



# QUARTERLY **UPDATE**

Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities

AUGUST 2020

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## **CLEAR AND COLLABORATIVE COMMUNICATION LEADING TO AN EFFECTIVE AND POSITIVE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE DURING COVID-19 AND BEYOND**

By: Marbella Caceres and Chantelle Blackburn

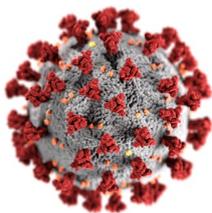
Fall is almost here, and with it the start of another school year. Present this new school year is another element that is changing the traditional way of educating our youngsters. That is the Covid-19 presence, which our world has been struggling with for some time, with no clear end in sight. It has changed the way we live our lives, in areas such as work, our medical appointments, family and friends' interactions, as well as sports and entertainment. The educational sphere has been no different in having to deal with this unprecedented situation which affects every one of us at many levels. We know that this school year will present us with many challenges. In working together and supporting one another, we will be able to overcome these difficult times.

We would all like a break from the constant anxiety and information overload that has been sparked from the growing Coronavirus Pandemic. Times like these can be stressful — for individuals, families, children, and entire communities.

COVID-19



At this time of Covid-19 it is essential to fostering good communication to support family involvement. Families, schools and community need to keep working together to create strong long-lasting partnerships to improve educational outcomes for our children and youth with disabilities. Parents of children with disabilities need to create strong and positive relationships to help improve educational outcomes and student success. The framework of these relationships start with communication..



## CLEAR AND OPEN COMMUNICATION CONTINUED.

Fear and anxiety are common responses to uncertainty, as well as feelings of isolation and disrupted daily routines, and can become overwhelming. However, if we take proactive steps to remain healthy, safe, and connected with one another, we will be able to better manage our emotions and to re-establish some level of normalcy in our daily lives.

While we are definitely in a “new normal,” some things have not changed. This includes the welfare of our children, physically, emotionally, and intellectually. We are all adjusting to different ways of doing

things, and now with a new school year upon us, we must learn how best to help our children succeed in this challenging educational situation.

If you are feeling stressed, keep in mind that your school’s teachers, aides, and other school personnel are feeling the strain of new ways of carrying out their goals of educating their students, also. While seeking to provide a quality educational experience for your child, many of them are also concerned for the wellbeing of their own children.

In the midst of this changing educational environment, one element has not changed. That is the need for clear and collaborative communication between home and school. You share the same goals that educators have, of making sure your child receives a good education and continues to thrive; therefore, effective communication and interaction between you, as the parent, and the professionals involved with your child is vital. We all need to work together and support each more than ever to keep advancing our children to a better and brighter future.



## DO NOT WAIT TOO LONG TO HAVE A CONVERSATION WITH YOUR CHILD’S TEACHER

The best way to avoid crises between school and home is to have regular and timely conversations with our child’s educators, and any other school personnel who are involved with their education. Communication is an essential component to a good relationship. If we would seek to be open to listening to each other’s concerns, we could avoid potential misunderstandings which could lead to a crisis later on. Extend courtesy to professionals when possible. Respond to any communication from the school promptly and expect a timely response from teachers when you reach out with a question, via email or other messaging systems. Most likely, teachers will respond during typical school hours.

## LISTEN TO ONE ANOTHER

The most important skill to learn is to listen. We all need to know that our needs and concerns are being heard.



Often, we go instantly into solution mode. Leaves space for simply listening and trying to understand the other's viewpoint. Listen to the answers you receive and feel free to ask questions if you do not understand something. Asking questions helps to clarify our mutual understanding. Families should assess what is being asked of them, determine their abilities and resources, advocate for what they need, and ask for realistic expectations and activities for supporting their children during this time.

### PREPARE YOURSELF FOR STRESSFUL SITUATIONS

Prepare yourself to "practice your patience." Use this as an opportunity

to train yourself to remain calm in stressful situations. Communicating frustration in an even-tempered and collaborative manner will help to maintain an open door of communication.

Also, be aware of how your body reacts to negative emotional responses like anxiety, sadness, feelings of isolation or fear, resulting in added stress and tension in the home, which is passed on to the child. Keep in mind that your child's teacher needs to be aware of what stressors your family is going through, in order to help the child who may be having trouble with school because of these issues.

There is a variety of ways to communicate regularly with the teacher, including face-to-face meetings, phone calls, emails, texts, parent/teacher communication logs/virtual calls/video calls/Facebook Messenger/mail, fax, etc. You will need to work together with the teacher to decide on which method of communication would be the easiest and most helpful. Find the mode of communication that works best for you and ensure your child's teacher knows how to reach you.

Learn More from these resources:

[Special Needs Communication Checklist](#)  
[3 signs of stress for children](#)



## TALKING WITH OUR CHILDREN

The way we, as parents and caregivers, respond to children's questions and worries will help them through difficult times and teach them to cope during future challenges.

Often our first thought is to protect, even if that means minimizing the situation. But in cases like this, being honest and providing factual information is a parent's best defense.

If you are struggling with how to talk to your child about all of these changes occurring at this time, make sure you also are reaching out to your child's teacher for support. It is important that our child hears the same information in a repetitive way from home and school.

## EXPLAIN THE WHAT AND THE WHY

Most people's fears come from being in an unfamiliar or uncertain situation and not knowing what to expect. To help minimize anxiety, and uncertainty, let your child know what you are doing and why you are doing it. Explain changes to their routine in advance, so they can prepare themselves for new situations and new ways of doing things, such as online learning

## PROVIDE STRUCTURE

Although the structures of our lives have changed significantly, it is important to keep a daily routine. Children feel secure and thrive when they have structure; therefore, provide numerous opportunities to create and follow a routine in your family. This will help your children with disabilities to regain their sense of security.



## FIND A BALANCE WITH SCHOOL AND WORK AT HOME

Part of our new normal is a home full of people trying to attend both school and work simultaneously

This is probably a huge change for everyone and can come with a lot of mixed feelings. For instance, some children may be excited to stay home, while others may be grieving the loss of milestone activities including sports, performances, proms, graduations, and even just the daily connections with their friends. While as parents, many are used to going into an office to start their day away from the distractions of cleaning, parenting, caregiving for other family members, and managing other household responsibilities, they are now working at home and trying to insure that their children are keeping up with their studies, providing their meals, and maintaining order. Additionally, for adults, leaving the home to go to work allows for social connections and personal independence, which may feel lost when remaining at home.

To adjust to this kind of change, members of the household should be open to having candid conversations with each other concerning the changes to their lives.

- Sit down and talk about what these changes mean for each member of the household and acknowledge any feelings of fear, sadness, or loss.
- Discuss the specific things that are needed to help make both the school day and the workday more successful for everyone.
- Consider designating specific school and workspaces in your home.
- Set boundaries around interruptions, breaks, and end of the day activities, since it is likely that the school day will end prior to the workday.

## BE EMPATHIC AND DO NOT DISMISS THEIR FEARS

Your child's fears may seem unreasonable or unrealistic to you, but that does not mean that your child does not see them as real or valid. Before you talk about facts, listen to his concerns, and do not dismiss the fears that are expressed. By giving your child the opportunity to verbalize what he is feeling and listening with an open mind, you will be able to determine how you should direct the conversation. Though it might be difficult at first to begin these conversations, keep in mind that afterward, both you and your child will likely feel better after discussing fears and concerns, as well as identifying proactive measures that can be taken to alleviate the fears.

[Learn More](#) with this resource.





## BE AWARE OF THEIR BEHAVIOR

Adults need to be aware of their children's behaviors more than ever. Many of our children with disabilities may not have the ability to verbalize their feelings. Depending upon your child's age and other factors, he or she may or may not have the communication skills to express how they are feeling. Most older children and teens show their worries through their behavior. Signs of stress and/or anxiety to look for include headaches, stomach aches, or sleep problems.

One way to combat this is to be present and engaged (that means no phones) and listen to what your child is telling you. Is she expressing anger and frustration too easily? Or maybe she is withdrawing? Those behavioral signs are clear indicators of how your child is feeling and should alert you that more support is needed.

[Learn More](#) with this resource

## KEEP THE INFORMATION AGE-APPROPRIATE

How you discuss this situation, and any others, will differ depending upon the age of the child

Younger children may need physical proximity while you talk to them. Consider sitting in a way so they are eye level with you. If you have middle and high school kids, the best approach is to talk about the facts and avoid placing your frustration or fears upon your children. Also, stress the importance of speaking to you and to their teachers about any concerns they might have.



## STICK TO FACTS

This may seem obvious, but the information you share with your children should come from one or two factual and trusted sources. This can help minimize confusion.

## EXAMPLES OF REAL-LIFE TEACHER AND FAMILY CONVERSATIONS:

Dear Families:

Our new school year will soon be underway! Although, this school year may look different than any other, it will still be a great one!

Your child will have live instruction each day, which will include daily lessons that (s)he would have had in the regular classroom. We will spend the first time together going over routines and expectations, just as we would do in the regular classroom environment.

It will be important for your child to still maintain a healthy sleeping schedule, have a designated "school" working area, and to have an organized space with all supplies at-hand.

As we embark on this new learning path together, there are sure to be questions and concerns that arise. As always, please reach

out to me through email, and I will help you in whatever way you need. Our district and school websites are a great starting point for general questions, like username/passwords, schedules, and updated Covid information.

I'm excited for this new learning adventure and can't wait to "meet" your child on our first day of school!

Sincerely,

*Your Teacher*



### YOU ARE NOT ALONE:

Many things can be done to help yourself and your child through this period of trauma, you also need to know that you are not alone. Below you will find a list of programs, agencies that could help families and school district to keep connected.

<https://www.ohioparentmentor.com/>

<https://www.ocecd.org/ForParents.aspx>

<https://ohiofamiliesengage.osu.edu/>

State Support Teams

NAMI Video Resource Library

# EXAMPLES OF REAL-LIFE TEACHER AND FAMILY CONVERSATIONS CONTINUED

Dear School Staff,

We know that this school year is different, and that you are doing your best to provide as much stability and consistency as you can, in light of the everchanging circumstances. We have all experienced trauma as our world was shaken through the uncertainty of a pandemic. As parents, we were forged into a new way of communication with those who educate our students. Google classroom, Zoom, and Google meet have become a new household language. We have had to learn together and build a foundation for learning while caring for the social-emotional needs of our children. We have an opportunity to build unique ways of communicating and supporting our shared goals of success for our children. I never thought that my daughter would find her voice through one of the most difficult times in history. Communication has always been a challenge for her; however, this has provided her an opportunity, as well. We were lucky to have a counselor who has been with her throughout her time in High School supporting her and finding ways for her to express herself. Weekly calls were scheduled to be there for her in whatever way she needed. Please continue to communicate in the best way you can, we are listening! Now, I welcome you to listen to that voice who has found an opportunity to be heard....

Tammie Sebastian



As a high school student going into senior year, this year has been no short of difficult. Due to my Aspergers, my main struggle with finishing this past year was the scheduling. I am very stuck to my schedules for the day, and when the pandemic hit and I was taken away from the school environment every day, it was not short of difficult. I would not be able to get my work done as I usually could, and since I was not in school, I felt that I could not get myself to focus with multiple other thoughts and projects popping up during work. Not only was my school taken from me, but my extracurriculars as well, and I could not even get the jitters out anymore. I had felt trapped inside my body and I needed that environment to work normally. It had affected my grades and I would fall behind and get overwhelmed the day it was due. Overall, the pandemic had changed my life in more ways that I could have imagined, and I struggle with that. The unexpected happened and even things that seemed that they were safe to stay were not. It truly was and still is one of the most challenging experiences in my life.

Noell Sebastian

## OTHER RESOURCES

[What Happened To My World: Paperback by Jim Greenman](#)

[Family-Engagement](#)

[Letter Writing](#)

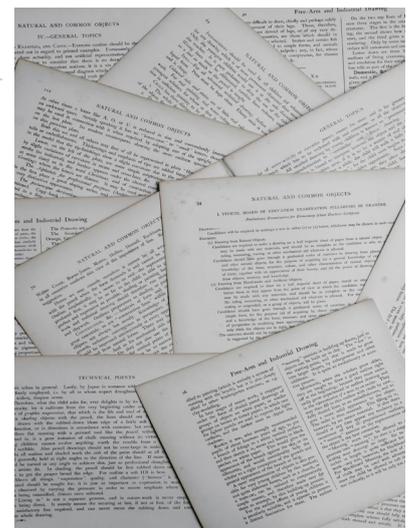
[Edutopia home to school guide](#)

[Building Communication Through Letter Writing | Spanish Version](#)

[Building Parent / Professional Partnership Through Communication | Spanish Version](#)

[Collaborating with Families](#)

[Working with Families of Children with Special Needs](#)





# OCECD

## OHIO COALITION FOR THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

If you need assistance with a oral language translation of this newsletter, please contact us at 1-844-382-5452.

Si necesita ayuda con la traducción de este documento por favor contáctenos al 1-844-382-5452.

To remove your name from our mailing list, or if you have questions, please contact [kellyb@ocecd.org](mailto:kellyb@ocecd.org) or call 1-844-382-5452.

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## OHIO COALITION FOR THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

The Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities (OCECD) is a statewide nonprofit organization that serves families of infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities in Ohio, educators and agencies who provide services to them. OCECD works through the coalition efforts of over 40 parent and professional disability organizations and over 70 individual members which comprise the Coalition. OCECD has also been funded since 1984 to serve as the Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) for the state of Ohio from the federal government, U.S. Dept of Education, Office for Special Education Programs.

Established in 1972, currently employing 28 staff in 15 offices who are primarily parents or family members of children or adults with disabilities or persons with disabilities, the Coalition's mission is to ensure that every Ohio child with special needs receives a free, appropriate, public education in the least restrictive environment to enable that child to reach his/her highest potential. Throughout Ohio, the Coalition's services reach families of children and youth, birth through 26 years of age, with all disabilities.



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