Strategies for Communicating with Parents
Coaching Guide

Module Summary

In this module, teachers will:
- Identify strategies for effective teacher-parent communication.

This module is part of a four-part series that includes The Importance of Working with Parents, Strategies for Engaging Parents, and Strategies for Communicating with Parents.

Key Takeaways

Essential knowledge: Many teachers experience uncertainty about how to best communicate with parents (Lewis, Kim, & Ashby-Bey, 2011). This uncertainty may include the best medium of communication (e.g. email, face-to-face) as well as – on a basic level – what to say and how to say it. This is especially true if the topic concerns something that is in any way negative (e.g. a challenge the student is experiencing, a behavior issue, etc.).

Essential skill: In any interaction with a parent, the teacher must strive to ensure that the parent feels heard and respected (Lewis, Kim, & Ashby-Bey, 2011; Lindsey & Lindsey, 2011; Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999). In addition, the teacher must operate with sensitivity. The teacher must remember – at all times – that he or she is talking about someone (the student) that the parent loves and cares about very deeply (Conderman et al., 2010). The resource that accompanies this module contains a specific list of “dos and don'ts” to help make teacher-parent communication as successful and productive as possible.

Essential mindset: To develop strong parent communication skills, teachers must believe in the importance of interpersonal awareness. This means taking the time to step into someone else’s perspective and consider how an issue might look from their point of view. One way to operationalize interpersonal awareness is by placing importance on listening during an interaction – asking open-ended questions, and seeking to understand where the other person is coming from.

The Skill in Action

Teachers who operate with strong parent communication skills demonstrate the following behaviors:
- The teacher has developed a manageable system for regularly updating parents on their children’s academic progress.
- The teacher has identified (e.g. through a beginning-of-year survey) each parent’s preferred mode of communication, and the best time(s) to reach him or her.
- All of the students’ parents believe the teacher is accessible and can be easily reached if they have a question or concern.
- In interactions with parents, the teacher asks questions and seeks to understand their concerns and/or goals for their child.
- When communicating with parents, the teacher uses neutral language and avoids “loaded terms” that might make the parent feel defensive.
- When communicating with parents about their child’s behavior or academic progress, the teacher shares objective information and observations, and avoids broad generalizations.
### Questions for Discussion

The following is a list of suggested questions for engaging in a reflective dialogue with the teacher, either before or after he or she attempts to implement the skill.

- How does the prospect of communicating with students’ parents make you feel? Is there anything about teacher-parent communication that makes you nervous? If so, what?
- Which of the strategies introduced in this module do you think you might use in future communications with parents?
- Are there any strategies that you are already using? How have they worked so far?
- Have you had any challenging interactions with parents? What happened?
- Based on what you now know, what could/would you have done differently?
- Would you like to role-play a “difficult conversation” with a parent?

### Coaching Moves

| Situation: The teacher is nervous about an upcoming communication with a specific parent (e.g. a call to discuss a challenge involving his or her child). | Ask: |
| --- | --- | --- |
| | • What about this interaction makes you nervous? | Suggest: |
| | • What information do you want to communicate to the parent? | • Use the Strategies for Communicating with Parents Resource to plan out what you’d like to say, as well as questions you want to be sure to ask. |
| | • How could this information be communicated in a way that is neutral and objective? | • Make it a point to listen to the parent during the interaction, and respond to his or her specific concerns. |
| | • How might this situation look from the parent’s point of view? What questions might he or she have? | • Let’s role play this. You be you, and I’ll be the parent. Review the “dos and don’ts” on the guide before we start. |
| | • How can you solicit – and validate – the parent’s point of view? | |

### Standards

InTASC: 3(n) The teacher is committed to working with learners, colleagues, families, and communities to establish positive and supportive learning environments.