

Communication Tips for Professionals

The following tips are helpful advice for clinicians and classroom teachers wanting to better communicate with parents of children with disabilities:

- Practice empathy, not sympathy. *Empathy* means to identify with and understand another's situation. *Sympathy* can mean pity. Parents need to know you respect them as persons – even in difficult circumstances. Knowing they are respected can lead to trust.
- Balance helping with listening. Sometimes the best help *is* listening.
- Level the playing field. Use plain, clear language so that parents can understand all the information you are giving. Mutual understanding is the key for communication.
- Be trustworthy. Follow through. For example, if you say you will contact a parent at a specific time, do so. Even if you cannot provide complete information, let the parent know you haven't forgotten him or her and are working on the situation.
- Don't take negative comments personally. Parents can be frustrated, angry, or anxious because their child is not doing well in school.