

Communicating with Parents

Establish a Foundation of Respect

- Approach conversations with parents with compassion. Remember that parents can feel vulnerable, like failings in their children are direct reflections of them as parents. Emphasize your desire to work together *with* the parents to help the child thrive.
- Come to the conversation with a posture of curiosity and a desire to truly hear what the parents have to say (not just share your own opinions). Ask lots of questions and consider planning your questions beforehand. This approach respects parents' perspectives and reduces resistance.
- Recognize your place in the layers of authority at play. You are in a position of service under the authority of God, the local church, the school board, and the parents.
- Consider a proactive approach, in which you contact parents before the school year to learn about the child's strengths, challenges, and effective discipline methods. This partnership approach acknowledges parents' expertise.
- Don't let the only time parents hear from you be when something is going wrong. Send an email or pick up the phone to tell them about good behavior, too. Affirm the strengths you see in the child.
- Regular, ongoing communication is valuable. Consider sending frequent progress reports detailing character growth or academic progress, regular newsletters, or a systematic personal contact with parents (e.g. sending an email to a different parent at the end of each day mentioning something you appreciated about their child that day).

Tips for Communicating Clearly

- Mirror and summarize what you hear the parents saying throughout the conversation. This reflects an openness to truly listen and a clear attempt to ensure understanding. Try phrases like, "I think I hear you saying (summary of what was said). Did I hear you correctly?" "I'm not sure if I understood what you were saying about x. Could you talk more about that?" "I agree with what you said about x. What would you say about y?"
- Be honest—even when it's difficult. Parents are trusting you with their precious children, and part of that includes trusting that you will communicate with them what they need to know.
- Practical advice for positive communication:
 - Make early positive contact—build rapport before addressing issues
 - Use a positive tone—avoid overly critical language about students (this can trigger a parent's naturally protective instincts)
 - Use the sandwich method—offer a positive comment before and after sharing any negative feedback
 - Understand the parents' perspective—recognize that parents see children as their most precious possession

- Be prepared and solution-oriented: come to parent meetings with documented observations and potential solutions
- Show a posture of humility—be quick to apologize for any mistakes and listen humbly to criticism

Other Considerations

- Recognize the following possible barriers to parental involvement:
 - Intimidation by education—parents may feel intimidated due to their own negative school experiences, cultural devaluation of education, or perceiving teachers as “smart”
 - Separation of home and school—some parents, due to cultural norms, see home and school as separate, unaware they can contribute
 - Perceived inability to help—parents may feel incapable, especially when helping students with homework, fearing they’ll appear inferior to their child
- Set boundaries if a parent situation becomes volatile or you are dealing with persistent parent harassment. Be quick to involve the administrator or members of the school board.

Sources:

- Relating to Parent Families and the Local Church by Glendon Strickler [Relating to Parent Families and the Local Church - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Facilitating Open Communication with Parents by Jason Crutch [Facilitating Open Communication with Parents - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Cultivating Conversations by Anna Zehr [Cultivating Conversations - The Dock for Learning](#)
- What Parents Want Most from Teachers by Shari Zook [What Parents Want Most from Teachers - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Naughty Students, Naughty Parents, and Naughty Teachers! By Jeff Swanson [Naughty Students, Naughty Parents, and Naughty Teachers! - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Teacher Ties with Parents by Norwood Shank [Teacher Ties with Parents \(Norwood Shank\) - The Dock for Learning](#)