

## Communicating with Parents\*

Regular and early communication with parents is essential. These regular contacts offer opportunities to discuss the child's strengths and areas for growth, as well as ways the parents can support the child at home. Through discussion, parent surveys or interviews, parents also provide important information about their child.

In some jurisdictions, educators meet with parents to gather developmental information about the child before school starts, or soon after it begins. They use this information to help plan school entry and the classroom program. Some schools send interest surveys for parents to complete, such as *My Child as Learner*, *My Child as a Reader*, which help educators plan and are also useful in comparing what happens at home with what happens at school. Additional information about the home or stressors in the child's life may provide some context for unexpected or atypical student behaviour. Open, regular communication with parents is critical. This two-way communication helps in understanding the child.

If parents and educators communicate regularly, there should be no surprises at the more formal conversation related to reporting. Understandably, parents don't appreciate learning about a problem with their child at the first scheduled interview, or through a negative report card. It is always good practice to communicate positive information about the child, as well as concerns.

Parent conferences/meetings can be stressful for both parties. They can be particularly stressful for parents who are not familiar with the school system. During the conference, parents need to feel that the educator knows their child well and has their child's best interests at heart.

\*The term ‘parents’ includes guardians, caregivers, and grandparents who are the child’s primary caregiver.

Before the conference/meeting:

- Review anecdotal notes, samples of work.
- Think about what stands out in terms of the child’s strengths and areas for growth, and how parents might support the child at home. Write down a few points so that the conversation can be focused. This helps when time is limited.
- Select anecdotal notes or samples of work (could include audio, video) to illustrate the points or to show growth over time.
- Determine if the child will be involved. Is this a meeting where the child can take part in sharing pieces of their portfolio?
- Consult with individual parents about the need for an interpreter and arrange if necessary.

At the conference/meeting:

- Invite parents to share information about their child and any questions they have.
- Avoid the use of educational jargon

(emergent reader, invented spelling). Use language that parents can understand and illustrate with concrete examples, as appropriate.

- Share how the child is being supported in the classroom with regard to needs and strengths.
- Ask parents how they might be able to support the child at home and make suggestions as appropriate. Remember that not all parents can support children in the same ways and that parents lead very busy lives. Keep suggestions simple and achievable.
- Before they leave, ask parents if they have any more questions, and review what has been agreed to at the meeting.

After the conference/meeting:

- Make notes as to what was agreed upon and any follow-up that is required so it is not forgotten at future meetings.

Having parents as active partners in their child’s education enriches a child’s early learning experiences.

## Thinking It Through

- *How do my assessment practices benefit children and support their learning?*
- *Do I assess children in authentic ways?*
- *How can I use my daily observations more effectively when working with children?*
- *Is my system for gathering information working for me? If not, what do I need to change?*
- *How does my assessment information connect to my planning?*
- *How do I engage children in self-assessment and peer assessment?*
- *How effectively do I communicate with parents?*