

The Effective Parent Voice



Advocates for Children of New York
Protecting every child's right to learn



Agenda

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What does Effective Communication Look Like?

- How to Start

- Practice

- Obstacles

AI

Before you hit SEND

Communication basics

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Clear Communication = Strong Parent Engagement

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Builds trust

Supports
student
success

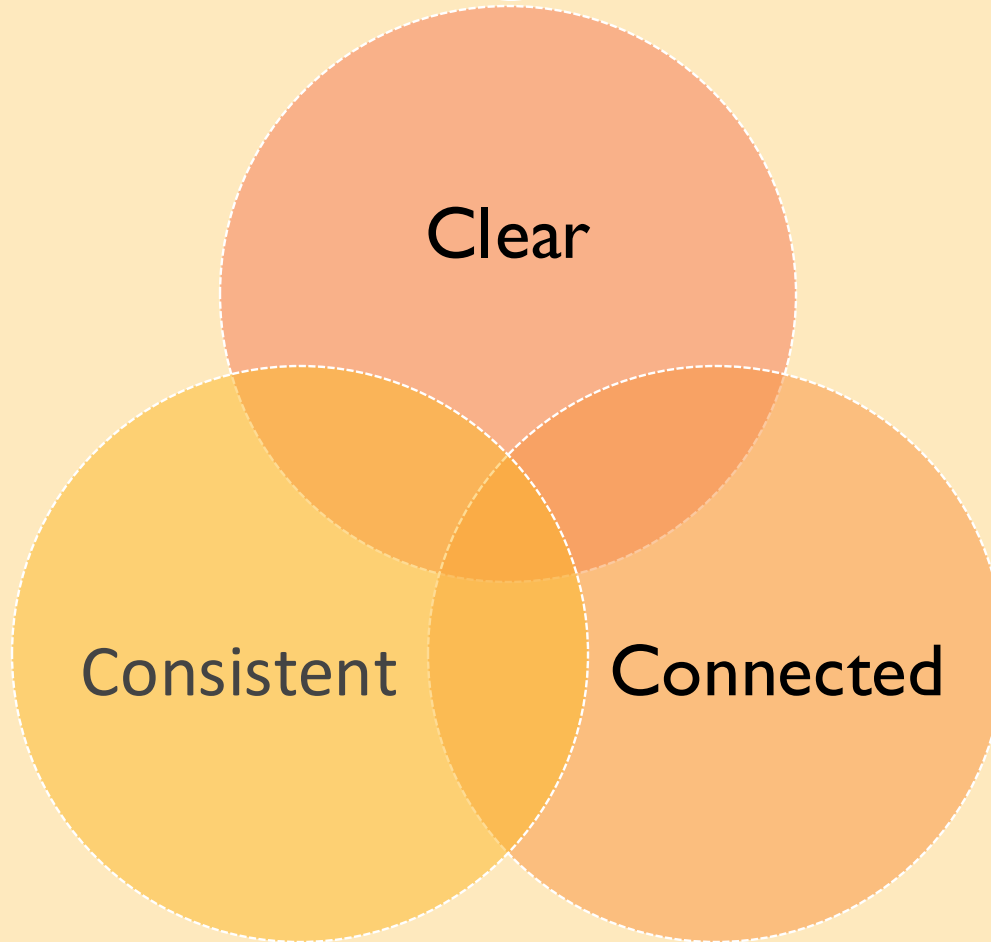
Encourages
Participation

Makes life
easier



≠ Just Information

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Communication Strategies

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Clear

- Plain Language
- Be specific about actions and expectations
- Focus on key message

Consistent

- Keep the message across communications between different school/district staff
- Repeat key points

Connected

- Professional/respectful
- Direct
- Assume good intent



≠ Just Information

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The goal
isn't to
tell the
whole
story.

What
to say

The goal
is to
move the
issue
forward.



Who knows what?

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You know

What your child is like outside school

Your child's school history and what happened in other years

How your child is experiencing school now

Your child's support needs

School knows

What skills working on

What classroom is like

Methodologies used

What your child's in-school work is like

Experts may know about disabilities and supports needed



What are you trying to communicate?

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Questions

- What skills should my child be working on?
- What should they be learning now?
- Who helps support my child with _____?

Concerns

- My child is coming home sad/scared/angry about _____?
- My child tells me _____?
- I would like _____, will you provide that?

How to address issues

- Who should I talk to about ...?
- My child isn't getting _____ on their IEP. How can that be addressed?
- How can my child get more support?

But how do I start?

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Step I - Pause



- Take a moment to process
- Something may have happened that makes you:
 - angry
 - scared
 - frustrated
 - overwhelmed
- You don't have to communicate in that moment.

Write it out. Say it out loud. Talk it through. Sleep on it.

- Then ask: **What do I need to accomplish?**



Step 2- Figure out the goal

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What am I trying to do?

- What do I want?
 - What do I need?
 - Why is this important?
 - **What is THE goal?**
-
- If you don't know what you want to accomplish, stop for a second.



Step 3—The facts

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Ask yourself:

- **What information do I need to reach my goal?**

And then:

- **What information do I WANT to say but don't actually need to say?**
 - Be brutally honest.
 - Keep ONLY the essentials.



Step 4-Who needs to hear it

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Ask:

Who can
actually help?

What do they
already know?

What do they
need to know?

How should I
send it?



Step 5—Now, write—and edit!

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Use a professional tone.

- Focus on the issue.
- **Make one clear ask**
- Make the next step easy



REVIEW!!!

- Take out anything that does not support your goal.



Practice:

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You are a parent. You have just learned that your child Sam isn't getting their Occupational Therapy. The school says they don't have any therapists available.

Draft an email to the school district about the situation.



Structure Message

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- Who are you?
- What is happening? (Main Point)
- Why it matters?
- Your ask: what action steps are needed

For Example:

I am the **parent of Sam Student** (DOB 2.2.2022, ID # 123-456-789), who is in a 12:1:1 class at PS X in Brooklyn.

Sam is **not getting the OT** that their IEP recommends. As a result, Sam is **unable to complete their written work** in time. Please **schedule them for OT** or let me know what other choices I may have. You can text me at 212-555-5555.



Make it easy to read

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Re: Student: Sam Student
DOB 2.2.2022
ID # 123-456-789
PS X in Brooklyn
Parent: Pat Parent

- Short Sentences
- Bullet Points
- Highlight actions

Dear School:

Sam isn't getting the OT listed in their IEP. As a result, they can't finish homework on time. Please let me know whether OT can be scheduled and, if not, what the next steps are.

You can text me at 212-555-5555 or email me at parent@gmail.com with next steps.



Sometimes: Make it Two-Way

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- Ask clear/simple questions
- Invite input (not just compliance!)
- Offer easy options to communicate

Instead of:

"This needs to be fixed now!"

Consider:

"Can OT can be scheduled this week? If not, who should I speak with about next steps?"

EXAMPLE A

Re: Student: Sam Student

DOB 2.2.2022

ID # 123-456-789

PS X in Brooklyn

Parent: Pat Parent

Dear School Psychologist S,

I am writing because I am getting a lot of calls regarding Sam's behavior and it looks like his BIP is not working as it should. I was hoping to pick your brain and discuss options with you. Would a short call or a zoom meeting any day this week at 10am or 11am work for you?

I appreciate your help with this issue.

Thanks,

PARENT





Always: Reduce Overload!

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Prioritize key
information

Avoid unneeded
detail or
repetition

Make it easy for
them to
respond!



What can get in the way in the Real World?

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Common Parent Communication Challenges

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Too much information

Jargon, Unclear or inconsistent Messages

Not sure about your rights

Feeling Unheard or dismissed

Big Emotions (Tip: Process emotions first. Take a beat!)

Don't expect immediate reply.



Common School Challenges

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Limited Time and juggling lots of parent communications

Unfocused communication and misunderstandings

Big Emotions

Parent wants response NOW but need more time

Don't have the answer



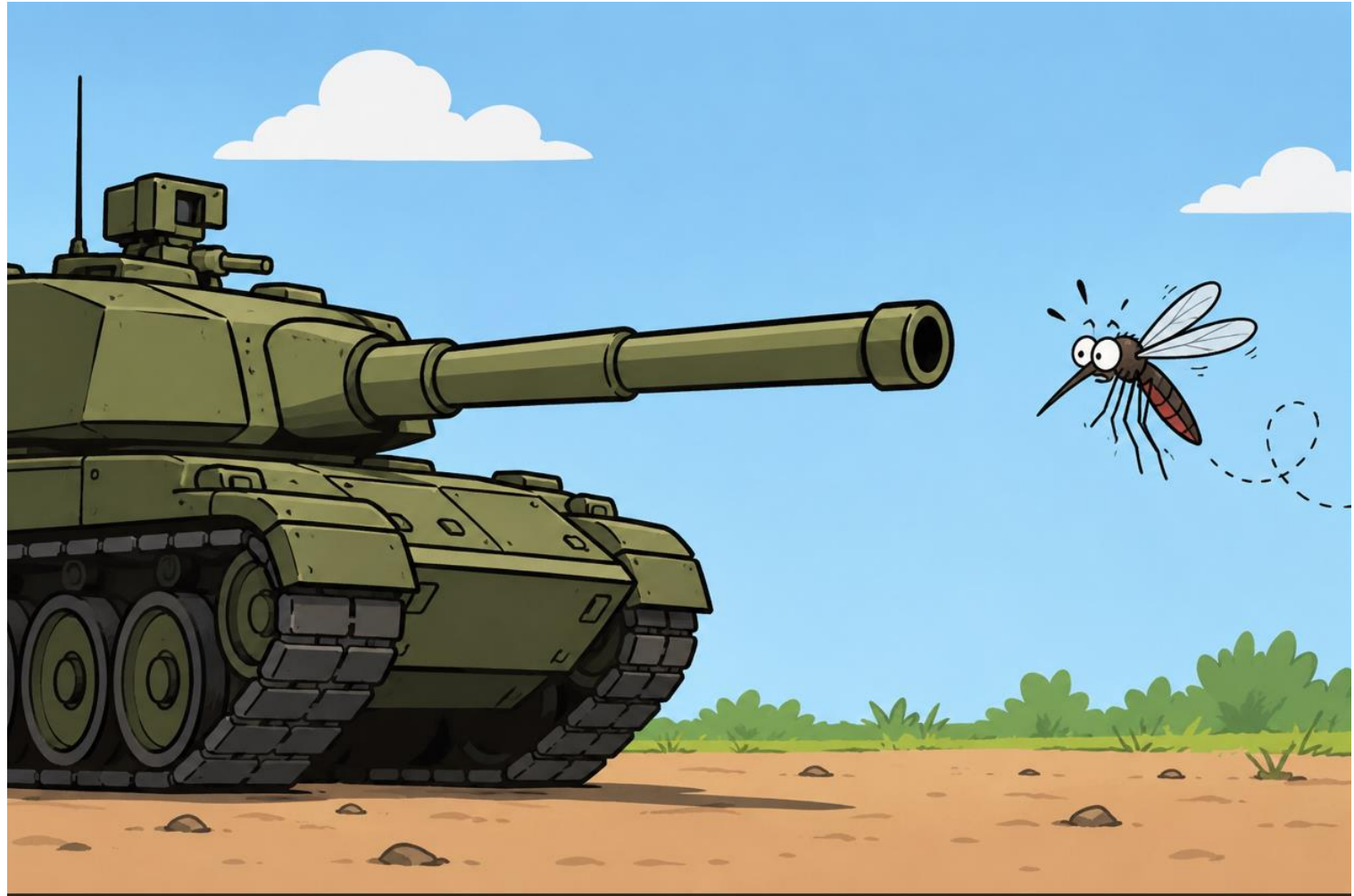
Keeping it going!

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- Thank people when appropriate.
- Confirm next steps.
- Put agreements in writing.
- Set realistic follow-up dates.
- **Follow up** if the promised action doesn't happen.

A.I.

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How can AI help?

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AI can help with:

- clarity
- grammar
- organization
- shortening
- tone
- initial research
- translation



BUT should not decide

- what happened
- what you want
- what your child needs
- what you are asking the school to do
- what the school can do



Using AI: Useful Prompts

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- “Rewrite to improve clarity”
- “Do not add detail”
- “Use plain language”

What not to do:

Don't ask AI to analyze your legal rights or draft a formal legal complaint.

Check over anything AI writes carefully!



Practice 2:

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You are a parent. You have learned that your child's paraprofessional has been reassigned to another student and your child has a new paraprofessional who isn't working out. Your child doesn't want to go to school and is unhappy.

Which of these two emails to the principal works better?

Dear [Principal's/Case Manager's Name],

EXAMPLE B

I am writing to formally request a change in the paraprofessional currently assigned to my child, [Child's Name], a student in [Grade/Teacher's Class] at [School Name].

Over the past [timeframe], I have observed and my child has reported ongoing concerns with the current paraprofessional's approach, including [briefly describe specific issue, e.g., taking away preferred items/activities as a disciplinary measure]. This has caused my child noticeable distress and, in my view, is inconsistent with the supports outlined in his IEP/504 plan and his rights to appropriate supports under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

I would like to request the following:

1. A meeting with the IEP team to discuss these concerns as soon as possible.
2. Reassignment of a different paraprofessional who is a better fit for my child's needs.
3. Written documentation of any behavioral interventions being used, to ensure they align with the strategies specified in his IEP.

Please let me know your availability this week or next to discuss this matter. I appreciate your prompt attention to this issue, as my priority is ensuring my child feels safe and supported at school.



EXAMPLE C

Dear Principal P.

I am writing because my child SAM has been upset since their paraprofessional was changed from PARA 1 to PARA2. Sam has explained to me that things are much harder in the classroom and PARA2 is not helping with them with Sam's teacher has also told me that

I'd like to ask that PARA1 be reassigned to Sam. Can we meet to talk about this? Let me know when I can come by.

I appreciate your help with this issue.
Thanks,

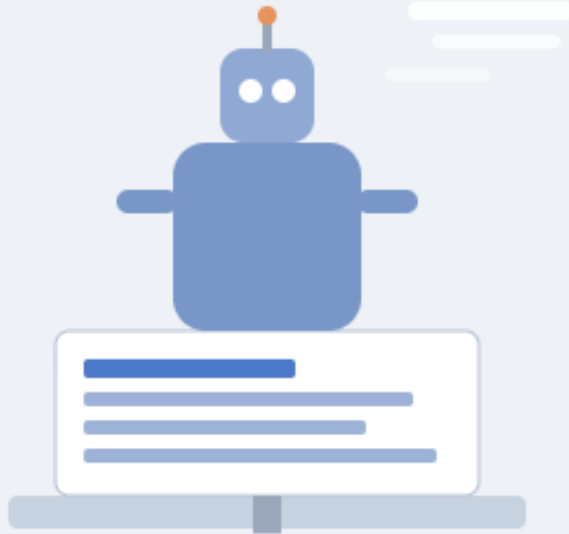
PARENT





Which was more effective? Why?

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drafted by AI



drafted by parent



When communication isn't enough

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If you don't get a response:

1. Follow up.
2. Restate the ask.
3. Ask who can address it.
4. Document what happened.
5. Escalate when appropriate.



Let's Review

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Plan out communication

- Gather information
- Make sure you know why and what you are planning to say

Use plain language

- Use simple language, clear points
- Don't use jargon

Have a clear next step

- Explain what you see, what you are asking
- Say what the next step is



A checklist

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Before you hit SEND:

- ☐ What do I want?
- ☐ What do I need?
- ☐ Is my main point obvious?
- ☐ Did I include only information that supports my goal?
- ☐ Did I make a clear ask?
- ☐ Did I identify the next step?
- ☐ Is my tone professional?
- ☐ Did I check the facts?
- ☐ If I used AI, did I make sure it didn't change my meaning?

TIPS

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- Keep a notebook/log
- Keep copies of everything, either physically or online
- Take your time
- The best way to advocate for your child is to communicate calmly and clearly. That takes a lot of planning!



Some Resources

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AFC Advocacy Skills:

<https://advocatesforchildren.org/resource/advocacy-skills/>

AFC Students, Know Your Rights!

<https://advocatesforchildren.org/resource/students-know-your-rights/>

AFC Alphabet Soup (common NYCPS acronyms)

<https://advocatesforchildren.org/resource/alphabet-soup/>

NY Region I Parent Training and Information Center (PTIC) Collaborative presents the 2026 webinar series:

The Effective Parent: Practical Strategies for Building Safe and Healthy Community Participation Skills for Families of Young People with Disabilities

The Effective Parent: Navigating the IEP Meeting as an Equal Member

Parents are equal members of the IEP team and play a crucial role in advocating for their children to receive appropriate programs and services. This workshop shares practical strategies that families can use to prepare for meetings, communicate concerns, and ask effective questions to ensure their child's needs are met.

Wednesday, October 7, 2026, 12-1 pm, English with Spanish Interpretation

English: <https://bit.ly/3S5iHpT> **Spanish:** <https://bit.ly/449NqVg>

Presented by



[INCLUDEnyc.org](https://includenyc.org)

The Effective Parent Voice: Strategic Communication for Families

This workshop explores practical and common communication strategies to support meaningful parent engagement and participation. Participants will learn how to shape clear, consistent messages, including how to use AI tools appropriately.

Wednesday, October 14, 2026, 12-1 pm, English and Spanish

English: <https://bit.ly/4vh7vVP> **Spanish:** <https://bit.ly/4eMg3yO>

Presented by



advocatesforchildren.org

The Effective Parent Today: Essential Advocacy Tools for Families

This session introduces the core skills parents need to advocate effectively for their child in today's special education landscape in New York, where advocacy increasingly includes digital tools, virtual communication, and access to technical information. Parents and caregivers will gain practical guidance on understanding their rights, communicating with schools, and taking meaningful action to support their child's success.

Wednesday, October 21, 2026, 12-1 pm, Spanish with English Interpretation

Registration link: <https://bit.ly/4uAsAJy>

Presented by



sinergiany.org/Events

The Effective Parent: How to talk to your Child/Student about Their Disability - Empowering vs Enabling

This interactive workshop will share strategies for parents and caregivers to develop confident, affirming, and developmentally appropriate ways to talk with their child about disability. We will explore how language, expectations, and daily interactions can either foster independence and self-advocacy or unintentionally reinforce dependence and limitations.

Wednesday, October 28, 2026, 12-1 pm, English with Spanish Interpretation

Registration link: <https://bit.ly/3QNdjHs>

Presented by



theliac.org

All are welcome.



Advocates for Children of New York

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Call us with questions!



Helpline: 866-427-6033 (toll free)
Monday-Thursday, 10am-4pm

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