Communicating with Parents: We're all on the Same Side

Ways to Communicate

1) Back-To-School Events

2) Parent Conferences

3) Other Teacher-Parent Interaction

4) Common Barriers to Communication and Suggestions for Overcoming Them

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1. Back-to-School Events
   a. Types of events & helpful tips
   - In-home visit, orientation, parent night, etc.
   - Welcome signs that reflect languages spoken by families create an inviting atmosphere
   - Refreshments, of course
   - Activities for siblings and for children enrolled in the center

   b. Purposes
- Opportunity to show how your teaching will impact children's lives
- Instill confidence in your abilities
- Help parents see how they can be your supporters/partners
- Inform parents about philosophy of program

   c. Conducting the Event
- Easy demeanor, professional appearance, unrushed and organized
- Greet parents with a smile and warmly welcome them
- Clear, thorough presentation about your background and goals for the year
- Treat parents with respect and as equals in your common goal to help their child
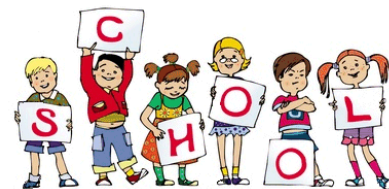
2. Parent Conferences
   a. Frequency
- At least two face-to-face meetings a year or "as needed" for the child
- Can be also be via email, phone, letter (but this is less preferred)
- Time and location may be flexible based on parents' needs (make sure parents feel invited and encouraged to attend)
   b. Items to Include and Discuss
- Samples of child's work (concrete, brings child's progress to life, shows progress over time)
- Checklists (show samples)
- Photos (samples)
- Anecdotal Records (samples)
- Can be presented chronologically
- Can present a few work samples that show strengths, weakness, level of development

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- May send home work samples a week ahead of time so that parent can review and bring them back to the conference

    c. Procedure
- Plan ahead what you are going to say (empathy, genuine concern)
- Put post-it notes on child's work samples to guide conversation (parents will be impressed)
- Focus on what IS working for the child (use everyday language)
- Let the parents offer ideas
- Focus on the child's progress (be positive)
- Offer a few suggestions/goals for addressing needs
- Set a time frame for the meeting (ten to fifteen minutes)
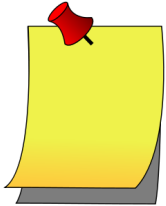
    d. Addressing concerns
- Be clear and honest if you have serious concerns about the child's progress. These children would most likely benefit from additional one-on-one attention, and the best approach might be to enlist the parent's help.
- Early intervention is essential in addressing many developmental delays.
- Check with your director for advice.
- When parents ask questions for which you are unprepared, it's okay to say you don't know but that you'll find out. Don't invent an answer on the spot. Tell parents that you need additional time to think about a response. Then do the research required and get back to them as soon as possible.

3. Other parent-teacher interactions (can be one-way or two-way communication)
   a. Newsletters (be concise and accurate, free of grammatical and punctuation errors, goal is for parents to <u>read</u>, use same format each time)
   b. Communication books (back and forth books, helpful for children with special needs, balance good and bad news, use everyday language, daily or twice weekly, share confidential things only face-to-face)
   c. School website or school-based voice mail system or text message system (can be one-minute spotlight on activity or reminder about upcoming event)
   d. Emails (same as paper newsletter or individualized for each student)
   e. Phone Calls (positive as well as concerns, regular basis, develops an ally relationship with parents)
   f. Positive Notes (do these frequently at beginning of year)
   g. Transition Times (before and after school, good for casual chit chat but not ideal for in-depth communication about child's progress)
   h. Content-specific ideas (literacy bags, class-made books, family math bags) can help parents see expectations for child's level of development and provide materials and support for at-home learning

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