



Working Together With Your Child's School

A parent guide to teacher communication and IEP meetings

The Openshaw Spot

A spot to belong. A place to grow.

You know your child's interests, routines, strengths, and challenges. Teachers see how your child participates in the classroom. Therapists contribute information about skills and supports. Bringing these perspectives together helps the team better understand your child.

You do not need to know every school term to participate. Your observations, questions, and priorities matter.

Start with your child's strengths

Help the team get to know your child beyond the activities they find difficult.

Share:

- What your child enjoys and feels proud of.
- How they communicate their needs.
- What helps them feel comfortable and connected.
- Activities that motivate them.
- What your child wants adults to understand.

For example:

"He enjoys building and figuring out how things work. He is more comfortable sharing ideas after he has had time to think or practice with someone he knows."

Include your child's perspective whenever possible. Ask what feels easy, what feels hard, and what they wish could change at school.



Build a communication plan with the teacher

Agree on a manageable way to share information. This might be email, a communication notebook, a scheduled call, or a brief check-in.

Discuss:

- The best person to contact.
- How often updates would be helpful.
- Which changes or concerns should be shared promptly.
- How the team will communicate about strategies being tried.

Keep messages focused on information that helps your child participate. Sensitive topics are best discussed privately rather than during a busy pickup or in a group message.

Describe what happens

Specific examples help the team understand a concern and choose a useful next step.

Instead of:

“She can’t handle school.”

Try:

“She says the cafeteria is too loud and has come home with most of her lunch untouched three days this week. What are you noticing during lunch?”

Helpful details include:

- When and where the difficulty happens.
- What the activity requires.
- What happens before and afterward.
- How often it occurs.
- What your child says about it.
- What support has helped.

A child’s response can have several causes. Ask questions before assuming they are being defiant, avoiding work, or having a sensory difficulty.



Share concerns and invite the school's perspective

Home and school may look different. Both perspectives can be useful.

You might say:

“We’re noticing that homework takes a long time and ends in tears. What do you see when similar work is completed in class?”

Or:

“I understand you aren’t seeing the same difficulty at school. At home, we’re seeing a lot of distress afterward. Can we look together at what may be contributing?”

The goal is to understand the pattern and identify support.

Before an IEP meeting

An Individualized Education Program, or IEP, describes a child’s special education program when they qualify. Before the meeting, organize the information you want the team to consider.

Choose your priorities

Write down your top two or three concerns. Connect them to your child’s school day.

For example:

- Asking for help when confused.
- Participating in written work.
- Managing transitions between activities.
- Communicating with classmates.
- Participating in lunch, recess, or self-care routines.

Gather useful information

Bring relevant teacher messages, work samples, previous plans, and outside reports. Include a few specific examples rather than every document you have.

Ask whether the school can share available reports and draft materials before the meeting so you have time to review them.

Prepare your questions



Write questions down so you do not have to remember everything during the conversation. If possible, share your main concerns with the team ahead of time.

You can also ask who will attend and whether someone you would like involved can participate.

During the meeting

Start with your child's strengths and the priorities you want the team to address.

It is okay to say:

- **“Can you explain that in everyday language?”**
- **“What does that look like during the school day?”**
- **“Can we look at an example?”**
- **“I need a moment to review this.”**
- **“Before we move on, I want to make sure we address this concern.”**

Take notes, or ask someone attending with you to help. Keep the conversation connected to your child's access, participation, learning, and independence.

Questions to ask about goals and supports

Understanding the need

- What can my child do now, and where do they need help?
- In which activities or settings does the difficulty occur?
- What information supports the team's understanding?
- What does my child say would help?

Understanding the goal

- What skill is this goal intended to improve?
- How does it connect to a meaningful school activity?
- What support will my child have while practicing?
- How will progress be measured and shared?

Understanding the plan

- Who will provide or help carry out the support?
- When and where will it be used?
- How will staff know what to do?



- How will we know whether it is helping?
- When will we check back?

A support is easier to follow when everyone understands what it looks like in practice.

Talk about strategies in practical terms

Rather than asking only for “sensory breaks” or “extra help,” explain the activity that is difficult and discuss what support could make participation easier.

For example:

“Transitions from recess to writing are difficult. Could we try a predictable transition routine and a brief check-in before written work?”

Possible topics to discuss include:

- A quieter place for certain tasks.
- Visual directions or a checklist.
- More time to process a question.
- An agreed way to ask for help or a break.
- Alternatives for showing knowledge.
- Seating or workspace adjustments.
- Support with communication, organization, or transitions.

These are discussion ideas. The team should choose supports based on your child’s individual needs and review how they work.

Include your outpatient therapist

Your child’s therapist can share relevant observations, explain treatment goals, and suggest strategies to discuss with the school. Ask about the clinic’s process for school communication, written input, or meeting participation.

Appropriate permission and information-sharing arrangements should be in place before your therapist and school exchange records or discuss your child.

Outpatient therapy and school services may address different needs. Outside recommendations can contribute to the discussion, while the school team considers your child’s educational needs and applicable requirements.



When you disagree or feel unheard

Bring the discussion back to the specific concern.

Try:

“I hear that the team sees this differently. My concern is that he still cannot complete this part of the school day without significant distress. What additional information could help us understand what support he needs?”

Ask the team to explain its reasoning and clarify what happens next. You can request written information and time to review materials you do not understand.

If you need help understanding your options or procedural rights, ask for the school’s procedural safeguards information or contact your state’s Parent Training and Information Center.

After the meeting

Review the documents you receive and compare them with your notes. Ask about anything that is unclear or does not match your understanding.

A brief follow-up message can help:

“Thank you for meeting today. My understanding is that we will try _____, that _____ will coordinate it, and that we will review progress on _____. Please let me know if I misunderstood anything.”

Keep meeting notes, reports, plans, and important messages together. Follow up on agreed next steps and share what your child is experiencing.



A quick meeting checklist

Before

- Identify your child's strengths and perspective.
- Choose your top concerns.
- Gather relevant examples and reports.
- Write down your questions.

During

- Ask for clear explanations.
- Connect goals to everyday school participation.
- Clarify who will do what.
- Confirm how progress will be reviewed.

After

- Review the written plan.
- Clarify anything that is missing or confusing.
- Record next steps and follow-up dates.
- Stay connected with the team.

You do not have to have every answer. Your role is to share what you know, ask questions, and help the team understand your child.