

Strategies for Connecting with Your School Team

By Danielle Nolan, MSW, RSW. August 2022.

Communication between home and school is important for both parents/caregivers and a child/youth's school team. For parents, communication improves relationships, promotes understanding of their child's experience at school, helps with consistent expectations and goal setting, and gives parents a sense of safety in sending their children to school. For students, this leads to better educational outcomes, a decrease in disruptive behaviours, and an overall more positive school experience ([Tanase, 2022](#)). Even teachers agree: "Communication is essential to building parent engagement. What parents know and perceive about the school depends on what they see, hear, and read" ([Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010](#)).



Types of Communication

Forms of communication vary greatly depending on the school and school board. Both formal and informal methods may be used. This may include texting, communication notebooks, emails, mobile apps, phone calls, reports, and/or in person meetings.

At the beginning of the school year, it is important to connect with your child's classroom teacher to inquire into their preferred communication methods. It is equally important to have an agreed-upon strategy for communication. This can include what information is to be shared, how often communication will be received, and what topics will be included.



Texting



Notebooks



Emails



Apps



Phone Calls



Reports



Meetings

Communicating with Your School Team

You are an important member of your school team! The culture and vision of school teams for autistic children are evolving, and school staff recognize that mutual support and joint problem-solving are critical to student success ([Stanley, Beamish, & Bryer, 2005](#)). Your skills, experiences, values, and knowledge of your child are important, and your voice needs to be heard.



Ontario Education Privacy Laws

Did you know that your communication with your school team is protected by the Ontario Education Privacy Laws ([Information and Privacy Commissioner, 2019](#))? This means that your school team should ask for your written consent to communicate with you using whatever method you agree to and outline how your child's identifying information (e.g., name, birthday, address) is protected. If there are any concerns or breaches with how your school team has handled your child's personal information (e.g., they lose your communication book), you can connect with your school principal, who will follow the regulated protocols for reporting

Tips for Effective Communication

Keep the communication request to three items or less to increase the likelihood that the school team will meet the demand and give you the information you are looking for.

As a family, think about the most important information you would like. For example, if potty training is the family goal, it may be most important to know how many successes and accidents your child had.

Similarly, if the family goal is participation and engagement with peers, information may be needed on whom your child was paired with for activities to promote discussion at home.

Stay calm	✓
Be clear about your expectations	✓
Focus on the positives, no matter how small!	✓

Alternately, connect with the school team about what information they would benefit from. For example, would the teacher like to know if your child had a good sleep? Would they like to know what the current therapy goals are in the home?

Lastly, it is important to know who is on your team that you may need to contact. Here is an example of an interdisciplinary team and the service providers that may be involved in your child's programming/education.



Families & Caregivers



Occupational Therapists



Special Educators



Speech Language Pathologists



Board Certified Behavior Analysts®



Teachers & Early Childhood Educators



Psychologists & Mental Health Professionals

Building relationships with your school team takes time, patience, and kindness, from all parties. Over the course of your school journey, you will become more confident in your ability to navigate this system and connect with the appropriate people.

Additional Resources

If you are looking for more information, the list below provides links to resources and strategies that can help you effectively communicate with your school team.

Autism Ontario Webinars & Resources

- [Negotiating the Maze: Strategies for Effective Advocacy in Schools](#)
- [Back to School Part 1: Strategies to Prepare for School Routines](#) with Kristin Gunby and Bethany Brewin
- [Back to School Part 2: Strategies for Connecting with Your School Team](#) with Tracie Lindblad and Danielle Nolan

Other Online Resources

- [Art of the Child-Centered IEP](#)
- [All About Me \(by ConnectABILITY.ca\)](#)
- [Kindergarten Communication of Learning](#)
- [Stay Involved in Your Child's Education](#)
- [Ontario Teacher's Federation - Parent Engagement](#)