



Breaking Down Virtual Meetings

March 30, 2020

Before participating in a virtual meeting/videoconferencing, take time to coordinate with families to determine the type of communication tool that works for them and identify which tools they prefer (i.e. full videoconferencing or calling in with a phone). Also, address any potential needs of parents/guardians who are English Learners or who cannot hear (e.g. closed-captioning, interpreters). Specifically for web-based IEP meetings, include parents/guardians in the process of creating the meeting agenda in advance so when you have the meeting, they already feel like a part of the team and know what to expect. Also, before the meeting, provide parents/guardians with documents to be discussed so they have time to absorb the information that will be covered.

Ensure that the location you will be using for videoconferencing is appropriate. For example, be aware of noise in the room such as fans, furnace, air, speakers, etc.; a quiet room with carpeting is ideal. Be at a location with good consistent internet service. Consider all objects in view of the screen to be seen by others. For example, solid blue or gray walls behind you is best. Shut the blinds or cover windows with darkening curtains so that the sun does not overpower the light in the room. Use florescent lighting directed at the front of the speaker. Also, for confidentiality, if sharing a living space with others, consider placing a sign on the room's door to let others know that the meeting/session is private. Arrive early to the meeting to test connectivity and read files, start by setting your volume to 50%, and use a headset with a built-in microphone.

Start the virtual meeting by confirming functionality of technology for all participants. Then ensure that all individuals are introduced and consider following the checklist with families:

- Where are you at this moment?
- Is there anyone in the room with you?
- Can anyone hear our conversation? (to maintain privacy and confidentiality)
- Is there background noise that will be a problem? Set the screens up for appropriate eye contact and sound.
- Discuss what will happen if service is disconnected (i.e. the call is lost/dropped/disconnected)

During videoconferencing, if you are hosting the meeting, consider muting all microphones when a call comes in to reduce background noise and be clear with time parameters for the meeting (e.g. "we have scheduled one hour for this meeting"). Utilize screen-sharing as

appropriate to ensure everyone is on the same page. Additional best practices during videoconferencing includes the following: sit in line of sight of the camera, dress completely and avoid wearing bright colors and loud patterns, place speakers away from the microphone (if you use speakers external of your computer), act naturally, look and speak into the camera as you normally would (speak in a normal voice; do not shout), and avoid distractions while participating (no side private messages in the chat box, etc.).

Throughout the meeting, mute yourself in-between speaking to reduce background noise and pause briefly after speaking for any lag that may occur. You may also instruct others on the adjustment of their microphone and/or using the mute button to reduce background noise on an as needed basis. The microphone is sensitive and may pick up and amplify noises such as clicking pens, typing on computer keys, and shuffling paper.

Encourage everyone to refer to specific page numbers and sections in documents when talking so team members can follow along. Also, use clarification techniques throughout the meeting to check for the understanding of all participants. For example, ask, "Does this match your understanding?" or "Do you see the same concerns or strengths?".

At the conclusion of the videoconference, identify next steps and ensure appropriate documentation is taken; do not make assumptions that certain staff members will take care of it, double check for clarity. For every attempted or held virtual meeting, ensure appropriate documentation (i.e. how the meeting was conducted ((i.e. videoconferencing and/or via phone), how many attempts were made to engage the family if they did not participate, what the meeting covered).