

QUICK FACTS

Effective Communication Strategies for Parent Leaders and Groups

Effective communication is key to successful outcomes and sustained relationships. Engaging everyone in the group's work while managing meeting logistics and building commitment to create meaningful change is no easy task. Use these tips to support a more effective meeting and encourage productive dialogue and decision-making in your group.

Setting Expectations for Effective Communication:

- ☀️ Develop a participation agreement or group rules for your meeting. See Sample - Participation Agreement [PDF](#)
- ☀️ Embrace individual differences and presume positive intentions.
- ☀️ Review group member roles and responsibilities they have during and outside of the meeting. See Sample – SEPAG Chairperson Job Description [DOC](#) and Sample – SEPAG Member Job Description [DOC](#)
- ☀️ Offer supports and accommodations for participation in the meeting (e.g., closed captioning, language interpretation, large font, assistance with transportation, childcare, etc.)
- ☀️ Decide on a document sharing and collaboration platform.

Planning Ahead:

- ☀️ Review meeting location and arrangements: Set up registration, identify online platform or reserve meeting space, secure language interpreter and refreshments if needed.
- ☀️ Develop an agenda that includes the purpose and anticipated outcomes of the meeting. Keep minutes for each meeting to document the group's decisions. See Action Agenda/Minutes [DOC](#) / [PDF](#)
- ☀️ Identify and bring necessary materials for the meeting. Share relevant information before the meeting if possible.
- ☀️ Develop methods to stay in touch and gather feedback after the meeting. Keep working between the meetings. See Quick Guide "[How Can Parent Groups Use Technology to Strengthen Family Engagement?](#)"

Understanding Different Perspectives:

- ☀️ Ask open-ended questions directly related to your peer's points of view: *"Tell me more about your thoughts on..."*

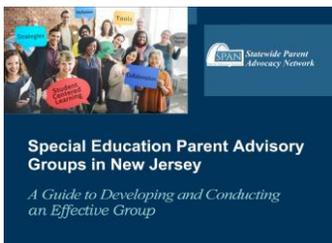
- ☀ Practice replacing the word “but” with “and”: *“I hear what you are saying, and I am trying to understand ...”*
- ☀ Share information, articles, and other resources to promote learning, transparency, and trust.
- ☀ Encourage open communication and document everyone’s input in the meeting minutes.
- ☀ Work through differences and use them as an opportunity to strengthen understanding within the group.

Supporting Meaningful Participation:

- ☀ Develop an effective orientation process for new members and provide an annual refresher for the group.
- ☀ Incorporate team building activities to support relationships between group members.
- ☀ Read the agenda prior to the meeting. Be prepared with questions as well as statements.
- ☀ Decide what you will say ahead of time, offer constructive feedback, and propose solutions.
- ☀ Value people’s time and allow everyone an opportunity to express themselves at least once.
- ☀ Think about ways to encourage others: *“Your personal story about your advocacy journey really resonated with me and the group’s mission to improve outcomes for all students with disabilities in our community!”*
- ☀ Ask “why” and “how” questions to learn the intent of your peer’s statements and to seek deeper understanding. *“Why can’t students with disabilities participate in the class trip?”* and *“How can we make sure all students with disabilities are valued and included?”*
- ☀ Anticipate questions and plan to clarify the meaning of what you are trying to convey if needed.
- ☀ Seek opinions and feedback from your peers: *“What do you think about doing it this way?”*

Being Inclusive of Communication Differences:

- ☀ Appreciate diverse communication styles and differences.
- ☀ Use “I” messages: *“I believe...” “I would like...” “I need to...”*
- ☀ Check for understanding and ask for feedback.
- ☀ Be specific in your language and use facts. *When you identify a systemic concern, communicate why exactly this is a concern and how it is impacting students with disabilities.*
- ☀ Identify situations when you are hesitant to communicate and try to be intentional about sharing more next time. Send an email to the group to convey your perspective. It’s important to add your voice to the discussion.
- ☀ Model good communication skills, value people’s time, and embrace cultural communication differences to build group synergy.



For a complete guide to starting and supporting a SEPAG in your school, district or community, visit the START-EPSD Project web-page (bit.ly/startepsd) and/or connect with a Parent Group Specialist in your region.

Access the SEPAG Guide: tiny.cc/SEPAGguideEnglish

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