

RealTalk for Parents: Podcast #3

Snapshot

Hello and welcome to Real Talk for Parents a podcast brought to you by the Parents' Place of Maryland. My name is Yvette DeCosta. Today on Real talk we are going to introduce you to the Student Snapshot. This "Student Snap shot" or Student Bio is a great way to introduce your child to the school and outside community.

This snap shot is a one pager with your child's photo and key information about your child. It's really important to remember that you are the expert on your child and you have invaluable information that will help the school get to know them and work with them in a positive productive way. This snap shot is in addition to your child's IEP but all school staff may not have the opportunity to read your child's IEP. Also the detailed level of information in the IEP may not be appropriate for all staff. You as the parent get to highlight your child in the Student snap shot to help them get to know your child.

This is a great idea for the beginning of the school year when there can be a learning curve with new teachers and staff, but this can be done at any time and should be required reading for any person working with your child. People may know that your child is receiving Special Education services but may have no other information and make assumptions based on their own knowledge or observations. Our children are so much more than a label any diagnoses. Without the proper information the staff may misinterpret your child's behavior or performance.

For example, lunch time can be very hectic. For some students the noise may be too much or all the confusion can cause them anxiety. Waiting patiently in the lunch line can be challenging for a child with ADHD. While in the lunch line, a cafeteria worker may try to engage your child in a friendly conversation as he

moves through the lunch line. Your child may not respond or answer. She may not know your child is hearing impaired or has Autism and a difficulty navigating social situations. Sometimes staff can view your child's lack of response as rude or disrespectful behavior. This can cause conflict or confusion. The Snap shot is to aid in understanding and empathy to the special needs and challenges your child may face.

Because families can have different ideas about how much information to share and to whom, it's important for parents to take the lead when it comes to providing personal information about your child at school.

Also, since time is often in short supply for both you and school personnel, it is important to find a way to deliver information quickly and concisely. There will be times when lengthy reports or detailed e-mails will be appropriate but we want to keep it short and simple. This one pager has a much greater likelihood of being read and understood by the school staff.

We will provide you with a template on how to fill out this "Student Snap shot" in a link on our web page. As you approach this, start to think about what is most important to you and your child. This is a great way to practice communicating concerns and expectations in a clear and concise way. At the end, after the Tips; I'm going to give you some examples.

Keep it Simple: Try to stay on one side of the page and use bullets instead of paragraphs to make it easier to read. Also keep the language simple and avoid using overly technical language, acronyms and jargon. Use everyday language when possible.

Prioritize: Include no more than five or six bullet under each of the five areas in the template. This is not the time to copy the IEP. This is a short list of essential information that will help staff work with and get to know your child.

Keep in personal: Be sure to include a current photo of your child. Keep the information specific to your child and not about the disability in general.

Involve your child: Be sure to include your child, (When developmentally appropriate) in the decisions about what information to share and with whom. Filing out this Student snap shot is a great conversation starter for you and your child. You may not have had this kind of conversation before and the five areas of the snap shot provide a good frame work.

Now that the “Snap shot” is completed you’ll need to decide who gets a copy. You may consider giving one to the following: school secretary, nurse, cafeteria supervisor, librarian, custodian, bus driver, afterschool child care, principal, counselor, art and music teacher, Playground or recess monitor, paraprofessionals, and of course the classroom teacher. Also ask that a copy be in any substitute teacher’s folder.

You can distribute the copies at back to school night or activities. Distribute to the IEP team at your IEP meeting. Provide a copy when there is any change in personnel working with your child.

Now let’s go over the five sections and some examples;

First section is your child at a glance: This has their interests SpongeBob Squarepants or riding a bike as well as likes, dislikes and motivators. A lot of children are highly motivated by praise and will shut down when the teacher raises his or her voice.

Next, Strengths to Build Upon: Musical rhythm and rhyme reinforces learning and is an auditory learner.

Challenges and ways to address them: Younger developmental age: close adult supervision for safety.

Long-range School goals: To participate in school with my peers as much as possible.

Focus for this year: make measurable progress in reading, especially decoding.

Those are the five areas. This “Snap shot” is a powerful tool for you and your student and this can be updated annually and shared out in the community: at the pool, at church and church school at the community center. This is also very helpful when registering your child for summer camp. This information can be critical when talking to camps about getting the support and accommodations that your child needs and can make the camp experience enjoyable for all. You can share it with of spring break camps as well and even with a new babysitter.

Believe it or not you can share this with the grand parents and other family members to help understand your child better. This is a living document you can update from year to year and track your child’s growth and progress.

RealTalk for parents is a podcast brought to you by the Parents’ Place of Maryland This is Yvette DeCosta. Real parent along the journey with you and remember it’s a marathon not a sprint. See you next time.