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Effective Communication with Parents

One of the most important components of high-quality childcare is positive communication between a childcare provider and parents. Communication is not always easy, but by following a few simple strategies, you can improve your communication with parents of the children you care for.

- **Keep communication lines open!** Open communication is a key to establishing a successful and meaningful relationship with all parents. Developing a relationship in which each party can honestly and openly share both successes and challenges takes time but will pay off in the end when you are able to effectively communicate with each other.
- **Listen, listen, listen!** Sometimes we all just want to be heard. Whatever problem we have, it is important to us at that moment that our concerns and issues are really listened to. It's important for the listener to listen carefully and try to understand the other person's point of view. If it is not a good time to listen, be honest and let the parent know that it would be better if you could talk another time, so that you're really able to focus on his/her concerns.

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- **Take concerns seriously.** After listening to the parent; show that you will not disregard his/her concerns, and explain how you will address them, if possible. If it is not workable in your childcare situation to accommodate the parent's concerns, compassionately state you'd like to but can't because of certain reasons or rules in your childcare. See if you and the parent can work together to find an alternative solution that works for everyone.
- **Use "I" messages.** They will help you speak honestly about your feelings without placing blame on the parent. Focus on how you are feeling and how behaviors affect you. Try using statements that identify your feelings and behaviors and a possible solution to the behaviors. For example, "I feel like you don't respect me as a childcare provider when you pick Johnny up late. I feel angry because after the children leave for the day, it is my time with my family. Do you think that we could work together to help you pick Johnny up on time?"
- **Emphasize the positive.** Even when talking about difficult situations or topics, focusing on the positive will help to keep the conversation moving and will make it easier for parents to want to work with you to find a solution.

In addition to incorporating the strategies listed above, you can also use the following ideas to help promote communication with parents using your facility.

- **Daily progress reports.** The primary purpose is to let parents know how their child is doing each day or week. Reports can be formal or informal and can be done at pick-up or drop-off the next day. Remember to report the positive things just as much as the negative!
- **Bulletin boards.** These can provide a quick look at the upcoming week or month. You can post schedules, policies or anything else that parents need to review. You can focus your board on the things that children are learning about that week, or you can provide parent resources and information on topics they may have questions about.

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- **Newsletters.** Can be done once a month or quarterly. They can include updates on policy or procedure changes, ideas for ways parents can extend learning at home or upcoming volunteer opportunities for parents.
- **Parent-provider meetings.** These can be done regularly or for special incidents. This is a time for you and the parent to discuss the child. Invite the parent to provide input also.
- **Talking.** Greet the parent at pick-up and drop-off. Small talk goes a long way in helping build positive provider/parent relationships.

Following these simple strategies can help you keep the communication lines open with your parents and make your job much easier!

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Reference:

Michigan Better Kid Care Childcare Training Curriculum