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Collaboration: The Key to Success!

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What do you think of when you hear the word collaborate? For most, it calls to mind an image of working together to achieve a common goal. For speech therapists, teachers, and parents, collaboration can be the key to success. Why and how do we collaborate? Use the following tips to help make the best learning experience for your children with successful collaboration.

Collaboration: What is the point?

It's true...collaboration takes a little time and work. The positive effects of successful collaborative efforts, however, are numerous for the child, the parents, the teacher, and the speech therapist. It builds trust and respect between the speech therapists, teachers, and parents, and helps build a child's self-esteem.

Collaboration benefits a child in many ways. First, it allows a child to learn in his/her best environment. To achieve this, the teacher and speech therapist modify therapy sessions and classroom lessons to best accommodate the individual needs of that child. Then, through successful collaboration, the teacher implements language-building techniques in an individualized manner, but contained within the classroom. Finally, successful collaboration gives teachers and speech therapists the freedom to try alternative teaching methods and allows evaluation of therapy goals and carryover into the classroom setting.

Successful collaboration depends on all three participants—the parent, the teacher, and the speech therapist. If they all work together, the child will benefit in the long run!

But HOW do I do it?

Successful collaboration follows a step-by-step process. First, start slowly. Never “force” collaborative efforts onto teachers or speech therapists or the efforts might be met with hostility and/or resistance. Introduce the idea of collaboration to the administrative staff for support and set-up an outline of the procedures and goals for them to review. Listen to and provide feedback with the administrative staff before attempting the collaborative process. Make sure you remain open to suggestions and changes when you work with the staff, making them feel an important part of the process.

Speech therapists should formulate goals and objectives easily integrated into the classroom setting. Write language-oriented goals that allow for application in the areas of math, language arts, social studies, and science. For example, if a child is working on object naming, the teacher can adapt this





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goal to include all areas. The speech therapist and the teacher should both use the same strategies to elicit the correct responses. The speech therapist trains the teacher on certain techniques/methods and monitors him/her until he/she feels comfortable incorporating them in the classroom setting.

If the child is working on articulation, communication between the speech therapist and the teacher is essential for application within the classroom setting. For example, if the child is working on /s/, the speech therapist supplies the teacher with words relevant to all subject matter and strategies to elicit the correct production of the sound. This is easily done by “borrowing” the child’s textbooks and choosing appropriate words with the target sound in the desired position and making an easy-to-use list for the teacher. Along the same lines, the speech therapist could make a supplemental list of words in conjunction with the lesson targeting the specific sounds.

Involving the Parents...

Sometimes it’s the hardest goal, but involving a child’s parents in the collaborative process often helps the child be successful in both classroom and therapy settings. You might ask, “But how exactly do I do this?” It’s not as easy as it looks. Just like starting collaboration with other professionals, the key is to start slowly. Don’t bombard a child’s parents with endless letters and phone calls. Instead make initial contact explaining the child’s goals and steps necessary to achieve these goals.

Allow them to ask questions and provide helpful, informative feedback. If a child’s parent asks a question that you do not know the answer to, look it up. If you feel it does not apply to that child, look it up anyway and explain this using factual information.

Explain to the parents that the classroom teachers, the administrative staff, and you will all work with the child on similar goals, using similar techniques. Explain that you would like to teach them how to use these same strategies when working with their child at home. Make them feel like a vital part of the team. Inform them that you would like to meet with them at scheduled times to discuss the child’s progress and to listen to any comments or suggestions. Provide them with your contact information in case any questions arise.

Collaboration depends on cooperation between teachers, parents, and therapists to achieve the desired goals. With a little teamwork, you might wonder why you never tried this in the past! Good luck!



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