



# **The Utah Family Coalition Policy and Training Manual 2015**

## **1 Section Seven**

- *Communication - Listening and Responding*
- *Communication - Answering the Call*
- *Communicating with Professionals*
- *Communication Study and Review Questions*



## Section 7: Communication Listening and Responding

### Definition:

- **Communicate** as a verb meaning: to make known, to impart, to be connected; to give or exchange information; to have a meaningful relationship.
  - **Communication** is defined as a noun: a transmitting; a giving or exchanging of information.
  - **Communicator** is defined as a noun: the one who does it.
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**Purpose:** Effective communication is one of the most basic skills to Family Resource Facilitators. This section provides an opportunity to review, identify, practice and demonstrate effective communication skills in listening and responding to one who is speaking.

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### Participant Objectives:

- Identify his/her own style of communication.
- Identify his/her listening skills and identify ones that can be improved.
- Identify the responsibilities of sender and receiver of communication.
- Demonstrate basic effective communication skills in the area of Listening and Responding.

# COMMUNICATION: LISTENING AND RESPONDING

## What is Communication?

Think about what communication is? Briefly jot down your thoughts.

Share the first thing on your list.

Communication is many things:

- An expression of ideas
- A statement of opinion
- An exchange of information
- Written expression
- Art
- Body Language
- Music
- Technology

Communication requires skills in

- Listening
- Speaking
- Observing
- Interpreting
- Writing
- Recognizing Emotion
- Problem Solving
- Body Language
- Eye Contact

Nonverbal (paralingual) elements are important as a means of communicating as they convey as much or more information than the words you use. Think about it as we review some of these. How do you feel about the communicator when you are listening? Do any of these nonverbal (paralingual) elements influence whether or not you wanted to continue listening to him/her? Do you feel that the person communicating is interested in the subject or you?

Tone of voice

Facial Expression

Position of Body

Eye Movement

Pitch of voice

Rate of Speech

Hands/Gestures

Communication requires YOU to be both a **Sender** (Speaker, Writer, Painter, Performer...) and a **Receiver** (Listener, Reader, Observer, Participant, etc.) of a Message. What does that mean? Let's look at that together.

Let's begin with the role of a Receiver of a message. Following is a quick, 20-question checklist to help you identify the type of listener (receiver of a verbal message) you are. Take a minute and circle and the number that fits what you do.

### Listener Checklist

Circle one: 5-Almost Always; 4-Usually; 3-Sometimes; 2-Seldom; 1-Never

<b>ACTION:</b>					
Do you like to listen to others?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you encourage others to talk?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you listen even if you do not like the person who is talking?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you listen well whether the person is a man or woman, young or old, or of a different culture?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you listen equally well to a friend or stranger?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you put what you have been doing out of sight or mind?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you look at the speaker?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you ignore distractions?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you smile, nod your head, and encourage the person to talk?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you think about what the person is saying?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you try to figure out why the person is saying it?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you let the person finish what the person is trying to say?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you try to figure out what the person means?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you re-state what has been said and ask if you got it right?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you withhold judgment about the idea until the person has finished?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you listen regardless of his or her manner of speaking or choice of words?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you listen even though you anticipate what he or she is going to say?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you question in order to get the person to explain the idea more fully?	5	4	3	2	1
Do you ask what the words mean as the person uses them?	5	4	3	2	1

Now, total your score on the quiz you took. \_\_\_\_\_

Note the areas you indicated as a 1, 2, or 3. Mark them with a yellow marker. These are areas you can improve in order to increase your listening effectiveness.

If your score is 75 or better, you are a GOOD listener.

If your score is 50 -75, you are an AVERAGE listener...keep on practicing on those areas that you have marked.

If your score is below 50, please review tips on listening and keep on practicing.

### What are your responsibilities as a Receiver?

You are responsible for:

- Getting information.
- Learning.
- Understanding what someone needs or wants.
- Empathizing with how someone feels.
- Enjoying.
- Sharing and being close to someone you like.
- Defending yourself against blame or danger.

### **What does a Receiver do?**

Remember, you cannot listen when you are talking. In order to be an effective receiver (listener) of spoken words you must be a good listener.

### **What does a Sender do? What are the responsibilities of a Sender?**

The effective sender does the following:

- States ideas clearly.
- Checks to see if the Receiver understands the main points.
- Restates misinformation.
- Watches nonverbal (paralingual) cues.
- Demonstrates consistency between nonverbal (paralingual) and verbal information.

### **Problems in Communication include:**

- Misunderstanding of information.
- Misinterpretation of nonverbal (paralingual).
- Emotionality.
- Unclear messages.
- Poor listening.
- WHY questions.
- Failure to **send** a clear message.
- Failure to **receive** the message.

### **LISTENING AND RESPONDING: Communicating in a supporting role**

Each parent's reaction to having a child with complex needs is an individual response. These purposes depend on many factors that should be respected and nurtured, including: personality, temperament, world view, life style, past experiences, coping skills, values and beliefs of cultural ideology.

It is important to understanding your own process of personal and family adjustment. Recognizing feelings and understanding your own values and beliefs is essential if you are to authentically support another parent.

Empathetic listening is the heart of effective communication. Understanding a person's pain or stress from their perspective and not your own, will help you to support the parent appropriately. If you listen carefully you will understand their needs and values.

You can use this understanding to support their happiness, reinforce their competence and confidence, share their grief, and support their needs.

This section is designed to enhance your ability to communicate effectively.

Communication experts estimate that only 10 percent of our communication is represented by words we say. Another 30 percent is represented by our sounds, and 60 percent is our body language.

## **LISTENING TOOL BOX**

### **ACTIVE LISTENING—Listening Carefully**

- Assume the speaker has something important to say.
- Focus on what the speaker is saying—give the speaker your full attention.
- Block everything else out...put aside any other tasks or activities to concentrate—Listen with concentrated effort.
- Listen to the speaker's complete story or explanation—this helps avoid misunderstanding, arguments and loss of respect.
- Keep an open mind. Control conditioned responses.
- Be patient with the speaker.
- Avoid interruptions. Ask questions at appropriate times such as when there is a pause or an anticipation of one.
- Focus on the message—don't think about what you will reply--keep your objectivity—don't be distracted by dress, accent, or manner.
- Listen with your eyes and brain.
- Let the speaker talk...encourage with verbal or nonverbal prompts.
- Demonstrate respect and courtesy regardless of age, background, your own likes or prejudices, culture.
- Search for meanings and ideas. Listen for facts to support main points.
- Limit notes to outlines, ideas, main points or key words. Check for context and meaning of any words that you need to have clarified.

### **OBSERVE PARALINGUAL (nonverbal communication)**

- Look at the speaker.
- Nod, smile, demonstrate concern...encourage the speaker to continue.
- Face the speaker and lean slightly towards him/her...
- Demonstrate empathy...not sympathy.

## **RESPONDING TOOL KIT**

### **Use “I” messages**

“I messages” focus on the sender (speaker’s) wants, needs, concerns. When responding to a speaker, responding with an “I message” is more likely to make him/her feel heard and less likely to feel defensive.

### **Formal “I messages” have four parts:**

- |                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| “I heard (feel)”     | (say what you heard, felt, thought...)  |
| “When you”           | (describe the specific behavior, phrase...)                                     |
| “Because”            | (describe what that meant to you...the effect on you...concern, questioning...) |
| “And what I want is” | (state what would make the situation better for you)                            |

Responding with an “I message” doesn’t need to be formal all the time. Recently at a conference, the presenter used a word that appeared people in the audience didn’t understand. After a minute when each person looked at another, a young lady raised her hand. When the presenter acknowledged her, she responded simply by stating:

“I heard you use the word...and I don’t know what that means, could you please define it for me?” The speaker did and the presentation continued.

In responding to speakers, “I messages” place the responsibility for listening and hearing the speaker clearly with you...the listener. Whoever is sending the message wants to be listened to accurately.

Responding with an “I message” reflects that you are accepting responsibility.

## **WHY NOT WHY?**

There is NO answer to WHY—

Think about this. How many times have we been asked or we ask “Why.” What kind of answers do we get?

“Why” makes you feel defensive

“WHY” does not identify the main concepts in the message

I said so, that’s WHY

## Reframing

- Clarify or reflect on speaker's statement  
**Example:** All day long, it's the same old thing! No matter how many telephone calls I take, there are more waiting on the line for help. Why can't they call someone else?  
**Clarify:** Sounds like you must be effective at your job helping people all day.
- Restate the facts; deleting emotion and value judgments  
**Example:** I'm so tired of listening to Lettie whine and whine all day long about wanting me to stop my work and play with her.  
**Restate:** Lettie wants you to spend time playing with her.
- Redirect focus, Redirect subject  
**Example:** All that physical therapist does is test, test, test...every time I'm there, he sits with a stop-watch and times me.  
**Response:** Sounds like your physical therapist is interested in the progress you are making.
- Emphasize positive, redirect negative  
**Example:** Jeffrey dragged a stool into the bathroom, climbed into the sink, opened the cabinet door, got out the toothpaste and was putting it on his toothbrush when I finally found him. I was frantic!  
**Response:** Your teaching him to brush his teeth is really working.
- Take complex issues and break them down into smaller parts  
**Example:** I'm just swamped today. I have a pile of ironing to do, a birthday cake to make and frost for Billy's party this afternoon, a call to make to my mom and the kids are whining all the time for me to take them outside to play on their swing set!  
**Response:** Sounds like a tough day. What time do you need the cake for the party this afternoon?
- Look for and build on partial interests  
**Example:** Jenny takes her baby doll everywhere...to the tub, to the bathroom...she even put it in the toilet...she takes it to bed with her at night. The doll needs a good scrubbing and cleaning up.  
**Response:** My daughter has a baby doll she loves, too. I know how hard it is to clean hers up.

**REFRAMING EXERCISE #1:** Pair up with the person next to you. Read the following scenarios and write your reframing response. Be ready to share with the group.

“Wait, wait, wait! That's all I seem to do. Wait on hold! Wait for the postman, Wait for the delivery truck! Why don't they just hire a waiter instead of a secretary? I can't get my work done for waiting.”

YOUR RESPONSE:

“I’m so upset. I can’t seem to stop crying. Nothing has gone right today and I’ve had a hard time getting ready for this appointment. Now, I’ve finally gotten everything ready, and I think I’m too exhausted to make any sense.”

YOUR RESPONSE:

Let’s see what responses we have.

### SUMMARIZING—

Summarizing means reflecting back what you have just heard by recognizing feelings as well as facts

1. Restate facts by repeating the most important points, organizing interests and discarding extra information.
2. Reflect feelings

### How does this look?

**Mary:** I am just exhausted these days. My 3-year old, Ben, is running me around all day and most of the night. If he isn’t into one thing, he is into another. He goes from one thing to another all day long. He never naps and I have to watch him every minute. The only time he is still for a minute is when he is watching Sesame Street and during commercials on TV. Then, last night came the final straw: while I was giving the baby a bath about 5:30, he ran into the kitchen, dragged a stool over to the cabinet, opened the door, got out the hot chocolate mix and spilled it all over the floor. When I got to the kitchen, holding a dripping wet baby, there he was licking it off the floor. I just don’t think I can handle this! Baby screaming and Ben covered in chocolate mix!

**You:** That sounds like quite a mess. There you are tired and not finished with your day, needing to spend time with the baby and facing something like that. Sounds as if Ben has an extra amount of energy and is looking for something to hold his attention and use that energy.

### Did this response contain the facts and honor the feelings of the person?

Here is a chance for you to try this out.

**Day-Care Worker to you, Mom:** I am so glad you finally got here. I have really been worried about Annie today. She has not gotten into any activities with the other children. She has just

sat alone. I had a hard time coaxing her out of her coat and mittens when she first came in and you left and then she just sat on the floor by herself. This is very unlike her. I am concerned.

How could you summarize this? Quickly, write down your response. Remember to summarize both FACTS and FEELINGS.

Facts:

Feelings:

Let's share some of these responses. Remember, each one needs to address both the facts and the feelings that the speaker is communicating to you.

**REFRAMING EXERCISE #1:** Find your partner again and let's try it out.

PARENT

“Gee, I’m glad today is over. My mom lit into me when I stopped by to pick Lisa up on my way home. Mom must be getting old. I guess Lisa pushed her buttons, but what does she expect from a 4-year old...someone who acts 25? According to her, Lisa had 2 temper tantrums this afternoon after her nap because my mom wouldn’t let her help ice a cake. I’m grateful that my mom is willing to have her at her house after pre-school and I really don’t want to put her through stress...Lisa is a handful when she doesn’t get her way...she does have tantrums and I don’t know what to do about it. I thought they were normal for that age.”

FACILITATOR RESPONDS

PARENT

“If I get another call at work about Peter and his behavior, I think I will be let go. I can’t keep on leaving the office and picking him up every day because they can’t handle him! I need this job to help keep our family going. I know he gets into a lot of things and goes from one thing to another, but isn’t the day-care supposed to know how to deal with kids his age. I think he is just all-boy—like my older sons were at the age of 4!”

FACILITATOR RESPONDS

**What worked for you?**

**What challenges did you have?**

## **CLARIFYING**

Clarifying means responding to the speaker by asking open-ended questions for one of two purposes:

- Get more information  
or
- Make sure you understand

Open-ended questions are those that require an answer and keep people talking. Close-ended questions are those that can be answered by a “yes” or “no”, a nod, or no answer at all. Here are some examples of open-ended questions

- What happened next?
- How did you feel about that?
- What do you think you might do the next time this happens?

Here are some examples of close-ended questions:

- Did you feel sad when that happened?
- You’ve been thinking about that for a long time.
- Do you think this will work next time?

**CLARIFYING EXERCISE #1:** Let’s try this out with the example of Ben and his Mom

**Mary:** I am just exhausted these days. My 3-year old, Ben, is running me around all day and most of the night. If he isn’t into one thing, he is into another. He goes from one thing to another all day long. He never naps and I have to watch him every minute. The only time he is still for a minute is when he is watching Sesame Street and during commercials on TV. Then, last night came the final straw: while I was giving the baby a bath about 5:30, he ran into the kitchen, dragged a stool over to the cabinet, opened the door, got out the hot chocolate mix and spilled it all over the floor. When I got to the kitchen, holding a dripping wet baby, there he was licking it off the floor. I just don’t think I can handle this! Baby screaming and Ben covered in chocolate mix!

**You:** That sounds like quite a mess. There you are tired and not finished with your day, needing to spend time with the baby and facing something like that. Sounds as if Ben has an extra amount of energy and is very busy around your home.

**What do you say next? What information do you have? Do you need more information?**

Think about it and we'll share.

**SEE SUPPLEMENTAL – ACTIVITIES**

**Activity No. 11 – Role Plays**

**Role Plays #1A – C: In groups of 2 take turns in each role (Family Resource Facilitator and Parent). Read the scenarios and practice listening and responding.**

How did that go?

What worked?

What was challenging?



# Communication: Answering the Call

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**Definition:** Responding to and Making Telephone Calls

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**Purpose:** This section provides the participant with knowledge and skills required in an initial contact by telephone with parents. As most referrals will be telephone contacts, this is a critical skill.

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**Participant Objectives:**

- Demonstrate effective telephone manners and skills that encourage callers to identify their concerns and feel understood and supported.
  - Demonstrate gathering information from the caller in order to provide appropriate services.
  - Demonstrate effective communication skills by responding to an initial contact telephone call.
  - Demonstrate effective communication skills by initiating an initial contact with a parent by telephone.
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While the internet is widely used to communicate, the telephone is still a preferred method of communication if it is not possible for an in-person contact. Telephone communication will be utilized by family resource facilitators for initial referrals, updating, organizing, linking, and ongoing conversations.

**The Initial Contact:**

An initial contact with parents is a critical step in establishing an effective relationship. It can be very challenging for many of us. Whether we enjoy meeting new people or think of ourselves as less outgoing, getting acquainted involves a degree of risk for both parties. Initial contact with parents is usually made in different ways:

- 1) Parent telephones you
- 2) By referral from another source after receiving the o.k. from a parent
- 3) In person

There are some basic guidelines to follow in strengthening your effectiveness with telephone contacts.

### **Limiting Telephone Communication Factors**

When speaking by telephone, nonverbal (paralingual) cues are more limited than when communicating in person. Let's consider which ones will be present by telephone:

- Background noise/interference from connection, other people, situations
- Pitch of voice
- Tone of voice
- Rate of speech

Each one of these will influence the parent and indicate whether or not to continue the conversation.

### **Goal of the first call: Build Rapport**

You can expect your initial contact from or to a parent to be by phone. The goal in your first conversation is to communicate who you are, what you can provide and to build rapport. A friendly, straightforward approach works best. Remember, they are either calling you for a reason or you have been requested to contact them...either they have indicated that they would like to speak with you or someone has referred you to them after receiving their permission.

- Say who you are and who you represent
- Make sure you are speaking with the parent or guardian
- Explain why you are calling
- Assure that what you hear will be in strictest confidence
- Confirm time to talk: "Is this a good time to talk or can we arrange another time?"
- Ask if you can make notes, if yes, begin an intake form

A good way to establish rapport is to begin on common ground.

Ask questions related to your services or your group:

- How did you learn about me (or this group)?
- What actually prompted you to take the group up on its offer for support or training? If asked explain how you became involved.
- Acknowledge that from information you received, you know they have a child with complex needs. Ask them about all their children. Share something about your family.
- Mention the child (or children) with complex needs and ask how they are doing now.

### **Listening and Responding to Personality Style:**

Personality styles influence how we interact and they usually fall somewhere on a continuum between:

- Amiable (outgoing, talkative, very willing to spill-the-beans). Help this individual deal with their emotions by framing a discussion around questions such as, “How are these problems making you feel? How do you find yourself reacting?”
- Detached (more reserved, less likely to offer information, less emotional, more factual, logical, and analytical). You need to draw this individual out--ask open-ended questions. Frame your discussion around the questions such as, “What are the biggest issues you are dealing with right now? What are some of your biggest concerns?”

### **Tips for the Initial Conversations**

Some ideas to keep in mind during initial conversations when you are getting acquainted include:

- Empathize (“How difficult that must be.” “That must be tough to do.”)
- Paraphrase (You say that you can’t get your son to take his medication and that he will often hide it?)
- Acknowledge (“uh-huh.” “Good.” “I see.”)

Encourage the parent to share. Be careful not to dominate the conversation. Use open-ended questions:

- “What do you say to your daughter when she complains about being picked on at school?”
- “What does your son enjoy doing?”

### **Issues you can expect to encounter:**

A new or referred parent will be faced with some kind of struggle or they wouldn’t have asked for help. It is a good idea to recognize that some issues will be serious. Other issues are simply painful. At the time they occur, both generate the same feelings. If serious issues arise (harm or abuse to someone), you need to involve professionals. Painful issues (lack of friend, failing grades) require empathy and good listening skills.

Issues may include:

- Lagging behind others in development
- Being difficult to soothe
- Lack of people to watch him/her
- Suggestion from relative or friend that something is wrong
- Hitting, biting, kicking others
- Not responding to family
- Easily startled

Social issues may include:

- Lack of friends/not getting along with others
- Being a bully/being bullied

**SEE SUPPLEMENTAL ACTIVITIES**

**Activity No. 12 – Role Plays Practice Exercise #1A & 1B**

Use the following instructions to practice making an initial telephone call to a parent who has either self-referred or has been referred to you by another party.

- Choose 2 partners
- Decide who is to role play the FRF, the parent, the observer
- FRF -be filling out the necessary forms as you talk
- Practice an initial contact having one person play the FRF and the other the new or referred parent
- Trade roles
- Debrief in large group by discussing what went well and what was difficult

## **Answering the Call: Receiving an Initial Telephone Call**

When receiving an initial call from a parent, the Family Resource Facilitator faces a unique challenge: the call is not expected. All of the skills addressed in this section up to this point apply. However, the one element that has changed is an unexpected call.

### **RESPONDING TO A RINGING TELEPHONE**

If you have received the call in the middle of an activity that cannot be interrupted, or where confidentiality may be compromised, or where you cannot provide the attention required to do justice to the caller, be honest and propose a time when you can either return the call or when you will be free to accept a call. Remember, common courtesy requires the following:

- Say who you are and who you represent
- Ask who is calling
- Ask how you can be of help
- Assure that what you hear will be in strictest confidence
- If this is not a good time for you to talk...arrange a time to call the parent back and keep it...be sure to get a telephone number!
- If the time is good for you and for the caller, continue following the steps outlined above.

Let's try one out.

### **TELEPHONE RINGS:**

**Family Resource Facilitator:** This is Norah Jones with Village Parents, how may I help you?

**Parent:** I heard that you can help me with my daughter, Janie. She is in trouble at day-care and I am afraid they may not keep her in the program.

**FRF:** That must be very difficult for you. I'm afraid I missed your name, would you please repeat it for me?

**Parent:** Oh, this is Mary Jones. I am really so upset. I do hope you can help me.

**FRF:** Mary, as you may have heard, all of us at Village Parents work with helping parents and children. I would really like to hear about the problem you are having with Janie and the day-care program. Because we are very careful about protecting the information we will be discussing, I need to schedule a time when I am not with so many people at a meeting. I should be out and back at my desk about 3:30; may I call you at that time? That would be in about 1 hour.

**Parent:** Yes, that will be great. You can reach me at my office:

**FRF:** Wonderful. I'll call you at 3:30 and we'll have a chance to talk.

**What did you hear?**

**Did the FRF confirm contact information?**

**What suggestions do you have?**

Let's try one more.

**TELEPHONE RINGS:**

**FRF:** Hello, this is Hilda Short with Village Parents. How may I help you?

**Parent:** Hi, this is Joan Tall. I've heard so many good things about how you help parents and children. I think I might need your help.

**FRF:** Well, Joan. Thank you for sharing that with me. We try very hard to help the parents in our community. Before we continue to talk, I need to remind you that whatever we discuss will be held in confidence. I do need your permission to make some notes about your child and family as we talk. These notes will help me as we work together. Is that all right with you?

**Parent:** Yes, that is fine.

**FRF:** Let's start then. You are Joan Tall, right. Do you live here in Anyplace, Utah? Tell me a little about your family and what is going on.

**What did you hear?** Let's begin with the FRF...

Speaking voice?

Straight forward?

Confidentiality?

**What did you hear as a parent?**

**What suggestions do you have?**



## Communicating With Professionals

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**Definition:** Parents forming mutual partnerships with professionals who are providing services for their child in order to:

- Share information
  - Provide and analyze concerns and progress
  - Set realistic goals
  - Develop, implement and monitor effective programs and services
  - Partner effectively in problem solving and in assisting the child in achieving success
- 

**Purpose:** To provide knowledge and skills for FRFs to use with parents to effectively form partnerships with professionals providing services for their child. This includes coordinating and advocating for services to meet the needs of their child and family.

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### Participant Objectives:

- Demonstrate knowledge and skills in effectively communicating with a professional.
  - Demonstrate assertive communication skills in instances where such may be required.
  - Teach families how to prepare for and participate in meaningful ways at meetings with professionals.
- .....

IF PARENTS DON'T LEARN HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR THEIR CHILD, IN THE LONG RUN, WHO WILL?

COMMUNICATING WITH PROFESSIONALS: A STEP TOWARDS FORMING WORKING PARTNERSHIPS WITH PROFESSIONALS

Many parents feel intimidated when talking with professionals. Professionals come in many different positions, areas, specializations and trainings as we could possibly imagine. Some may be open and easily approachable while others seem distant, hurried. Some explain things in detail before we have a chance to ask, others talk in a language and manner that we do not understand. They may appear hostile and openly dislike answering a question. We live in a society that encourages us to look at professionals and to accept what they say without question.

However, professionals are there to serve our families! We should help our families find the skills to not be intimidated – it is their child who is being discussed. These parents have spent far more time with their child than any professional. They know him/her better than anyone else. The parent's observations and feelings about him or her are important. There is a legal right to help in designing his/her services and programs.

When there is a concern, discuss it first with the person directly involved. If that doesn't produce results, then go to someone higher up. Parents can improve their own credibility by giving the person involved a chance to make changes before going to a supervisor.

**FRFs and parents should applaud the professional when you are pleased with what they're doing, not just when there is a problem or complaint. We all appreciate positive feedback, and it can create a "reservoir of good will". Make sure that every contact with the professional is not just about a problem, but that messages of thanks are encouraged as well.**

That being said, there are steps we need to take and things we need to remember:

1. Each time there is contact with a professional or a group of professionals; remind families ahead of time that they are important and have a right to be involved.
2. Remind parents that they are speaking for their child.
3. Prepare for meetings or contacts. Know ahead of time the important points or questions that need to be answered. Encourage families to make a list and take it with them to the meeting.
4. Review listening and responding skills with families.

At the meeting, listening skills are fundamental communication skills. Use active listening and responses that clarify, summarize, and reflect.

- Encourage the speaker to say more.
- Accept the feelings and content of the person talking.
- Clarify and/or paraphrase what is heard.
- Keep body language in harmony with words.
- Keep listening until there's a sign that the speaker is ready to listen.
- (Usually, you will be asked: "What do you think?", "Am I right?")

**Reminder:** Listening does not necessarily indicate agreement. It DOES indicate respect.

Remember, professionals are in the business of providing services. The family and child's needs are the reason they are there.

What do you need to do?

1. Set a time or make an appointment with the professional unless there is a question that can be recorded easily and responded to such as:
  - a. Is our next appointment for an hour or 30 minutes?
  - b. Did you say to take the medication until it is all gone?

What kinds of things can be answered with a telephone call?

What things need a meeting or appointment?

1. Be prepared BEFORE THE MEETING: 6 Steps
  - a. Make sure that child's folder is up to date.
  - b. Keep critical documentation from the past in the current folder.
  - c. Write down questions or concerns...make copies for the professional, as well.
  - d. Parents should ask someone to come to the meeting to take notes, help keep the focus...provide an extra set of ears.
  - e. Keep data that gives a sample of the area of concern: such as number of days with incomplete assignments in school; numbers of temper tantrums, dates and times.
  - f. Take the child's folder or binder to the meeting.

### Exercise:

Now, try this part out with this exercise: Assume that you have a set appointment, use your child's binder and follow the steps listed above. Be sure to write down the questions or concerns that you have. Summarize data you have collected about the area of concern. (You probably won't have collected this data, but make some up) Ask the person next to you to come to the meeting with you to take notes, etc.

In groups of four, share with each other what you have done and written. Discuss and give each other suggestions, hints...

2. During the meeting:

It's important to help families stand up for their rights and those of the child. It's also often necessary to compromise. For most people, deciding when to do which is difficult. It will help to think carefully about the parents' priorities for their child.

At the meeting, listening skills are fundamental communication skills. Use active listening and responses that clarify, summarize, and reflect.

4. At the meeting:

- a. Display an attitude that conveys you are there in good faith to work for solutions and assume that all attending share that attitude. Be Friendly, Firm and Fair
- b. Ask if the parent can share your agenda/concerns
- c. Listen actively...clarify, summarize, ask for more information...
- d. Keep notes or minutes (your companion may do this)
- e. When in doubt, check it out...ask questions when you don't understand. (Each profession has its own language, ask what it means and what that means for your child, for you, for your family...)
- f. Keep the focus on YOUR child, YOUR Family, NOW—Keep that front and center all the time and how will this help your child do what he wants/needs to do
- g. Summarize: recall the highlights of the meeting, the most important outcomes or feelings; tie together confusing lengthy or rambling topics...identify any unresolved topics
- h. Review your notes and the notes taken during the meeting with everyone there
- i. Ask when you will know if this is working (results)
- j. Ask for copies of decisions made...Check BEFORE YOU LEAVE—make sure you understand and feel comfortable
- k. Set a time for a review of plan
- l. Keep to schedule and honor the time set
- m. Thank the professional(s)

Let's watch and listen to the following scenario:

**Janet:** Thank you for meeting with me this afternoon. I appreciate the time. This is Andrea, one of the family resource facilitators I work with, who I asked to be here today to take notes and keep me on task. (Janet puts the folder for her daughter, Lucy, on the table in front of her and opens it, pulls out a couple of pages).

**Pre-School Teacher:** Thank you for coming. Andrea, it is good to meet you. Lucy just got on the bus to go home. Janet, what can I help you with this afternoon?

**Janet:** I put this together so we can make the most of the time we have this afternoon. May I give you a copy?

**Pre-School Teacher:** Sure. Looks good to me. You note that Lucy has been crying everyday about coming to school. How long has this been going on?

**Janet:** I've been making notes on my calendar and it looks like it started over two weeks ago. Just after Valentine's Day. Have you noticed anything here?

**Pre-School Teacher:** Well, one of the staff who helps unload the children from the bus said that Lucy has been one of the last ones off...sometimes Joan has to go on the bus and take her by the hand and bring her in. But she seems fine once she is here. She is getting along fine with the other children and is really making good progress.

**Janet:** She won't talk about anything at home...just cries when I bring out her coat and hat. I have a hard time getting her out the door when they come to pick her up. Do you think someone or something is bothering her on the bus?

**Pre-School Teacher:** That could be. I can check with the driver and aide. May I call you tomorrow after I have a chance to talk with the driver and aide?

**Janet:** Thank you. That would be fine. I'll be at home all day tomorrow and look forward to hearing what you find out. Will we need to meet again?

**Pre-School Teacher:** Let's wait until I hear from the driver and aide. I'll call you about 3:30 tomorrow and let you know what I learn. We may need to meet with them to work this out.

**Janet:** Thank you so much. I appreciate the time and am glad that Lucy is still making progress here at school.

**Pre-School Teacher:** Good to meet with you, Janet and it has been nice meeting you, Andrea. Thank you.

**Question: What did you notice?**

**Question: What suggestions do you have?**

Here is one for you to try with your partner. Work together to see how you would handle this one.

**You are Rebecca.** Your daughter, Jill is receiving Speech Therapy from Sandy Red at the local clinic twice a week. You've been working on the exercises the therapist sent home with you 6 weeks ago. Jill responded great to the exercises and she no longer has that problem—she no longer just points and grunts at items she wants at home like cup, food, drink...! You wonder what is going on now at her therapy sessions. You haven't gotten any more exercises to work on at home even though you have called and asked the secretary to have the speech therapist call you or send more home. You finally called and scheduled a meeting for today at 3:30. You have asked Andrea, your friend and also an FRF, to go with you to this meeting. You have your list and Jill's file with you.

**Sandy:** Hello Rebecca. Who is this with you? Let's go into our conference room.

**Rebecca:** Hi Sandy, this is Andrea, my friend and a Family Resource Facilitator. I asked her to come today to help me take notes about our meeting.

**Sandy:** Glad to meet you. What can I help you with today, Rebecca?

**Question: What is your response?**

Be ready to share with the group.

Let's try this out. In groups of three decide who will be a parent, a professional and an observer first. Remember, each of you will have a chance to play each role. Pick up your role and play that part.

Change Roles

Change Roles

When You Disagree: (note that this says "When" not "If")

<sup>1</sup>When working in a partnership with a professional or a team of professionals, you may need to disagree or make an assertive statement. It is important to keep in mind that your message should be clear and direct but not aggressive or hostile. Avoid making overstatements and using words that indicate absolutes (i.e. must). Overstatements or exaggeration of your point will hasten a loss of credibility.

Also avoid putting the other person on the defensive. Even the most hardened criminals will justify themselves when put on the defensive. **Attack issues, NOT PEOPLE.**

## **THE ASSERTIVE PERSON**

An **assertive** person clearly states his/her point of view and takes into account what others have to say. Other people generally respect an assertive person.

A **passive** person discounts his/her own needs and defers to the other person. People learn that they can take advantage of a passive person.

An **aggressive** person discounts others and insists on what she/he wants. Others may feel forced to do what the aggressive person wants, but they often feel angry about doing it and will do only as much as they have to. The aggressive person teaches others to fear and avoid him/her.

## **Assertiveness IS .....**

- Expressing your needs clearly and directly
- Expressing your ideas without feeling guilty or intimidated.
- Sticking up for what you believe the student needs
- Knowing your rights.
- Writing down what the student needs and all the facts pertaining to his/her case.
- Treating professional like partners
- Effective communication
- Conveying your feelings of self-confidence when you communicate with others.

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<sup>1</sup> Braun Swap Home-School Partnership, Wheelock College 1987/ Allies with Families

- Advocating effectively on your own behalf
- Self-reliance and independence
- Working together to get the services the student needs
- Analyzing a problem and pinpointing the area of responsibility before you act.
- Organizing for change
- Having a positive attitude at all times.

Watch and Listen to this example:

**Mother:** John is having a difficult time getting to sleep at night. I have kept track for the past month, and he has been up and down until 11:30 or later 25 nights out of 30. What can we do?

**Physician:** It’s probably just the time change. Give it another month and we’ll see what happens then.

**Mother:** Oh, I guess you’re right.

**Question: What did you hear?**

**Question: What would you have said, if you were “Mother?”**

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Let’s try this one:

**Mother:** John is having a difficult time getting to sleep at night. I have kept track for the past month, and he has been up and down until 11:30 or later 25 nights out of 30. What can we do?

**Physician:** It’s probably just the time change. Give it another month and we’ll see what happens then.

**Mother:** I really don’t think that is the case. Our other children were off-schedule for 3 days and then they have been getting to sleep just fine. For the past 30 days, this has been a new and ongoing problem with John. My husband and I are both becoming exhausted. How can this be handled?

**Physician:** Yes, I do see your point. It is the first time you have talked about sleep as an issue. Let’s see what we can do.

\*\*\*\*\*

Here is one for you and your partner to team up on.

Meeting is scheduled for 3:30. You are Mary. Your son, Jason, has been scheduled to see Jim Torn, the physical therapist, at this clinic twice a week for the past 2 months. You have brought him each time 5 minutes before his scheduled time to have his therapy and you wait for him each time. Your plan indicated that after the therapy session, the PT was to discuss with you what progress Jason has made and give you exercises you could follow up with at home. Each session Jim runs late in beginning the session and each visit is shortened by at least 10 minutes. Each time Jim tells you that he is running late and can't meet with you, or he forgot to get the exercises ready, or someone else brings Jason to you. You and Jane have been waiting in the hall for 15 minutes. You can see the physical therapist sitting on the corner of his desk talking on the telephone. He puts the telephone down and walks down the hall to you and says:

**PT:** I understand you want to see me? I found us a room down the hall. I only have about 20 minutes. Come on with me. You can talk to me while we walk!

**You are Mary:** Discuss with your partner and be ready to share with the group.

Let's hear what "Mary" would have said or done.

**SEE SUPPLEMENTAL – ACTIVITIES**  
**Activity No. 13 – Role Plays #1A - C**

Now, let's do a role play. Pair up with the person next to you. Decide which of you will be the professional and which the parent. Pick up the role you have been assigned and begin.

Review with each other. Give feedback to the "parent."

Switch around and pick up another role. Begin.

Review with each other.