



Family & Educator Partnership



Communication Tips for Strong Partnerships Between Home and School

Whether you are a parent or a teacher, the following tips will help maintain connections that support student success.

Introduce yourself

Parents, at the beginning of the school year, introduce yourself to your child's teachers.

Teachers, connect with your students' parents. You may meet parents during an open house or before school conference. For any parents you haven't met, make a phone call or send a note home to introduce yourself. It is much easier to have a conversation with a person when an issue or question arises if you have already made a positive connection.

How will we connect?

Find out the best way to get in touch if you have a question or concern. Some teachers have phones in the classroom and welcome calls during the day. Many have certain times of the day that they can answer calls more easily. Most teachers have e-mail and use it to communicate with parents. Similarly, some parents can take phone calls during the day while others are not available until evening. Some parents use the inter-net and email, others prefer written notes that are sent home. Whatever method you use, phone calls, e-mail, websites or notes, as long as you both know the best method and times of day to connect, you can avoid frustrations when you need to do so.

When you have a question or issue, the first step is to clearly define the issue.

Make a list of your concerns and questions.

Look at your list and think about which of those issues/questions need to be taken care of first, either because they are the most important or because of a pending deadline.

Pull together as much information as you can so that you know what you're talking about. Use any data or other documentation (examples of student work, reports, record of time spent on homework, etc.) If the concern is based on hearsay, develop questions that will verify the information you have, or clarify the situation. Misconceptions and misinformation are barriers to success.

Think about why this topic is an issue for you. Is it something that can be resolved without a discussion between the parent and teacher? Is it something that needs a quick note or e-mail, a phone call or maybe an in-person meeting?

What is the outcome you want?

Identify possible options and outcomes from your conversation. Do you want changes to occur in the classroom? Do you want to increase communication? Do you want support from home? Do you want suggestions for how to address an issue?

After you identify results you would like to see from the conversation, write them down and ask yourself these three questions:

- What would be the best results I could hope for?
- What outcome would be OK and get the results I want?
- What outcome would not be acceptable?

You may want to use the Discussion Guide as an outline for your communication to help organize and record what you want to cover. It is helpful to take the Discussion Guide with you so you can refer to it during your conversation.

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Who do I need to talk to?

Identify who can help you with your question. Talk to the person closest to your child first. This is usually the classroom teacher. Sometimes it might be the principal or the bus driver, depending upon the issue at hand.

Contact the person and let him/her know you appreciate the time the person is taking to answer your questions/concerns.

Focus on the issues

Be specific and positive when you identify your concerns and the outcomes you would like to see. If you keep the conversation focused on solving the issue and centered on the wellbeing of the student you will get better results.

Practice what you want to say

If you write notes about what you want to say and practice saying it, it will be much easier to have the conversation. Similarly, if you write out anything you want to send as a note, letter or e-mail and have a friend read it, you have a chance to re-write anything that is not clear and change any wording that might not send the message you intended.

Tips for the conversation

Listen. The most important aspect of communication is listening. Often we are so worried about what we are going to say that we forget to listen to the other person. Whether you are having a conversation by phone or in-person, remember to pay attention when the other person is speaking. After you have shared your issue/concern, listen to understand the other person's response. Ask questions so that you understand and get all the information you need. You might say, "I just don't understand what you are saying. Can you explain it in a different way or give me some examples?" Or, you might repeat what the person said to confirm that you understood, "Do I understand correctly..."

Ask questions

Remember, questions that begin with "why" or "who" make people feel more defensive than those that begin with "what" and "how".

"How can we help Jim feel safe on the playground?" is better than "Why isn't my son safe on the playground?"

Be open to different options

As we work together to resolve an issue, the solution is often a little different than what we might have thought up on our own. As long as we get to the outcome we want, it doesn't usually matter what path we take to get there. If a plan is developed that you are not convinced will work, ask to have another conversation/meeting in the near future to see how it is going. This will help everybody involved keep an eye on the plan and provide an opportunity to make any changes that are needed to the plan.

End on a positive note

Even if you haven't come to a positive solution to the issue and continue to disagree on a topic, thank the other person/people for the time and attention they are giving to your concern. Shake hands and smile.

What if things don't go well?

If you are not satisfied with your conversation and there are unresolved issues, you may want to talk to the supervisor of the individual involved. Another option is to consult with someone who might help you sort through the issues and help you think about options.

QUESTIONS?

Anytime you have questions, do not hesitate to contact the Central Rivers AEA Family & Educator Partnership at: 800.392.6640 or 641.357.6125 for Loni Jorgenson; 641.485.9166 for April Wooldridge.



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