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Communicating With Professionals

Many parents feel intimidated when talking with "other professionals." There is much in our society which encourages us to look up to professionals and to accept what they say without question. But you don't have to let yourself be intimidated! After all, it's your child who's being talked about. You have spent far more time with the child than anyone else has, and you know her/him better than anyone else. Your observations and hunches about the child are important.

Some suggestions for avoiding that intimidated feeling and being successful in your communication with professionals:

- Each time you have contact with a professional, remind yourself that you are important and have a right to be involved.
- Prepare for meetings. Know ahead of time the important points you want to make. Make a list and take it with you.
- If possible, take someone with you--to take notes, help you make a point, or provide whatever other forms of support you need.
- When you don't understand something, ask for clarification.
- Learn to communicate ASSERTIVELY, rather than passively or aggressively.
- An assertive person clearly states his/her point of view and takes into account what others are saying. Other people generally respect an assertive person.
- A passive person discounts her/his own needs and defers to the other person(s). People soon learn that they can take advantage of a passive person.
- An aggressive person discounts others and insists on what he/she 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/or avoid her/him.
- At meetings, let your nonverbal behavior tell others that you know you belong on the team. Look at people when you talk to them. Take notes. Sit at the table with other participants, not back in your chair like an observer.
- If you say some of what you had planned, but not all of it, don't be hard on yourself. Like other skills assertive communication develops with practice. CONGRATULATE yourself for taking the first steps

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