



# Tips for Building Relationships with Families

## 1 Show respect in communications with families.

- ☑ Always refer to parents as Mr. and Ms. (unless they tell you otherwise).
- ☑ Pronounce names correctly (ask if you're not sure).
- ☑ Be aware of the message you intend to communicate and the nonverbal signals you are sending (i.e., to listen and understand vs. to end meeting quickly).
- ☑ Use body language and tone of voice that is welcoming and respectful.
- ☑ Practice compassionate, active listening.
- ☑ Share difficult news in a careful, productive way that is focused on solutions.

## 2 Build relationships with families by connecting informally.

- ☑ Be approachable; greet warmly.
- ☑ Invite/encourage parents to enter classroom.
- ☑ Initiate conversations with parents.
- ☑ Conduct get-to-know-you phone calls with every family.
- ☑ Ask about and use each families' preferred method of contact.
- ☑ Always make your first contact with parents a positive one.
- ☑ Balance negative communications with positive ones.

## 3 Ensure classroom environment and communication with families are free from biases.

- ☑ Design your classroom to reflect the different cultures represented and languages spoken by the students in your classroom.
- ☑ Have translated materials/information posted and available for parents as they enter your classroom.
- ☑ Be flexible and adaptive to the expectations and desires of different cultures, and even different expectations of families within a culture.
- ☑ Keep an open mind to different suggestions or approaches parents might offer. Be willing to change your approach in working with families if their cultural backgrounds dictate another response.
- ☑ Check yourself for any biases about the cultures represented in your classroom.

## 4 Uses a strengths-based approach by focusing on parents' strengths and empowering them to use those strengths as part of their child's education team.

- ☑ Identify parents' strengths and maintain a positive attitude about families.
- ☑ Brainstorm creative ways to use a parent's strengths in classroom or as a part of their child's educational team.
- ☑ Ask for and use parent insight.

## **5 Work with families to minimize language, cultural, emotional, and logistical barriers to partnership.**

### **MINIMIZING LANGUAGE BARRIERS**

- ☑ Identify and use each family's preferred method of contact.
- ☑ Use verbal/visual communication styles (pictures, symbols, or videos).
- ☑ Provide translated versions of written communication as much as possible.
- ☑ Use a translator when making phone calls if at all possible (avoid using children as translators).
- ☑ Explain educational terms in an understandable way; stay away from "educationese" or educational jargon/teacher talk.
- ☑ Provide a word bank with definitions and visuals.
- ☑ Ask clear questions.
- ☑ Check for understanding frequently.
- ☑ Be flexible with parents who speak in the casual register (using slang terms).

### **MINIMIZING BARRIERS CAUSED BY CULTURAL DIFFERENCES**

- ☑ Be understanding and open-minded with parents' decisions and decision-making processes; parents make decisions through many cultural and religious lenses.
- ☑ Initiate communication with parents, don't wait on them to initiate.
- ☑ Be flexible with a variety of communication styles.
- ☑ Be aware of any cultural or religious practices, including any dietary restrictions your students and their families might have.
- ☑ Focus on the shared goal of student development, growth, and success.

### **MINIMIZING LOGISTICAL BARRIERS**

- ☑ Allow parents to sign up for more than one parent-teacher conference slot.
- ☑ Provide the option for parents to show up when they get a free chance even if not scheduled ahead of time.
- ☑ Use technology for meetings or conversations if parents cannot make a physical meeting (FaceTime, Skype, WhatsApp, Webex, etc.).
- ☑ Offer a home visit as an alternative.
- ☑ Allow a parent to bring his/her children to the conference and provide toys for play while you talk to the parent.
- ☑ Be flexible and understanding due to inconsistencies in public transportation.

### **MINIMIZING EMOTIONAL BARRIERS**

- ☑ Be welcoming, approachable, and communicate positively, as parents may have had negative experiences with school in the past.
- ☑ Have educational terms defined, and use lots of videos and visuals when possible, to reduce any anxiety parents might feel talking about educational concepts.
- ☑ At every communication with the parent, explain why things matter for the child and speak in simple terms that can be understood.
- ☑ Remind parents that you care for their child and are dedicated to helping them succeed. One way to reinforce this is to balance positive feedback with negative feedback.
- ☑ Be flexible, patient, and supportive as families might be experiencing stress, crisis, grief, mental health challenges, etc.