

EFFECTIVE LISTENING TIPS

Positive communication means using effective listening skills. The following are things you should keep in mind to be a good listener.

Concentrate on listening

Too often we are busy preparing our response to someone rather than listening to what they're saying. This can result in missing important information.

Watch your non-verbal communication or "body language"

Often your body language will tell the person that you have stopped listening, even if you haven't.

Use eye contact, head nods, and lean toward the person you are speaking with

It will indicate that you are interested in what they are saying.

Do not text or talk on your cell phone while you are in a meeting

Please put all electronics on *silent* or *vibrate*.

Ask questions for clarification

When you don't understand something, it's important to ask follow up questions. This will also show people that you are paying attention to what they are saying.

Summarize and restate

Repeat what you heard in your own words to make sure you understand what the other person is telling you.

Take notes

If you want to remember important information, jot down notes so that you can look at them later. You can always refer to your notes if you have to follow up with another meeting, letter, or phone call.



Our Mission

AFC promotes access to the best education New York can provide for all students, especially students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. We use uniquely integrated strategies to advance systemic reform, empower families and communities, and advocate for the educational rights of individual students.

Still have more questions?

Please Call

The Jill Chaifetz Education Helpline

Monday through Thursday

10AM to 4PM

(866) 427-6033 (toll free)

Advocates for Children of New York

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New York, NY 10001

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AFC'S

Advocacy Skills

A GUIDE TO HELP
YOU ADVOCATE FOR
YOUR CHILD'S
EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS

April 2011



Advocates for Children
of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

ADVOCACY TIPS

Education is a partnership between school and home. You have unique information about your child. Be sure to communicate your concerns, ideas, and suggestions about your child's learning clearly.

Be informed

Know your rights as a parent/guardian and know what to expect. Try to concentrate on solutions. Stay focused on new ways to support your child. Bring a copy of any laws or regulations that may be helpful.

You have the right to see your child's records (including general education records (like report cards), special education records (like IEPs and evaluations), and disciplinary records (suspension letter, witness statements, charges, etc.—also known as the “suspension packet”).

The Department of Education's **Parent Bill of Rights** can be found here:
<http://schools.nyc.gov/RulesPolicies/ParentBillOfRights/Parents+Bill+of+Rights+and+Responsibilities.htm>

Be persistent

You may not always get a quick response to your request. Keep asking. Keep calling.

Remain calm

Your child's education is a sensitive and emotional topic. Do your best to stay calm so you can hear what others are saying and so you can be heard.

Be polite

You are more likely to be heard or helped if you are courteous. Be positive and keep an open mind. Focusing on the negatives can create a barrier to effective communication.

Be ready to find some middle ground

You may not always get what you ask for, so have an alternative plan in mind.

Listen

Not listening can be a barrier to successful communication. Make sure to concentrate and listen carefully. (See Effective Listening Tips)

Put it in writing

Create a “paper trail”. If you speak to someone and he/she agrees to something, send him/her a letter to confirm what was said. Always send important letters certified mail and request a return receipt.

Ask questions and ask for help

If you do not understand something, ask someone to explain it to you. Make sure to ask specific questions. Use phrases such as “tell me more” and “I think what I heard was...am I right?” These phrases require the person you are speaking with to provide more complete information. This will help avoid confusion and misunderstandings.

If you need translation, ask. You have the right to translation and interpretation services if your native language is not English.

Save everything

All of the written correspondence you get concerning your child is very important. It may help you in the future if you have a problem. You should put all written materials (letters from the school, evaluations, etc.) you get in a folder and keep it available. Save envelopes too because the date on the letter may not match the post mark date. In some cases, the Department of Education is under strict time guidelines for fulfilling their responsibilities. An envelope with a post mark can be proof if the DOE did not meet a deadline.

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• **For additional resources on specific**
• **education-related topics please visit our**
• **website: www.advocatesforchildren.org**
• **or call our Education Helpline:**
• **866-427-6033.**
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Get people's names

If you are at a meeting, ask people to identify themselves. Take notes and write down names. If you are on the phone, find out who you are speaking to. This will help you hold someone accountable for what he or she tells you.

Remember, everyone has a supervisor

If someone is unable to answer your questions, ask to speak to a supervisor. Get the name of the supervisor and continue up the “chain of command” until your questions are answered.

Sign documents only after you have read them completely and understand them fully

Make sure you understand everything that you sign. If you can't read it or understand it, have someone you trust explain it to you.

Seek out professional advice

Sometimes you need the help of a professional who can make a big difference in the outcome. Try contacting an attorney or professional advocate.

Get involved

Join others who are organizing for the same goals. There is power in numbers. Reach out to other parents and work together as advocates. Parent groups often understand how a “system really works” and how to navigate the system.

Say “thank you” to those who help you

Most people are never thanked for what they do. Showing your appreciation to those that have helped you can go a long way.

Be confident

You are the best advocate your child has!