

# Great Expectations: Building Better Communication between Schools and Families

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UNIVERSITY OF  
**LOUISVILLE**<sup>®</sup>

KENTUCKY AUTISM  
TRAINING CENTER



# Power of Parental Involvement

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- Relationship building
- Parental Stress
- Positive child outcomes
  - Systemic Change
  - Individual change

# Positive child outcomes?

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- Parent involvement is a core feature of evidence-based approaches to intervention for ASD
  - Determination of instructional targets
  - Delivery of instruction
  - Longitudinal programming

# Urgency in Autism

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- The complexities of autism make parent involvement imperative
  - Problems with generalization
    - Mismatch between school and home outcomes
  - Early intervention
  - Numbers of instructional trials required

# Barriers to Parental Involvement

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- Diversity/Culture
- Learning History
- Resources
- Defining of Roles
- School system bureaucracy
- Teacher training

# Different Perspectives?

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- Parent's world
  - Limited resources
  - Competing priorities
  - Negative feedback from schools
  - Negative feedback about schools
  - Systems are complex, and reinforcement is thin

# Different Perspectives?

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- Teacher's world
  - Limited resources
  - Competing priorities
  - Negative feedback from parents
  - Negative feedback about parents
  - Systems are complex, and reinforcement is thin

# Coming together

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- Perspectives can serve as major barriers unless there are working channels of communication



# Getting the best reception

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- Recognizing that clear communication goes both ways
- That communication has to be beneficial to both parties
- That communication has to be ongoing



# Creating Clear Channels

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- Keep a point of contact to avoid mixed messages



# Creating Clear Channels

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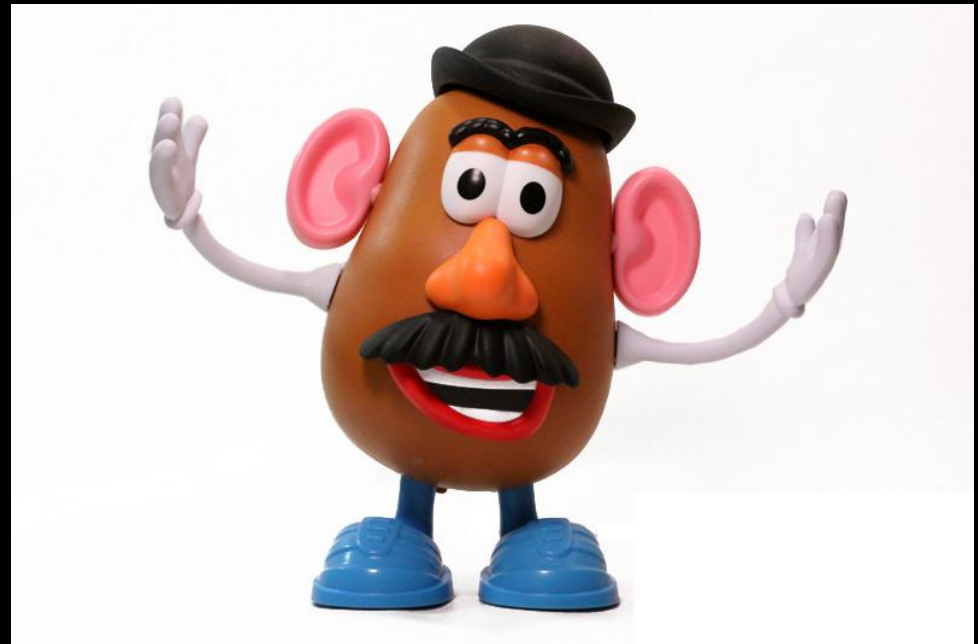
- Use language that everyone can understand
  - Take it deeper than just “avoiding jargon”
  - Consider underlying theoretical perspectives or belief systems



# Creating Clear Channels

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- Really listen, avoid just “waiting for your turn to speak”



# Creating Clear Channels

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- Reinforce attempts at communication
  - Share positives
  - Express gratitude
  - Share goodies
    - Bake goods
    - Resources
    - Photos/Child Products



# Creating Clear Channels

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- Keep it objective
  - Outline issues
  - Avoid the blame game, it distracts from real issues
  - Share data



# Creating Clear Channels

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- Go deep!
  - Consider systemic issues that prevent desired outcomes
  - Tackle what is doable now and plan for making long term change



# Creating Clear Channels

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- Keep it continuous but relevant
  - Communication in itself is not the goal
  - Communication should provide data that are useful for both parties
  - Maintain constant conversation around team goals and effectiveness





# Communication Tools

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- Daily Communication notebooks
  - Describe daily activities, performance
  - Medical information
  - Behavioral Supports



# Daily Communication notebooks

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- Formats
  - Established school agendas
  - Spiral notebooks
  - Specialized forms
  - Web-based blogs

# Daily Communication notebooks

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## ■ Purposes

### ■ Tracking

### ■ Promoting generalization

- Johnny learned this, can you assess...

### ■ Instructional content

- Mary went to the movies over the weekend, she saw .....
- John mentioned in class he might like to work in a bank, what do you think?

# Considerations

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- Consider the time it takes to complete the notebooks
- Excuse minor trespasses
- Stay positive and remember inflection cannot always be accurately inferred
- When addressing touchy subjects, get a second read

# Email

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- Quick way to share information
- Same considerations as daily communication notebooks
- Not everyone is comfortable with email communication, so it cannot be expected
- Consider intermittent emails

# Sharing Data

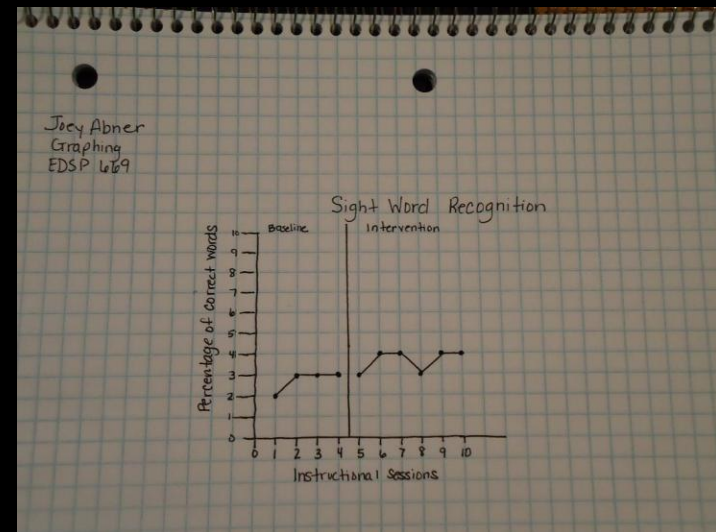
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- Permanent product data
- Digital media
  - Pictures and video media
  - Personal YouTube/Vimeo pages
  - Ipod sharing
- Build an electronic portfolio



# Sharing Graphed Data

- Graphed data provide one of the most effective means of evaluating student progress
- Data can be shared
  - via photo copies
  - Scanned copies
  - Or Google docs



# New Twists on Phone Conferences

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- Using free video conferencing software
  - Skype/Face-time
  - Less travel time for families
  - Flexibility in scheduling
  - Opportunities to show classroom materials
  - Share data files
  - Meet with multiple participants
    - Dual custody/outside agencies





# Other Communication Strategies

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- Class newsletters
  - Great way to share
  - Student news, family news, community news
- Student journals
- Blogs
- Classroom listservs

# Facilitating Gatherings

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- Quarterly teas, potlucks, breakfasts
- Family trainings
- Invited speakers

# Avoiding Mucked Meetings

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- Consider how levels of ongoing communication can impact episodic, meeting-based communication.
  - Unnecessary urgency to “get it all out there”



# Avoid summoning the Hordes

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- Sometimes it is difficult to balance inviting the most relevant people and keeping the group to a workable size.
- Consider the purpose of the meeting and only the necessary to meet the proposed objectives

# Avoid a Fast Food Approach

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- Meetings should not continue past their efficacy or restricted by squeezing them into 30 minutes intervals.
- Agendas or IEP's should not be merely delivered, they should be developed within the meeting

# Consider Pre planning

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- Student objectives are not easy to develop. It may be beneficial for parents and teachers to meet in advance to discuss and draft IEP goals and objectives

# Bring Evidence of Humanity

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- Consider starting the meeting by sharing a picture, video of the target child.
- Consider having the child welcome the group and share their own vision
  - PowerPoint
  - Video

# Offer your Respect

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- **Everyone** bring expertise to the room





# Stay focused

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- Avoid sidebar conversations
- Revisit important points and check for consensus
- Document
- Summarize

# Statements to avoid (Cheatham et al., 2012)

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- To save some time we went ahead and...
- Because the student has autism, he should be served in..
- I need to check with ..... before I can commit to ....
- Nothing works for this child...
- If only someone did this ...then the child would do this.....
- This program does not serve.....

# Questions

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