

Christine's Chronicles: A New Partnership

Follow along with one parent on her journey to make inclusion a reality for her son.



by Christine Lindauer

Here we are middle of October, just over four months since I had my epiphany on inclusion. I'm happy to report that a lot has changed and for the better. Four months ago, I realized that though my son had full *access* to a pre-school program, he was missing full *participation*. I was quick to blame and point the finger at the teachers and staff, thinking they were under-prepared, they didn't have the necessary skills, and they didn't listen to my suggestions. But when I finally stepped back and looked at the entire situation, I realized that the skills were there, it was the communication and our partnership that was lacking. In hindsight, I'm not surprised we missed it. We were always very friendly and respectful towards each other. But we never got to a point of talking about and really understanding each others' expectations for Luke.

So with this new understanding, Luke and I began his transition into his new pre-school classroom. My first attempt to reach out was by inviting his teachers over for a home visit. One teacher came and I was so happy to know that she had a chance to see my son in his natural environment. I talked about my goals for Luke, his likes and dislikes, and I'm sure gave her way too much information at once. But I was excited to see such a willing partner ready to learn about, teach and love my son.

The teachers and therapists then reciprocated by inviting me to their biweekly meeting to discuss Luke's progress. I was thrilled. Last year, I attended a few IEP meetings and maybe one or two others. And perhaps it is my change in attitude, but the tone in these meetings is different. Last year, when I made a suggestion or asked a question, I first heard "No", followed by a "well maybe later, perhaps, if this...", and now I hear an immediate "Yes" followed by a "how can we make this work?".

I had to laugh at myself a few weeks ago, when I realized I had slipped back into my old ways again. One of Luke's teachers was telling me about his day during pick up time while my son was rushing

me out the door as usual, so I quickly said thanks for the update and was gone. Wait a minute, stop for a second. His teacher was reaching out to me, and all because my son was excited to go home, I didn't even take the time to really listen and respond to what she was saying. So now I do my best to recognize those impromptu moments. It's challenging with my son pulling at my leg or worse yet, running out the door without me, but I'm getting better at it. I'm realizing as with every relationship in life, this one too needs tending.

So our partnership is growing. We're working together as a team. Let me bring this back to Luke's participation. He has come so far in such a short time. His teachers and therapists are using strategies that I've been using at home, and they are teaching me new ones. And those strategies have led him to expand his play routines, communicate more with adults, and increase his self-help skills.

So a few months in and we're off to a fantastic start. I'm glad that Luke will be in this classroom for two years, so our efforts now will be worthwhile.

Community Questions

What other communication strategies have worked well for you as a practitioner or parent? Any tips for me to keep this going?

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