



UNITED EDUCATORS ASSOCIATION

IDEALAB EDUCATOR TRAINING SERIES

IDEAS FOR SUCCESSFULLY WORKING WITH PARENTS

You are dealing with the most precious resource in the life of most adults.

What should you do first?

- Establish positive rapport through proactive communication
- Send introduction letter to parents
- Send parent questionnaire which:
 - gathers information
 - ask for special problems
 - seeks help when needed
- Write monthly newsletter or email
- Give positive notes, cards, stickers, etc.
- Invite parents to view collection of work

What can you do to protect yourself?

- Contact parents at the first sign of a problem!
- Send FYI notices on Thursdays.
- Call parents at home or work.
- Let the student talk to the parent.
- Send registered letters when there is no response
- Visit the office and ask for suggestions

"I'M GOING DOWNTOWN!"

- Don't panic
- Thank them for their time
- Ask for a copy of the complaint as pursuant to Board Policy FNG.
- Call your association
- In discussion with anyone else, be careful not to use the student's name.



Students do not care how much we know, until they know how much we care.

WHAT TO DO IN A PARENT CONFERENCE

- Prepare for the conference.
- Determine topics in advance.
- Allow enough time for conference.
- Let the parent(s) talk.
- Watch body language (yours and theirs).
- Listen empathetically.
- Address the parent(s) by name.
- Look the parents in the eyes.
- State the problem in specific terms.
- Ask for their help.
- Offer ideas for help.
- Summarize the conversation.
- If possible, end on a positive note.
- Send follow-up note.

WHAT TO AVOID IN A PARENT CONFERENCE

- Do not minimize the problem or downgrade the consequences.
- Do not overwhelm the parents.
- Avoid physical barriers.
- Avoid becoming defensive.
- Do not apologize for bothering the parent or belittle your abilities.
- Do not discuss the student in front of other students or parents.
- Do not discuss the student in the faculty lounge. Only involve colleagues that can help you develop a solution.

IF THE CONFERENCE BECOMES HOSTILE

- Stay calm, speak softly and slowly.
- Watch what you say. In fact, talk very little.
- Use the "broken record"
- Ask to move the conference to the office.
- Ask for an end to the meeting.
- Ask that complaints against you be put in writing.
- Stay there. Do not end the conference unless you have been given permission to leave by the administrator present.
- If things get too rough, ask to be excused to go to the restroom.

The more communication between parents and teachers, the fewer problems a teacher will usually experience.

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You are dealing with the most precious resource in the life of most adults.

You are about to meet with a parent whom you believe will be out of control. You may even fear what the parent will do. What are you going to do? Teachers face this situation every day. Unfortunately, there is very little training or guidance offered to teachers in this area. So what do you do?

The most important thing you can do when dealing with an angry parent is to stay cool when things get hot. When talking to parents, stay calm, speak slowly, and do not become defensive or angry. If the parent is angry, just listen and use what is known as "the broken record." (This is a method used by teachers whereby they simply repeat what they have already said.) State the problem, then the consequence. For example, if the student is missing classes, state "(problem) If Mary does not come to school, (consequence) she will fail. Or, "(problem) if Johnny continues to act the way he is doing, (consequence) he will be 'Chapter 37ed' (removed from class)".

Convey to the parent(s) that both you and the parents want the same thing, to help the child learn. Listen to everything they are saying. Avoid overwhelming them with irrelevant materials or by using jargon. Try not to overwhelm them with other school personnel unless they are needed. Avoid physical barriers. Do not sit behind a desk.

Address the parent(s) by name (the right name) and maintain eye contact. Remember to state the problem in specific terms, ask for their help, and let them know the consequences. For example, "If Johnny does not do his homework, he will fail. He and I need your help to ensure that this does not happen."

Offer the parents ideas on how they might help. Summarize the conversation at the end and reiterate what you and the parent have agreed to do. If possible, end the conversation on a positive note. Follow up the conversation with a note or email.

What rights do parents have to information regarding my class?

Parents are by law entitled to request a change in their child's class or teacher. The law does not say whether a request for a different class or teacher must be granted. However, unless there is a good reason to deny the request, it will usually be granted by the administration.

Parents are also entitled to all written records concerning their child, including attendance records, test scores, grades, disciplinary records, and teacher and counselor evaluations of the student. Therefore, it is important that teachers be careful about any comment regarding a student. This includes notes to the administration, counselors, and others. Teachers should be careful with opinions they express about a student, especially those that are placed in writing. This includes emails to anyone from a district email or computer. It might even include your home computer if the records are subpoenaed.

Parents are also entitled to a REVIEW (not a copy) of all teaching materials, including textbooks and other teaching aids. In addition, parents can review each test after it is administered to the child. The law goes on to say that the district must make these items available. The law does give the district the right to specify reasonable hours of review.

Even though this law requires teachers to release information to the parents of a student, other laws require that teachers be careful not to release it to someone who is not the parent or the custodial parent. Parents do not have the right to see the tests or grades of other students. It is also important that teachers be careful not to discuss a student's records with anyone who does not have "a REAL need to know." This would include administrators and others who work for the educational institution, as they also work with that child. This does not mean that such records should be given to those outside the system, including parent chaperones and others. Before any information is given, please be sure to ask that the request for information be placed in writing, and make sure that the request is approved by the administration before it is provided to ANYONE outside the educational institution.