



Communicating with Families: Helpful Suggestions

Elizabeth Steed and Glen Dunlap with the NCPMI Family Engagement Workgroup

It's important for early childhood personnel to use a variety of strategies to communicate with families and to offer opportunities for families to share information about themselves and the child. Different families will appreciate and be responsive to different ways of communicating. Therefore, it is important to always affirm the languages spoken by families in the program and use multiple forms of communication, including:



in person



paper





electronic
(e.g., email, texts, and apps)


Ways to Communicate with Families

Orientation

When you want to orient the family to the program and classroom, you can share information:

- 
 - ▶ In an information fair or orientation event


 - ▶ In a family handbook


 - ▶ On a school webpage
 - ▶ On a closed Facebook school page

Happenings

When you want families to know about something happening in the program or classroom, share information:

- 
 - ▶ On a board with daily/weekly reminders at program entrance or outside classroom
 - ▶ On a family bulletin board
 - ▶ In newsletters


 - ▶ In weekly emails in electronic newsletter form
 - ▶ Through an app like REMIND
 - ▶ On a closed Facebook school page
 - ▶ Group text messages

Progress Reports

When you want to share information with families about the child's day, use:



- ▶ Informal, regular face-to-face conversations



- ▶ Emails, texting, and phone calls
- ▶ Web-based home-school communication like Storypark, Preschool2Me, Brightwheel, HiMama, Learning Genie, ClassDojo, KidReports, MyProcure, Bloomz, or Seesaw
- ▶ Photo sharing through a program like Kaymbu or Tadpoles



- ▶ Daily notes or a communication notebook

Developmental Supports

When you want to share information to support children's development, do it through:



- ▶ Child-focused meetings such as parent-teacher conferences or IEP meetings
- ▶ Family events during mornings, evenings, or weekends (e.g., open house, family workshops, family breakfast at drop off, family festivals, fundraisers)
- ▶ In-person communication with specialists, such as an Early Childhood Mental Health Consultant, speech pathologist, or occupational therapist



- ▶ Provision of print or material resources (e.g., NCPMI resources) about social emotional development or a developmental issue (e.g., tantrums)



- ▶ Links to electronic resources (e.g., Backpack Series)
- ▶ Online portfolios; like Storypark, Preschool2Me, Brightwheel, HiMama, Learning Genie, ClassDojo, KidReports, MyProcure, Bloomz, or Seesaw

Ways to Invite Families to Share

Building a relationship is foundational to engaging families. Different families will prefer different strategies for sharing information about their child, themselves, and what they see as important. You'll need to provide choices and be responsive to parents' preferences.

Enrollment

When you want to learn about the family, child, and what is most important to them at intake, use:



- ▶ Home visits
- ▶ Program orientation
- ▶ Open house



- ▶ Screenings (e.g., ASQ:SE2) and assessments (e.g., SEAM, DECA)
- ▶ Questionnaires and forms (e.g., new student/family questionnaire, enrollment forms)
- ▶ All About Me form or poster with pictures of the child and family

Relationship

When you want to learn about the child and family and build a relationship over time, do it through:



- ▶ Informal face-to-face conversations at drop off and pick up
- ▶ Family events during evenings or weekends (e.g., family workshops)
- ▶ Child-focused meetings such as parent-teacher conferences or IEP meetings
- ▶ Collaboration with the Mental Health Consultant, behavior specialist, cultural liaison, and/or other professionals who work with the child and family



- ▶ Communication notebooks



- ▶ Emails, texting, and phone calls
- ▶ Communication app like REMIND
- ▶ Web-based home-school communication/portfolios like Storypark and Seesaw

Input

When you want to have formal ways for families to provide input and support to the program, partner with them by inviting parents/caregivers to:



- ▶ Volunteer in the classroom
- ▶ Volunteer to help organize/carry out a school event or fundraiser
- ▶ Participate as a member of the family board
- ▶ Be a room parent/caregiver
- ▶ Serve on the Pyramid leadership team
- ▶ Get involved with the board of directors
- ▶ Make things for the classroom or program
- ▶ Help fix, clean, paint, and/or organize things during a workday at the school