

PARENT COMMUNICATION

It is possible to have great communication with the parents/clients of your center as long as they know that you and your staff appreciate and treasure their children as individuals, and value parents as an important part of your team.

- Prior to taking any issue to a parent, we have to ask ourselves, "Have we formed the proper relationship with this parent?" Your first meaningful conversation with a parent cannot be connected with an issue.
- Employee policies should outline what issues should be brought to a parent's attention and which should not, and what steps to go through.
- Ensure that your teachers know that before any behavior issue is taken to a parent, they are to inform you or another appropriate supervisor first so that a "self check" can be conducted.
- Do the parents (aka clients) view you and your staff members as professionals? Parents are our clients, not our friends. It is essential that all employees of the child care center establish a professional relationship that is personable but that doesn't cross the line into personal.
- Know your clients. Just as the same tactics do not necessarily work with every child, parents also need to be recognized as individuals and dealt with appropriately.
- Determine the best strategy for relaying the information – phone call, email, registered letter, or face-to-face conversation. (Keep a copy of any written correspondence in the child's file.) Face-to-face is usually best; so decide on the best location for a face-to-face conversation. The usual choices are: in the parking lot, your office (door open), your office (door closed), in the classroom, in the hallway, lobby or front desk area.
- Body language is important. You want to appear open-minded and non-judgmental. If the conversation is taking place in your office, decide whether you want to appear as the "authority figure" and sit behind the desk, or as a "teammate" and sit on the visitor side of the desk alongside the parent.
- The only acceptable outcome for any issue we take to a parent is "win/win." Visualize the best equitable outcome you hope to achieve and prepare yourself for possible negative reactions.
- Be clear. You can begin the conversation with a moment of chit-chat, a compliment about the child or the family, but when you get to the issue – be clear. "I saw Dylan on the playground today. He has great upper body strength on those hand-to-hand bars! Does he like to play outside at home as well?" (Listen to response.) "Well, the reason I asked to speak with you is so we can get your account up-to-date. I remember that when we spoke on Thursday you had planned to drop off a check that evening, but then grandmother picked up..."
- Once you have presented the issue to the parent, utilize "active listening." This is where you make a conscious effort to hear not only the words that another person is saying but also attempt to understand their total response to the issue.