



Setting up a School Communication and Advocacy Plan

STEPS

1. Set up a mutually agreed to communication plan with the school

- E-mails are preferable since they can be tracked.
- If a call or discussion occurs follow it up with an e-mail to explain your understanding of the meeting and what was decided.
- Relying on your teen to take communication back and forth is unreliable and destructive.
- Decide on what will be shared (teachers should not view this is an opportunity to tattle on your teen but rather the ability to share valuable information on the student's functioning).
- Have teachers e-mail you when assignments are overdue or your teen is struggling.
- If numerous behavioural issues have occurred a behaviour plan should be developed to prevent issues from escalating.
- Suspensions that occur due to your teen's ADHD should be challenged. The school must officially document all suspensions.

2. Meet with the school to ask the questions listed on the "Specific Questions to Ask the School About Your Teen's Functioning"

This will allow you to:

- understand your teen's academic level and issues with functioning,
- know if you and the school have a similar view on this,
- learn what the school has put in place to assist your teen,
- assess whether this is adequate or if more support needs to be supplied and
- look at what more can be done and what might be impeding putting those supports in place.

3. Review your teen's IEP (substitute your province's acronym for IEP). If one does not exist make sure that one is being developed. If not, this may be the first thing that you need to advocate for. (see next step)

- Compare your teen's profile with what you see on the IEP.

- If information is missing or the information there does not align with your profile speak with the school (they may not have as much information available to them as you do). If that is the case, share your information if you feel that it is appropriate.
- You have the right to ask for things to be added to the IEP, in the list of strengths and needs as well as the goals and accommodations. Use both the [EF Strategy](#) and [Impairment/Accommodation](#) charts to assist you.
- Review the school's goals for your teen to see if they align with yours. These should not be primarily focused on behavioural expectations.
- If you see the term modification used in the IEP, question if the curriculum is being modified from the expected grade level and access the [Specific Questions on School Functioning](#) document for more information on the questions you should be asking.
- If your teen is in an applied or alternate course ensure that they are still able to receive their high school diploma.
- Meet with school counsellor to ensure that your teen is in all the right courses to qualify for their chosen post-secondary program.
- Meet with the new teachers and the special education teacher at the beginning of each semester to ensure that they are aware of the IEP and your teen's profile and required accommodations. Let them know that you want to be notified if your teen is struggling or assignments have not been handed in. Review how accommodations plan to be implemented. If accommodations are found not to be working, other accommodations and strategies must be tried and the IEP up-dated.

4. If your teen has not been designated as an exceptional learner or an IEP has not been implemented your next step will be to convince the school and or board that you adolescent is struggling, "has demonstrable learning needs" caused by their impairments (disability) that gives them a right to accommodations. Use the word "disability", even if you are uncomfortable using it, since this is what triggers their right to special education resources.

Some of these needs might include (but are not limited to) attention/focus, organization, processing speed, working memory, executive functioning weaknesses, mathematical processes and skills, and expressive and receptive language, as per Ontario Memorandum "[Categories of Exceptionalities](#)"

Tips on how to Demonstrate Your Teen's Struggles/Impairments

- Keep comments from the teacher(s) on your teen's: quality of work, incomplete work, inability to stay focused, difficulty following instructions, disorganization, etc.
- Use any medical documents you have, or request that your medical professionals produce documents, outlining your teen's impairments.

- Keep examples of your teen's work that demonstrate how they are struggling or that they are not functioning at grade level.
- If their ability in certain subjects varies widely from other subjects document this.
- If your teen is not meeting their potential, document and explain this. This may need to be tied to a psychoeducational assessment.
- Do not accept the school believing that your teen is OK because they are not failing.
- Use your teen's own words when describing their struggles, or if they are comfortable have them share their thoughts directly.

5. Escalating Issues Up the Chain of Command (document everything along the way)

- Always begin with speaking with the teachers and special education teachers first. Stay calm but be assertive.
- If no change occurs or the meeting does not go well speak with the principal next.
- Meanwhile continue to develop your teen's profile and collect evidence of struggles.
- Allow the school some time to put things in place, but decide on a mutual agreed upon time to meet again to evaluate if changes have occurred. Give them a reasonable time (a few weeks) but don't allow months to go by.
- If you are meeting great resistance (or are outright denied accommodations), feel that your teen is in a detrimental situation, being passively ignored or told the school has no resources, escalate up to your board's superintendent of special education, or if this position does not exist, your area superintendent.
- Your next step will be your board's Director of Education.
- If this does not work, remember that everyone has the right to communicate with their Ministry of Education area representative. The Ministry's job is to hold school boards accountable for meeting the needs of their students. Sometimes a quick call from the Ministry to the board will change attitudes.
- Remember that your teen has the right to equal access of education, including all of the same experiences as their peers (outings and activities). If their disability is getting in the way of that, the board must implement additional resources to make this possible.