

## **Trust is Built on Constructive Parent/Professional Communications**

At a recent PACER workshop, Al Blixt, a nationally recognized speaker on collaboration and himself the parent of a child with a disability, stressed the importance of good parent-professional working relationships. He, along with PACER parent advocates, emphasize the importance of building trust through good communication. The following tips encourage parents built trust and good parent/school relationships through effective communication:

1. Be confident. Always remember that you, the parent, probably care more than anyone else in the world about your child. A parent never has to feel guilty or embarrassed asking questions or assertively pursuing the appropriate services for the child. It is your role, responsibility, and right.
2. Ask for a setting in which you are comfortable and can do your best in communicating with the school about your son or daughter. For example, tell school personnel if you feel awkward sitting in a tiny elementary school desk while discussing important information about your child.
3. Tell school personnel how you want to be addressed as you interact. Do you prefer to be called, "Mr. Smith" instead of "John?" In turn, ask the people from school how they want to be addressed.
4. Think about the important points to discuss and questions to ask before a telephone call or meeting. Write them down and check them off as they are addressed. At the end of the call or meeting, summarize actions to be taken and who will be responsible for each action. Write them down.
5. Ask questions, ask questions, and ask questions. It is an effective way to clarify points and keep the line of communication open.
6. Make sure you have the same information as the school professionals. For example, if the school evaluated your child, read and be sure you understand the evaluation. Ask until you do understand.
7. At meetings, direct comments and questions to the persons who can best address or answer them. (Be sure a school district representative, someone who knows the district's resources and is authorized to make decisions, attends each IEP meeting.)
8. In all communications with the school, speak or write in an honest,

respectful, and direct manner. When speaking, try to state your issues clearly. Restate your concerns if you think you were not heard the first time. Listen, as well. It will help you gather information about your child and understand other viewpoints.

9. Focus communications on the child. For example, at an IEP meeting, include your child as much as is possible and appropriate. Request that he or she attends some or all the meeting. If that is not feasible, bring pictures of your child to show. It is a way to remind the group that the child is the reason for the meeting.

10. Keep the communication lines open. Remember that neither you nor the professionals have all the answers. Work as a team to find solutions. Everyone has the same goal - to provide an appropriate educational program for the child.