

Let's Talk Parents

PARENT TEACHER MEETINGS AND BEYOND – ENGAGING AND WORKING WITH PARENTS OF
PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

Facilitator Details

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Content

- Reflect and questions around content
- Why do we engage parents?
- When & how to approach parents?
- Tips to make it easier
- How are you?
- Parent/Teacher Meetings
- How to collaborate & plan effectively.
- When a parent is angry/irate.

Reflections and Questions



- How do you think parents feel about being approached by school/teachers?
- Does your school have a specific protocol or is it an individual teachers approach to engaging parents?
- Do you feel supported in a whole school approach?
- Any specific questions about when or how to approach parents/past experiences that may have caused conflict or issues.
- What do you find the most difficult about engaging parents?
- Do you think a collaborative approach is beneficial? Why?

Why do we engage parents?



- A parent's positive attitude and support towards their children's education can inspire and empower a child to have good learning habits.
- Research shows that parental involvement leads to reduced absenteeism.
- Open communication between teachers and parents can help in establishing trust and building relationships that are respectful.
- Parents are the experts on their children. They know them best and may have answers to questions around some behaviours, that they may have forgotten to tell you (Case example – Ciara).
- Sometimes when we ask a question, we can find out relevant information a parent forgot to tell us. (Case example – Steven)
- Trust your gut. You spend a lot of time with the child/children and you do get to know them very well.

When and how to approach parents

- What is your approach?
- Notes? Phone Calls? Emails? Speaking at the gate?
- BOUNDARIES are extremely important for us as teachers. It is a good idea to inform parents of how they can contact you, in a way that is comfortable for you.
- It can be extremely stressful when we are caught off guard with questions by a parent and can send our day into disarray, which then filters into our teaching and onto the children in our class.
- HOLD YOUR BOUNDARIES – firm, fair and consistent.
- What feels right for you? (Case example - Jess)
- Try not to blame/shame a child over an action that is inevitably a parent's responsibility.
- Keep lines of communication open.

Tips to make it easier

- Be warm – Friendliness goes a long way. When you see parents in person, smile, make eye-contact, use their name, shake hands (if possible).
- Be positive – Always start with some positivity – something you've noticed about the child that is positive, to help the parent to feel that you know their child and can see all sides of them.
- Trust – Always assure a parent that your conversations are confidential and that you have the child's best interests at heart.
- Communicate often – Whether it be a note on the homework sheet, or a family task for home/school app etc. Let them know you're there.
- Make a plan and acknowledge involvement – notice improvements in the child's behaviour/academic success.
- Don't make assumptions about home life & offer support around elements a parent may be finding particularly stressful – homework etc

How are you?

- It's important to remain professional, approachable and empathetic with parents. How do we do that? We mind ourselves.
- Minding our own self-regulation around this can be difficult at times, when we feel triggered or blamed for certain behaviours/ways in which we teach children.
- Ensure that we are prepared, open and ready for conversations with parents is important.
- We want conversations, not confrontations.
- We always need to remember that the child in question is this parent's world and it may be difficult for them to hear that their child is not coping in school academically or if there are behavioural issues.
- As with children we want to approach parents with a soft tone, facial expression and soothing presence, to help them to relax and feel that you are all on the same side, with the needs of the child in the centre. Remember our Mirror Neurons.

Parent/Teacher Meetings

- Organisation is key.
- Use a timer system to stick to your allotted time per meeting and if you feel more is needed, advise the parent that you will schedule a further meeting asap and you will contact them in due course.
- Use the parent's names & again be open, friendly and approachable. A warm smile goes a long way (Smiling is contagious).
- Ask the previous class teacher about how parent/teacher meetings had gone before, who attended and how they were approached. This is key as you can be well prepared in advance.
- Ask for a parent's input on how the child is finding school/curriculum. Do they have questions?

Parent/Teacher Meetings



- THE SANDWICH APPROACH
- Start with a positive, then discuss any relevant issues and end on a positive collaborative approach.
- Use the Language of Alliance – “We”.
- If there are issues with the child’s academic ability or you would like to discuss a particular issue – try to have some of the child’s work available, so you can show them and discuss what you would like to see moving forward.
- If there are behavioural issues, it is beneficial to have a diary of dates and incidents where you feel behaviour was unacceptable and what you had to do as a consequence to this behaviour.

Parent/Teacher Meetings

- Use adjectives that suit the child's personality – funny, friendly, helpful, empathetic, kind, happy. This shows the parent that you really see and know their child.
- Discuss the child's happiness at school and include social/emotional well-being.
- If you are asked difficult questions that you do not know the answer to, it's perfectly okay to say "I'll check and come back to you on that", "I don't know" or "I see that you're really concerned about this - that particular question is out of my realm as a teacher, so it's impossible for me to say".
- If there is something a child is finding particularly difficult e.g. homework – are you open to supporting some change here?

How to collaborate and plan effectively

- Discuss a triangular approach between you and the parents with the child in the centre.
- Ask the parents if the child is seeing any other professionals, who may be able to give relevant information about the child – OT's, SLTs, play therapist, psychologists etc – Are you open to talking to them?
- 3 step approach
 - - 1 What you plan to do.
 - 2 – What the parent plans to do.
 - 3 – Evaluating progress – set a timeframe – again hold boundaries.
- Celebrate successes and let a parent know that you appreciate them being on board with the child's academic/behavioural issues.

When a parent is angry/irate

- At the arranged time, when you are prepared – Let them talk. Listen attentively. Don't interrupt – just let them voice their opinions/concerns/problems. Let them know that you might jot down a few notes so you can refer back to them when the parent is finished.
- Remain professional – Thank the parent for bringing the issue to your attention. Stay calm – even if you feel you are being treated unfairly.
- Take time – You don't have to have the perfect answer to the problem/issue right away. Give them a time frame for when you will get back to them and let them know what other members of staff you will be speaking to about the issue.
- A few days is a good amount of time – don't put yourself under pressure. You are within your right to have a chance to think things through, put a solution/plan in place or get advice from other staff.
- Apologise if you DID make a mistake, handle a situation badly. Admitting this is not wrong. We are all human.
- Plan – Make a plan to discuss the approach that will be taken and discuss the steps that this will involve moving forward to TRY to resolve the issue.

When a parent is angry/irate

- Take notes of what is happening with dates are relevant information for future reference.
- Sometimes the problem/issue has nothing to do with you and can or may be blown out of proportion, but try not to let it affect you outside of school time and try not to take it personally.
- If you feel under any threat or have dealt with this parent before, ask another staff member to confidentially sit in on the conversation and inform the parent of this beforehand.
- If a parent becomes unreasonably loud or offensive – stay calm in your tone and advise them that you feel that this is not okay and you think that your conversation should end for today and be rearranged for another time. You do not have to accept this behaviour from anyone.

When a parent is angry/irate

- Some parent's can feel triggered by teacher's mainly based on their childhood experiences, so their reactions may not be about you personally and they may have opinions on you or the school that are wrong or irrelevant.
- It's useful to acknowledge their feelings. "I notice you're very angry". "I can see you're very worried about this issue". "How do you feel I can support you in this?".
- We still want a parent to feel valued and heard.

What are the questions?

- Thank you so much for attending
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