

Organize a telephone tree for parents in your classroom

In this way, each parent will receive a personal call from another parent in the class reminding them of an upcoming event with a minimum amount of time and effort for you.

Develop a parent feedback form

Parent feedback forms can assist parents in monitoring their involvement in important areas, such as praising their children, getting children to school on time, helping with homework, volunteering in the classroom, etc. These forms are also a good way to provide parents with additional ways they can get involved in their child's learning.

Communicate personally with parents at least once a month

A quick "home note" can encourage parental involvement by suggesting ideas for home learning activities. Clearly mark a parent response portion of each note to encourage two-way communication. Ask parents to comment or answer one or two questions relevant to the content of your note. Seek parent input and feedback about the most effective ways to communicate with each other. Share information with other educators about successful parent involvement and communication approaches.

Tips for POSITIVE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS



A Guide for Teachers

Positive Communication Between Parents and Teachers

Teachers face the challenge of educating an increasingly diverse student population, which is growing up in varied home environments. Families and schools are both active and important participants in the education of children and youth. Open communication between responsible, concerned adults in the home and at school is essential to building this partnership.

The tips offered here can help teachers initiate constructive and consistent communication with parents to accelerate positive outcomes for students.

There are four essential ingredients **to building healthy, two-way communication** between schools and families. **These ingredients are the Four P's:**

1) Positive

- Too often students and parents are wary of a note or call from the teacher. **Sending home words of praise and encouragement** can change this perception and improve communication with the family. Remember, parents need a pat on the back too!

2) Personalized

- Parents can be overwhelmed by impersonal Xeroxed memos which seem less relevant to their child. To avoid the "junk mail syndrome," **jot a quick personal note** on letters home and have students decorate them to draw parental attention.

Try to contact parents by phone at least once each quarter

A positive phone call acknowledging a student's improved work or continued effort, thanking a parent for helping out on a class project, or personally inviting a parent to a special event will increase parents' comfort in approaching you. This simple strategy of recognizing what is going well will revolutionize your classroom.

Create a Family Bulletin Board

By creating a family bulletin board in your classroom you can notify parents of upcoming events, display pictures from special occasions, and offer suggestions for parenting and home learning.

Send students home with a Weekly Work Folder

Weekly Work Folders should be given to students every Friday containing their completed homework assignments, in-class work, and any tests or quizzes. Staple a blank sheet to the inside cover of the folder so that you can write a quick message to parents and always include a space for them to respond.

Recognize academic and behavioral achievement

Achievement certificates should be able to be taken home and displayed. These certificates can be formatted and copied in advance so that you can simply write in the child's name and achievement. Certificates can also be used to thank parents for their efforts.



Ideas for Positive Two-way Communication



Start a weekly or biweekly class newsletter. While this may seem an impersonal method of communication, it can be personalized in several ways:

- (1) pick a student to decorate the border and be the newsletter artist of the week;
- (2) feature an “academic star” and a “class citizen” of the week and note their recent efforts; and
- (3) include student and parent contributions on a regular basis.

The tone of the newsletter should be positive, highlighting recent accomplishments and interesting experiences of the class. The newsletter is a proactive way to inform parents of upcoming events and activities. It may also include a few tips for parents about helping with homework and boosting reading skills. To encourage parents to be involved, add a few questions for a “reader opinion survey”—post the results the next week. There are commercial products that can help your site accomplish this easily. Adding a way for parents to contribute easily builds trust and reciprocity.

Greet parents personally as they drop off or pick up their child at school

This may require you to come in a little early so that you are organized before students arrive. Communicating with parents in this informal manner helps increase the comfort level of two-way communication. It also reinforces the idea that parents and teachers know each other and are working together for the benefit of students. This is not a good time to discuss problems, but it may be an opportunity to set an appointment.

3) Proactive

- **Keep parents informed** of your class rules, expectations, and current activities. Provide plenty of notice for special events. Let parents know immediately if you have a concern and work together to prevent problems from developing.

4) Partnership

- Well informed parents can work as partners in their children's education. **Encourage parents to respond to your notes** by leaving space for comments or including a few quick questions for return—this practice keeps you informed of parents' ideas and concerns. Reciprocity shows you **value** their input.

Getting Started

- Written communication to parents is more effective when **simple, familiar language** and short sentences are used. Be direct and avoid using educational jargon and long explanations.
- If possible, use “**attention grabbers**”—upbeat graphics, bold headings, borders or boxes around special items, etc.
- Students can decorate invitations and letters going to their parents—this will help **ensure that parents see your communication**.
- Always **communicate respect** for and **appreciation** of parents and families.
- Talking down to parents will put a quick stop to two-way communication. **Be sensitive to cultural differences**. Have your letters and memos translated to the first language of your students' families. Integrate bilingual and multicultural materials into displays and written communications. **Be persistent**. Use a variety of methods to communicate your important information to families. See which format (note, newsletter, phone call, meeting, etc.) works best for different kinds of information. Use alternative methods to follow-up with hard-to-reach families.



Send a welcome letter

Send a welcome letter to parents well before the school year starts to help them get their children ready for a new classroom. This letter may also be sent to the parents of students transferring into your class throughout the year. In it, you should include:

- an upbeat-message one that expresses excitement and confidence about the school year and working with children and families.
- basic subjects and major goals for the year
- materials needed for class
- how and when to contact you (a phone number and most convenient times to reach you)
- your expectations for students' work and behavior
- suggestions for ways parents can appropriately support homework completion
- a sincere invitation to share concerns, visit class, and provide support
- ways for them to join you in supporting student success and development.

Remind parents to read the school handbook

You may want to highlight school policies and programs pertinent to your students (e.g., procedures regarding absences and tardiness, weather emergencies, after-school activities, etc.). Ask parents to discuss this information with their children.

Encourage parents to attend the school open house or orientation night

If your school does not sponsor such an event, hold one for your classroom. Publicize the open house on school bulletin boards and with community outlets such as grocery stores, banks, etc. Mail invitations to parents well in advance. Be prepared to review the information in your "welcome letter," but recognize that the open house is a social event. Parents will want to get to know their children's teacher and classroom in a relaxed atmosphere. Have displays and examples of last year's student work to give parents an idea of your teaching style. **Be sure to share who you are as a person.**

Give parents a chance to express their needs and priorities

Encourage parents to share with you their goals about their child's education. Ask them to express their hopes and dreams for their child. Have them identify their priorities about their child's academic and behavioral performance. Provide them with ways to enhance their child's learning at home and extend the classroom curriculum in the home environment and beyond. Discuss with parents the best ways and times (e.g., phone calls, notes) to communicate with them on a regular basis.