

Communication



Bridge to Independence: This study was supported by grant R40 MC 08960 from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (Title V, Social Security Act), Health Resources and Services Administration, Department of Health and Human Services.

What Did the Doctor Say??

Andy's daughter Olivia needs to have a feeding tube put in because of slow weight gain and problems swallowing. They are at a clinic appointment to meet with the surgeon.

Here is what the surgeon tells Andy: "I am going to laparoscopically place a gastrostomy tube under general anesthesia in the OR. After surgery she will go to the recovery room and then be admitted to an inpatient floor. Once she tolerates enteral feeds she'll be discharged. The nurse will explain how to administer feedings. The discharge planner will order equipment and supplies from the DME company. The tube will be changed to a Mic-Key button in 6-8 weeks. If the tube falls out before then you will need to put in a foley catheter and contact the on-call surgeon."

Before leaving the room the surgeon asks, "Do you have any questions?" Andy isn't sure, so he says no.

When they get home Andy tries to explain to Olivia's grandma what is going to happen. He realizes that he doesn't understand the plan for Olivia's surgery and wishes he had asked more questions. Andy wonders if this surgery is the best way to help Olivia.

- What could Andy have done to make sure he understood what the doctor told him?
- What can Andy do to make sure he remembers what the doctor says after the appointment?
- How can Andy make sure he agrees with the doctor's plan?



What's It All About

Many people are part of the team that cares for your child. Team members may include doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers, and family members. The most important member of the team is you.

Team members need to be active and involved to provide the best and safest care for your child. Knowing the members of the team and how to contact them is the first step to working together. Each member of the team has skills and knowledge. Doctors are experts about medicine. Teachers are experts about learning. You are the expert about your child.

It's important to have good team communication. Communication is everyone's responsibility, including yours. Building a team and working with so many different people can be hard. It takes time and practice. Good communication helps you and your child.

It's your responsibility to tell team members about your child. You know how your child's health condition affects daily life. Other team members do not see your child every day like you do. It is up to you to write down and keep track of communication with the team. Using a standard way to communicate will help the team understand your child's needs.

Key things to remember when talking with others are to be honest, listen, and respect everyone on the team. Asking questions and telling providers what you need or if you disagree helps everyone on the team. Learning how to communicate clearly makes working with the team easier.

Steps to Learning about Communication with Health Providers and Schools

1. Keep a written list of contact information.
2. Write and keep communication notes.
3. Use a communication method.
4. Ask questions when you don't understand.

Take Action

Talk with your health care provider.

Know who is on the team and how they help.

Health care providers, teachers, and others work with you to help your child be healthy. You are all on the same team and you share the same goal. Everyone wants your child to be as healthy and happy as possible.

- Know who is on the team.
- Recognize what each person does to help (their role).
- Find out the best way to keep in touch with team members.

Keep a written contact list of providers.

Think about who to put on your list. Some examples are:

- Health care providers such as doctors, social workers, and pharmacies.
- School providers such as teachers, therapists, and classroom aides.
- Home care providers such as nurses, health aides, and supply companies.
- Community providers such as Birth to Three and after school providers.
- Family, friends, and others who help.

Choose a way to make your contact list work for you. Having providers listed in one place is what matters most. Tools that can help you make and keep your list include:

- The Provider Contact List form included in this section.
- Your cell phone, computer, or flash drive.
- An online personal health record or hospital's patient portal.

Create your provider contact list. For each provider include:

- Provider name.
- Type of provider.
- Best way to contact such as phone, email, office staff, or nurse.
- Best time to contact.

Update the contact list regularly.

Have the list at home.

Bring a copy to provider visits or meetings.

During a Hospital Stay

The care team may be different during a hospital stay.

- Regular providers may not be involved.
- The team often gets bigger.
- You may not know everyone or their roles.
- Team members change daily.
 - Nurses change every 8 to 12 hours.
 - Doctors may change each week.
 - Different providers work during the day and at night.

You are still part of the care team. You have the right to know:

- Name of anyone providing care.
- Each care provider's role.

Keeping track of everyone may be hard.

- Write notes to help you remember who is involved.
- Ask questions if providers don't introduce themselves.
 - "May I see your ID tag?"
 - "What is your name?"
 - "What do you do for my child's care?"

Take Action

Talk with your health care provider.

Use clear communication

Using clear communication helps people get their point across and understand each other. Clear communication makes a positive difference to your child's health. It helps you be involved in care and decisions.

When sharing information with providers:

- Give complete and up to date information.
- Be honest.
- Clearly tell any concerns, questions, or needs.
- Focus on the reason for the conversation.
- Listen carefully to the provider's response, even if you don't agree.
- Repeat back what the provider tells you.
- Ask questions to make sure you understand.

Use a communication method

There are several methods for communicating with providers. Start by choosing one method. Practice it with a few providers. Two examples are:

- Ask Me Three
- SBAR

Ask Me 3™

The Ask Me 3™ method uses three questions to learn basic information:

1. "What is my child's main problem?"
2. "What do I need to do?"
3. "Why is it important for me to do this?"

Change the questions depending on what you need to know.

For example, when asking about a test ask:

- What is the name of the test?
- Are there any special directions? What can my child expect?
- Why is this test being done? What will we do with the information?

To learn more about Ask Me 3™, go to the More Information and Resources list.

Communication Tips

Being friendly and polite can improve communication.

Make phone calls when you won't be interrupted.

Turn your cell phone or pager off.

Ask another person to help at provider visits by:

- Caring for your child while you talk with provider.
- Taking notes.
- Caring for your other children while you're gone.

Before ending a conversation:

- Review your notes quickly.
- Repeat the key points and plan.
- Ask, "Am I missing anything?"

Take Action

Talk with your health care provider.

SBAR method

SBAR is a four-step method for communicating with providers. Each letter stands for a different step in your communication. SBAR helps you stay focused when sharing information and asking questions.

S is for Situation

Give a short description of what's going on (the situation). Start by telling the provider you and your child's names. Explain what is going on with your child. Tell them the reason for your call, appointment, or meeting.

"Hi, My name is Jane Doe. I am calling about my son John Doe. John has a fever of 104."

B is for Background

Tell the provider what led to the situation (the background). Tell about treatments you have tried for the problem. Say if the problem has gotten worse, better, or stayed the same. Tell anything else that you want the provider to know about the background.

"John has had a fever for two days. He is crabby, sleepy, and not drinking or eating as much as usual. I am giving Tylenol every four hours. His fever goes down to 101 after I give Tylenol but it goes back to 104 within three hours."

A is for Assessment

Give your thoughts about the situation (your assessment). Clearly say what you think the problem is. Tell the provider why you are concerned. Focus on the key things you want the provider to know about the situation

"I am worried about John's fever being so high for two days and that he is not drinking as much as usual. I think he has an infection and may need an antibiotic."

R is for Request or Recommendation

Clearly tell the provider what you want to happen next. Ask if there is a new treatment or changes in treatment that you can try.

Ask for more information. Ask what the plan is and exactly what you need to do. Ask if an opinion from another provider would be helpful.

"Is there another medicine I can give to bring his fever down? Do you want to see him today? How will I know if he is not drinking enough?"



Take Action

Talk with your health care provider.

Write and keep notes.

Write and keep notes whenever you talk with providers, such as,

- Doctor, therapist, or other health care provider visits.
- Hospital stays.
- Phone calls.
- School meetings or parent-teacher conferences.

There are many tools that help you take notes. Choose whatever works best for you. Tools include:

- Appointment Notes form.
- Phone Log form.
- A notebook or blank sheets of paper.
- Cell phone or computer.

Note-Taking Tips

Write the date and names of who you spoke with.

Ask for help when needed:

- Ask providers to write notes for you.
- Ask, "How do you spell that?"
- Ask, "Can you please slow down?"
- Ask, "Can you please explain that again?"

Write down questions you think of while provider is talking.

Ask for written information or pictures that you can keep with your notes.

Notes can help you:

- Remember who said what and when.
- Know what to do to care for your child.
- Understand information providers tell you.
- Tell family and other caregivers about a conversation.
- Share information and concerns with providers.

Write notes before you talk with providers about:

- Your questions and concerns.
- Your suggestions and ideas.
- Things you see or notice that are new.

Write notes during conversations with providers about:

- Things that the provider sees or notices about your child.
- Answers to your questions and concerns.
- Suggestions and ideas.
- New information.
- Directions or instructions about treatments or tests.
- Action plan or next steps.
- Referral and resource information.

Write notes after you talk with providers:

- Review your notes as soon as possible after the conversation.
- Add anything you missed that will make your notes clearer.

Take Action

Talk with your health care provider.

Questions

Learn as much as you can about your child's needs. The best way to learn is to listen and ask questions.

Tell providers how much information you want. Say if you want an answer with a lot of details or just basic key information.

Ask Questions:

- One at a time.
- As soon as possible after you think about them.
- When the provider doesn't explain clearly. Ask again if you still don't understand. For example, "Can you explain that to me again?"
- To get information.
- To find out the plan and what may happen next. For example:
 - Ask about medical tests, problems, and procedures.
 - Ask about school health and education plans.
 - Ask who will do what and when.
- To check if you understand what was said. Ask, "Do I understand correctly?"
- Even when you think you know the answer, double check.
- Whenever you have them.

Some questions can't be answered

Sometimes providers can't answer your questions right away. They may need to gather more information first. Sometimes there is not an answer.

Not knowing is hard for everyone. The important thing is to continue working and communicating with your child's team.

Questions to ask about tests

- Why is the test being done?
- What will we learn?
- Will the results change what we are doing now?
- What do we need to do before the test?
- How is the test done?
- How long will it take?
- When will I get results and who will tell me?

Questions to ask about referrals

- What is the reason for the referral?
- What are our main questions for the new provider?
- What records should I bring?
- Who will discuss the report with me?

Questions to ask about surgery

- Why is it needed? Please tell me in everyday terms.
- What are the possible benefits (good things) and risks (harmful things) of the surgery?
- Is there any other treatment we can try?
- What will happen if it's not done or we wait?
- What do we need to do before the surgery?
- How is the surgery done? How long does it take?
- How long will my child have to stay in the hospital?
- How long will it take to recover?

Check Yourself



- I kept a written list of providers.
 - I know who is on our team.
 - I know what each team member does to help.
 - I bring a copy of my provider contact list to appointments and meetings.

- I wrote and kept communication notes.
 - I write notes and questions before appointments.
 - I write notes or ask someone else to take them during appointments.
 - I write and keep notes about phone calls with providers.
 - I keep (save) my communication notes.

- I used a communication method.
 - I use the Ask Me Three method.
 - I use the SBARR method.

- I asked questions when I did not understand.
 - I write questions down when I think of them.
 - I ask my questions when I see or talk with providers.
 - If I don't understand an answer I ask the question again.

More Information and Resources

Ask Me 3 questions and other resources from the Partnership for Clear Health Communication are available on the NHP website:

http://www.npsf.org/askme3/for_patients.php

Talking With Your Doctor is an 18 minute video. It gives tips for asking questions and sharing information with doctors that's needed for the best possible care. It was made to teach teens but the tips are helpful to adult caregivers too. The website also has the written transcript of the video.

<http://www.ichp.ufl.edu/videos/twyd>

Who's Who in the Hospital is a written guide about the different types of providers in a hospital. The guide is in English and Spanish:

http://kidshealth.org/parent/system/doctor/hospital_staff.html?tracking=P_RelatedArticle#

Tips for emailing pediatricians An audio file that discusses what types of questions can be emailed to your child's doctor:

<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/health-management/pages/Tips-for-Emailing-Your-Pediatrician.aspx>

Frequently asked questions about communicating with health care providers from UW Center for Patient Partnerships:

<http://patientpartnerships.org/pathways/content.php?category=5&question=34>

Telephone tips for caregivers from the National Family Caregiver's Association:

<http://www.thefamilycaregiver.org/pdfs/TelTips.pdf>

Multiple videos with ideas for making the most of your time with the doctor:

<http://www.survivorshipatoz.org/cancer/articles/videos-maximizing-time-with-your-doctor/>

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction gives information about how parents and educators can work together. This website has a section called "Links for Better Communication."

<http://www.dpi.wi.gov/sped/agreement.html>

An IEP Map: Finding Your Way Through The Maze is a SchoolTube video. It shows an IEP with good communication and one without. It also gives caregivers and school staff tips for working together.

<http://www.schooltube.com/video/6d476df2ef7d4abfa02f/An-IEP-Map-Navigating-Your-Way-through-the-Maze>

Communication Forms

| Form Name | How it can be used |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Meeting Notes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use this form to keep track what happens at meetings with providers, teachers, or others. |
| Phone Log | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use this form to keep track of phone calls you have with providers, teachers, insurance companies, and others. |
| SBAR Communication Notes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use this form to make notes before and during conversations using the SBAR communication method. |
| Appointment Notes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use this form to prepare for appointments. Completing it ahead of time will help make sure you and your child get the most out of an appointment.• Circle or put a star next to your most important questions or concerns.• Bring it to the appointment. Use it to help you remember your questions and what you want to discuss. Take notes during the appointment . |
| Provider Contact List | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use this form to keep track of health care providers . For example, list doctors, home or school nurses, pharmacists, and dentists. |

Meeting Notes

Use this form to keep track what happens at meetings with providers, teachers, or others.

| | |
|---|--|
| Date | |
| Reason for meeting | |
| People attending meeting <i>List name and title.</i> | |
| Notes | |
| What to do next | |

Phone Log

Use this form to keep track of phone calls you have with providers, teachers, and others.

| Date and Time | Name of Person and Agency | Phone Number |
|---------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Notes | | |

| Date and Time | Name of Person and Agency | Phone Number |
|---------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Notes | | |

| Date and Time | Name of Person and Agency | Phone Number |
|---------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Notes | | |

| Date and Time | Name of Person and Agency | Phone Number |
|---------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Notes | | |

| Date and Time | Name of Person and Agency | Phone Number |
|---------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Notes | | |

| Date and Time | Name of Person and Agency | Phone Number |
|---------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Notes | | |

| | | |
|---------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Notes | | |
| Date and Time | Name of Person and Agency | Phone Number |
| Notes | | |

| | | |
|---------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Date and Time | Name of Person and Agency | Phone Number |
| Notes | | |

| | | |
|---------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Date and Time | Name of Person and Agency | Phone Number |
| Notes | | |

| | | |
|---------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Date and Time | Name of Person and Agency | Phone Number |
| Notes | | |

| | | |
|---------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Date and Time | Name of Person and Agency | Phone Number |
| Notes | | |

| | | |
|---------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Date and Time | Name of Person and Agency | Phone Number |
|---------------|---------------------------|--------------|

Notes

SBAR Communication Notes

| | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| Date | Person You're Talking To |
| Situation <i>Tell what is going on. What is the problem or reason for call or appointment?</i> | |
| Background <i>Give the background about your child and your concern or question.</i> | |
| Assessment <i>Summarize the situation. What do you think the problem is?</i> | |
| Recommendation <i>Find out what will happen next.</i> | |

Appointment Notes

Use this form to plan before an appointment. Write notes during the appointment to help you remember what you learn. Use the back of this form if you need more room.

Appointment Information

Provider/Clinic: _____ Date: _____

Reason for Appointment: _____

Before Appointment: What do you hope happens at appointment? What do you need to tell the provider?

Questions: Write your main questions before appointment. Write answers during appointment.

Next Steps: What will I do at home and when? What will provider do and when? Will anyone else help? What are reasons to call provider? When is next appointment?

Provider Contact List

List doctors, therapists, pharmacies, and other health care providers.

| | | |
|--|------------------|-------|
| | | |
| Provider Name | Type of Provider | |
| Address | | |
| Phone | Fax | Email |
| Notes <i>Who to talk to, best time to call, etc.</i> | | |
| | | |
| Provider Name | Type of Provider | |
| Address | | |
| Phone | Fax | Email |
| Notes <i>Who to talk to, best time to call, etc.</i> | | |
| | | |
| Provider Name | Type of Provider | |
| Address | | |
| Phone | Fax | Email |
| Notes <i>Who to talk to, best time to call, etc.</i> | | |
| | | |
| Provider Name | Type of Provider | |
| Address | | |
| Phone | Fax | Email |
| Notes <i>Who to talk to, best time to call, etc.</i> | | |