**Effective and Positive Communication Among Parents and School Staff**

High quality educational services for youth and adults with disabilities depends upon collaborative planning among team members. This can be achieved through continuous, effective communication between all parties whenever new information or situations arise. Transition from school to adult life requires such planning as team members develop and implement Transition Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). The intent is for students and parents/caregivers to be equal partners. Unfortunately, they are often marginalized and disempowered. The following are keys to effective and positive communication.

**Knowledge is Power**

* Students and parents/caregivers need information and resources to know their legal rights and to understand the often complex and confusing service system.
* School personnel and disability rights/advocacy organizations should provide early and ongoing information in multiple formats so families can be equal partners and advocate for what they need and want.
* Students should be consulted on what it is that they want to do with their own lives, and from there the team can work together to empower the student to achieve their best life.
* Independent living and self-determination should be discussed early and often.

**Skills That Enhance Communication**

* Positive communication encourages open communication.
* Communicate early and often in the manner that is best accepted by the sender/receiver.
* Open the door to two-way conversation. Encourage questions. Be an active listener.
* Paraphrase what you heard back to the speaker, to ensure you have mutual understanding.
* Continue to listen even when the urge is to start debate.
* Avoid jargon.
* Be open to feedback.
* Do not be afraid to ask clarifying questions.
* Follow through.
* Use problem-solving strategies.

**Student Led, Collaborative IEPs**

* Throughout their lives, youth and young adults with disabilities should develop an understanding of their skills, talents, interests, and support needs and develop their self-determination and self-advocacy skills.
* Students should be prepared to lead their IEP/Transition IEP (INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM) meetings to the maximum extent possible. By at least age 14, students should be an active participant in their own IEP meetings with the idea of leading their own meetings as soon as possible.
* The expertise and experiences of parents/caregivers should be honored and respected as part of the IEP/Transition IEP process.
* All team members need to hold high expectations for students.
* IEP team members do not have to consist only of school staff, parents, and the student. An effective team consists of the people who you consider experts on your student, whether that be a waiver case manager, their regular caregiver, or more.
* As the student approaches age 18, invite other agencies, such as VR (Vocational Rehabilitation), or community partners to attend IEP meetings and prepare the student for success by putting supports in place to promote independent living, post-secondary education, and competitive, integrated employment.

**Resources**

IN\*SOURCE

* [Effective communication and collaboration](https://insource.org/get-help/resources/ages-3-to-22/communication-and-collaboration/)
* Student Led IEP Checklist (coming soon)