



A COLLECTION OF TOOLS, ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

One of the most important aspects of the special education process is creating the plan of specialized instruction that will serve as the foundation for the education of a student with special needs. This plan is called the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP is developed by the IEP team, a group of individuals with diverse experiences who share responsibility for and joint commitment to achieving positive outcomes for students. Each team member's input is equally valuable and necessary. Parents and students are key members of the IEP team and bring an important perspective to the discussion.

As Rebecca Burns (1993) so eloquently stated nearly two decades ago, *"when schools and families work together, a partnership of support for children develops. Education becomes a shared venture, characterized by mutual respect and trust in which the importance and influence of each partner is recognized. Although children, families, teachers, and schools benefit individually, their partnership enhances the entire process of education."*

Family/educator partnerships are established and sustained when communication is honest and direct, planning and decision making is shared, joint responsibility is promoted, and mutual respect is fostered. Members of an IEP team that is working collaboratively:

- Cooperate with one another to achieve common goals;
- See input of each team member as equally valuable and necessary;
- Recognize that collaboration is achieved through conscious efforts to build and sustain relationships;
- Develop trust and positive interdependence; and
- Work together flexibly to identify and respond to the changing needs of the student.

At the IEP meeting, effective communication and collaboration is facilitated by creating an atmosphere where everyone can speak freely and feels comfortable sharing information and asking questions. Other effective communication strategies include:

- Being an active listener;
- Expressing doubts, concerns and feelings in a non-judgmental way;
- Recognizing that many people communicate and process information differently; and
- Periodically, summarizing key points of the discussion to make sure that all perspectives are represented.

The tools, activities and resources included on this website have been designed to enhance family/educator collaboration throughout the process of IEP development and implementation. You are encouraged to share these tools, activities and resources at parent group meetings, staff meetings and at other professional development activities.

*Coming together is a beginning;
Keeping together is a process;
Working together is success.*

–Henry Ford