

Communicating Tests Results to Parents

An important skill for special education professionals is their ability to report test results to other professionals or to parents in such a way that these people walk away with an understanding of the causes, specific areas of strength and weakness and practical recommendations to alleviate the situation. Many times parents will leave a conference having been "bombarded" with jargon and statistics and understand nothing. Reporting results so that they are understood may be accomplished in the following ways:

- 1** - When setting up the appointment with a parent never allow yourself to begin the explanation of the results over the phone, even if the parent requests a "quick" idea of how their child performed. If the parent does request this, gently say that the type of information that you have is better explained and understood in person. If you sense further anxiety try to reassure the parent that you will meet as soon as possible. It is important to visually see the parent/s so that you can further explain areas in which they seem confused or uncomfortable. The face-to-face contact also makes the conference a more human approach. Hearing results from our doctor over the phone may not be as comforting as in person.
- 2** - Make the parent/s feel comfortable and at ease by setting up a receptive environment. If possible, hold the meeting in a pleasant setting, use a round table, or any table instead of a desk, and offer some type of refreshment to ease possible tension of the situation.
- 3** - It may be helpful to refresh the parent's memory about the reasons for the evaluation and the symptoms that brought the child to the attention of the team. Explain the tests that comprised your test battery, why they were used and what specific types of information you hoped to arrive at by using these measures.
- 4** - Go over strength areas first, no matter how few there may be. You can also report positive classroom comments, and any other information that may help set the tone for acceptance of problem areas.
- 5** - Provide a typed outline of the tests and scores for the parent to take with them if the report is not ready. If possible, always try to have the report typed and ready to hand them. It looks more professional and may help alleviate problems that may occur when reports are sent home and the parents read it without a professional present.
- 6** - Explain in simple terms any statistical terms you may be using i.e. percentiles, stanines, mental ages etc. In fact it may be a good idea to define these on the same sheet with the scores so that parents have a key when they go back and review the scores.

7 - Again as with the intake, you should offer them a pad and pen so that they can write down information, terms or notes on the meeting. Further indicate that they should feel free to call you with any questions or concerns they may have.

8 - Put aside a sufficient amount of time for difficult conferences. This is not the type of situation in which you want to run out of time. The parents should leave in a natural manner, not rushed.

9 - Take time to explain the differences between symptoms and problems. This explanation can go a long way in alleviating parent's frustration.

10 - It is helpful for parents to hear how the problems or deficiencies you found were contributing to the symptoms in the classroom and at home. It is reassuring for parents to know that what they were seeing were only symptoms, even though they may have been quite intense, and that the problems have been identified and recommendations are available. Offer them as much realistic hope as possible.

11 - Be as practical and specific as possible when offering suggestions on how parents can help at home. Offer them printed sheets with step-by-step procedures for any recommendation that you make. Parents should not be professionals and should never be given general recommendations that require their interpretation. This may aggravate an already tense situation at home. Offer them supportive materials that they can use with the child. While a parent working with a child can be positive, in some cases i.e. low parental frustration levels, you may want to shy away from this type of interaction.

12 - If the case is going to be reviewed by the Committee on Special Education, take some time to alleviate their fears by explaining the process and what they can expect. Indicate that your report is part of the packet that will be presented and that they are entitled to a copy of all materials. Some school districts may charge for copies so indicate that fact if it is a policy.

13 - Again reassure the parent about the confidentiality of the information gathered. Indicate the individuals on the team that will be seeing the information and the purpose for their review of the facts. Also indicate that in order to send out this information, you will always need permission from them in the form of a signed release.

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