

## Section Three

### Partnering for Student Success

Whether a child is starting school for the first time or moving to another grade, many parents of children with speech and language impairments wonder: *Can the teacher and other children understand him?, Will the new teacher know how to help my child?* These are all legitimate concerns and open communication with the school staff is the best way of dealing with these worries.

#### 3.1 Building Partnerships

Establishing positive working relationships with the members of your in-school team is helpful to the development of an effective partnership. A solid partnership between home and school will support your child's success at school and will help prevent and resolve conflicts that may arise.

Strategies for Effective Partnerships:

1. **Communication** with school staff is the key to successful partnerships. By maintaining a positive relationship with the classroom teacher, you can work together to address issues as they arise. The classroom teacher has a variety of resources and people that are available to help problem solve issues and concerns. These include curriculum and teaching plans, differentiated teaching strategies, special education staff, and the Principal. Share reports from the Speech-Language Pathologist, or other professionals involved with your child.
2. **Regular visits to the classroom.** Consider volunteering in the classroom to help the teacher with classroom events and activities. This will help in understanding how the classroom is run, how the teacher supports the students and how your child is managing.
3. **Discuss concerns** about your child's progress starting with the teacher. By working together, strategies to help your child can be developed. If there is a need for more information about your child's needs, or for additional assessments of your child's skills, the classroom teacher can start the process. This may lead to a connection with the special education staff, or a request for additional consultation by board professional staff.
4. **Work together with the school towards your common goal** for student success.
  - Define clear, relevant goals for your child
  - Work together to problem-solve, share ideas and strategies to help your child
  - Set timelines; How long will we try the new approach? When will we meet again?
  - Assign responsibilities to be clear about who will be doing what
5. **Share the good news.** Communicate positive information with the teacher, rather than only getting in touch when there is a problem. Let the teacher know that you appreciate working together to support your child.
6. **Be informed about what you need to know.** To help your child you need to know:
  - What are my child's strengths - socially, academically?
  - What are my child's special needs - is there a diagnosis?
  - What strategies or supports help my child? What do the assessment reports suggest?
  - What programs and services are available at school? Who do I contact to find out more information?

6. **Be professional.** Communication with the school can take many forms including meetings, letters or notes and phone calls. In all forms of communication be sure to:
  - State the purpose of your communication
  - Set dates and times for meetings and follow-up
  - Keep a record of the time and date of the communication and who was involved.
  
7. **Maintain Good Records.** Remember to document your concerns and keep accurate records of your activities and the response of the school system. Reports from regular and special education teachers and other professionals, including doctors, and speech-language pathologists, are very useful in describing your child's needs and identifying strategies or supports that benefit your child.
  
8. **Follow the communication protocol.** It is important for parents to take their concerns to the proper levels of authority.
  - First, speak with the classroom teacher.
  - If you are concerned that the teacher is not dealing with your questions, the next level of authority is the Principal.
  - The Principal supervises all school staff, is responsible for all school activities and can help to resolve issues at the school level and act as an advocate with school board personnel.
  - If you have further questions or concerns after meeting with the Principal, the next step is to find out about the school board communication protocol.
  - Many school boards have a written protocol or other resources, to help parents who have concerns about special education, which may be available from the Principal or on the school board website. If you are not sure who to contact next, ask the Principal.
  
9. **Learn to negotiate and problem solve.** It is important to be assertive but not aggressive. Work with school staff co-operatively to find common ground and solutions.
  - Brainstorm ideas without judgment and consider new ideas
  - Evaluate each idea and identify consequences
  - Select best solutions and plan details for implementation
  - Evaluate results and decide whether to continue or to try another option
  - Recognize the resource limitations faced by school staff
  - Look for areas of agreement and compromise

### *OAFCCD Parent Tip*

*Keep all information and reports about your child organized in one place. Use a binder to file and keep information organized and easy to find. Check the OAFCCD Parents as Partners website for information on organizing a 'Parent Resource Binder' and on preparing for school meetings.*

#### **Additional Sources of Information:**

**Shared Solutions, A Guide to Preventing and Resolving Conflicts Regarding Programs and Services for Students with Special Education Needs** (2007) Ministry of Education

**Fact Sheets: Communication Strategies; Hot Tips for Effective Communication; Hot Tips for Getting Ready for a Meeting; Hot Tips for a Great Meeting;** OAFCCD Parents as Partners Website: [www.parent-as-partners.ca](http://www.parent-as-partners.ca)

**The KIT; Keeping it Together,** CanChild Centre for Childhood Disability, Research, McMaster University website: [www.canchild.ca](http://www.canchild.ca)