

# A PEATC

Do You Know....



## Factsheet for Virginia's Parents Managing Emotions -- Strategies for Effective Communication

### Frustrations are Normal--So is Feeling Emotional

If you are the parent of a child with a disability, you are coping on a daily basis with many situations. Things like medical appointments, insurance coverage, therapies, and, of course, school. **It's normal to feel overwhelmed.** Walking into an Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting with 6 or 7 people sitting across the table from you talking about all of the things your child can't do is exhausting; it takes a toll on emotions—even when things are going well. In reality, **it's impossible to leave your emotions at the door.** You are only human. But what you can do is learn some techniques for **managing your emotions and the way you communicate** so that your interactions with school staff can be as positive and productive as possible.

### Relationship Building

It's also impossible to eliminate frustration, especially if you are concerned that your child's needs are not being met, that he or she is not making adequate progress, or you disagree on his placement or services. **Building positive relationships** early on can help you better navigate challenges later. Some key principles of forging relationships are:

- Build mutual respect and trust,
- Really listen and have an open mind,
- Create positive connections before meetings,
- Separate the person(s) from the problem,
- Focus on the interests of the child; try not to be inflexible,
- Be honest about your emotions and how you are feeling,
- Introduce your child to the team as **you** know them, not just as they appear on paper or even in the classroom. Completing PEATC's *Student Profile Document* is a great way for the team to obtain a holistic view of the child—their strengths, abilities, needs, likes, dislikes, goals, and dreams. Let the team see the person you do!

### Resources

[10 Tips for Effective Communication, by Liz Kingsnorth \(dailygood.org\)](#)

[23 Rules of Email Etiquette to Make a Perfect Impression on Anyone \(hubspot.com\)](#)

[Nonverbal Communication and Body Language - HelpGuide.org](#)

[Principles of Effective Communication \(businessmanagementideas.com\)](#)

["Positive Reframing" as Optimistic Thinking | Psychology Today](#)

[The Emotional Toll of IEP Meetings | Different Dream Living](#)

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Hablamos Español

# Fact Sheet for Virginia's Parents

## Communication Strategies

Communication is a way to give and hear information, whether verbal, written, behavioral, or non-verbal. Remember, even if your voice is pleasant, your non-verbal communication can give your emotions away. We all make communication errors, especially when we are frustrated; so, **it's important to be aware of what and how we communicate.**

- Think about **how you would react** if you were the receiver of the message you are sending. Would you become defensive? Offended?
- Try to **reframe messages in a positive manner**, i.e., instead of "You don't care about my child and this meeting is pointless." Try, "I have and dreams for my child that may seem unreasonable to you but let's try to aim for them anyway."
- Even if you are upset, **be professional and respectful**. If the school is negative in their communication to you, it's normal to feel angry. Think about whether you could be misreading their intent. Either way, respond courteously. If you respond in writing, **let your response sit** for a couple of hours or overnight and read it again before you send it. Every letter, email, or text becomes part of your child's record.
- **Stay focused and be prepared**. Being organized can help you manage your emotions at a meeting that is or becomes difficult. It's hard-- but try to act like it's a business meeting. Be aware of your tone of voice and body language. Focus on solutions.
- **If someone on the team is upsetting you**, let them know; they may not be aware of how their communication is affecting you.
- **Bring someone with you** to the meeting. That person can take notes so you can focus on what is being said and on your child's needs.
- If you get emotional, it's ok. We all lose our composure a times. **Ask for a break**. If you feel like you can't continue, to schedule a second meeting. Everyone knows you are your child's best advocate!

## Remember

- Communication has to go both ways and in-person communication usually results in less miscommunication than emails or texts in which it's very hard to convey tone.
- Assume that teachers and staff are there to support your child and be open to listening to their perspective even if it's different than yours.
- Teachers can also be overwhelmed. They may not have administrative support; they may have new responsibilities; they may feel as though they don't have the right training to serve your child.
- You are an equal part of the team; so just as you need to listen to what other team members are bringing forth, they need to listen to you.



**PEATC's mission focuses on building positive futures for Virginia's children by working collaboratively with families, schools, and communities to improve opportunities for excellence in education and success in school and community life.**



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