

Fact Sheet #5:

Tips for Teachers on Communicating with Parents

How can I handle “tough” conversations?

Prepare ahead of time. Do some thinking: What is the goal of the meeting? How can you make the parents feel comfortable? What can you do to keep discussion open?

Put yourself in the parents' position. If you don't have children, think about a child in your life. How would you want to hear difficult information about a child you love?

Always find something positive to say that will make parents proud. What are the child's strengths? Use the “sandwich” approach: positive / difficult / positive.

Be sure that you don't blame the parent never make a parent feel that a problem with their child is their fault.

Show empathy and support. Keep tissues handy.

Be familiar with family support in your community and have contact information available if needed.

Let parents know that you are in this together you're a team that will work together to solve the problem.

Keep the meeting on track. Do your best to stay on topic. Check in with parents during the conversation to be sure they have all the information they need.

Leave the meeting open-ended. Make sure parents know they can contact you again at any time. Give them information on the best way to get in touch with you.

How can I deal with conflicts?

Don't argue back. Stay calm, and try to stick to the facts as you see them.

Be sensitive to feelings and choose your words carefully.

Remember: Anger is a secondary emotion. Try to determine what the feelings are behind the anger. This can help you stay focused.

Don't take it personally. Sometimes parents just need to be heard. Let them know that you are listening. “I'm really sorry that this has been so difficult for you.”

If the situation worsens, schedule a meeting to continue the discussion at a later time.

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