



# Spokane County Parent Coalition

[www.spokaneparentcoalition.org](http://www.spokaneparentcoalition.org)

## Working with Families

A positive, meaningful relationship between a family and a school often results in successful education experiences for the family's children. Communication, with both parties sharing information, is a major component of the relationship. There is no one type of parent-teacher relationship. There are a number of factors that may undermine family-school relationships. We have compiled list of "Tips" for educators to help build that relationship.

### Educators:

1. Be respectful of the parent and truly listen. Respect parents' expertise and let their interests and concerns influence the pace and focus of discussion. Explain information in lay terminology. Respect family culture and ask parents about their preferences.
2. Take things slowly. Proceed gently and slowly with information, especially when disabilities emerge. Be aware of acceptance issues and know that families may be going through a difficult, emotional time.
3. Utilize modern technology – e-mail, Web pages – wherever is available to help get your message out. With so many two-paycheck families, phone tag via answering machines can be a very inefficient method of communication. Delicate messages should not ever be placed on a family's answering machine when it is unclear who will listen to them first. For secondary teachers with 100 or more students, online communication is especially advantageous.
4. Arrange for a member of the IEP team to call the student's parent to share information about the student's adjustment to and progress with the new services. Share positive comments or developments. Consider using a communication notebook that goes between home and school. Parents appreciate positive notes and/or other communications from school staff, and dispel the idea that *any* communication from school should be avoided.
5. Give parents opportunities to visit school unencumbered by the often-daunting prospect of parent conferences and IEP meetings. With both parents working, the parents or single working parent appreciates working some creative scheduling, so they can participate in their child's conference.
6. Prepare students to participate in IEP meetings. Explain what an IEP is and go over the student's current IEP with him or her.
7. Be positive about what's ahead. Help students and families prepare for transitions by telling them about what they can expect. Point out how their new situation will be similar to and different from what they know now.
8. Network with other school staff. Contact other school staff that has worked with students with similar disabilities and their families.
9. Don't be wordy or condescending in your written communication with parents. For some parents, letters full of "educationese" reaffirm a sense of intimidation or distrust of schools that may have developed over years of negative personal experiences.
10. Become acquainted with community resources, and promote networking among families. Refer them to family support organizations.

Resources: Family Educator Partnership Project: FEPP Guide, Education World: What I've Learned about cultivating Parent Involvement, Family-School Relationships- National Association of School Psychologists



# Spokane County Parent Coalition

[www.spokaneparentcoalition.org](http://www.spokaneparentcoalition.org)