

Speaker Notes

Talking to Parents: Effective Parent/Caregiver Communications

Page 1 – Title Slide

None

Page 2 – Objectives

None

Page 3 – Establishing a Parent/Caregiver Relationship

- Developing a trusting and collaborative relationship with parents begins the moment the child is enrolled in your class.
- Greeting the parent daily sets a foundation of trust and openness. The parent will begin to see you as a resource for discussing issues that may arise in the child.
- The parent is sometimes struggling with their own issues. Recognize that with a question of how the parent is while their spouse is deployed.

Page 4 – Establishing a Parent/Caregiver Relationship (Continued)

- Ongoing feedback between caregiver and parent on a regular basis instead of waiting until there is a problem decreases the likelihood of problems escalating.

Page 5 – Discussing Difficult Issues

- Always find a private place to speak with a parent about sensitive issues regarding their child.
- Put yourself in their place and imagine what it would be like to hear something negative about your child.

Page 6 – Discussing Difficult Issues (Continued)

- Start with the positive: Begin with saying something positive about the child. Make sure that you are sincere. Parents will recognize genuine concern for their child.
- Use non-threatening language: Let them know about the behaviors you have observed in the classroom and ask if they have noticed similar behaviors at home. Rather than starting with, “I have some concerns I want to talk with you about,” try “There are some behaviors I’ve observed in class that I want to talk with you about.” The word “concerns” can be a hot button for some parents and can evoke feelings of anxiety and defensiveness. Use your own judgment on this and go with what ever feels comfortable.
- Be direct: Focus on specific behavior, not broad generalizations or any references to the child’s character or personality.
- Ask the parent if they have noticed any of these behaviors at home: Ask the parent if they’ve noticed any of the behaviors that are concerning you when the child is at home. Also ask if they have any concerns, and ask for any feedback they have about how their child is doing in school.

Page 7 – Choosing the Right Words

- NOTE: The following are vignettes to read aloud or hand out to the group for discussion. Ask participants to discuss the differences between these to scenarios. Which approach is more effective and likely to promote a positive exchange?

- Vignette 1: “Lately in class, Johnny has been really emotional and temperamental. It seems like he always has to get his own way or he becomes completely unmanageable. Sometimes he even becomes aggressively out of control. He can’t control his anger at all. We care so much about Johnny and we are worried that if he remains this immature when he enters kindergarten, this will present serious problems for him. He must get all these tantrums under control. That is why I am discussing this with you today.”
- Vignette 2: “Lately in class, we have been noticing that Johnny has been crying and screaming in a hysterical fashion when he is asked to do something he doesn’t want to do. The other day when we were in free play it became time to clean up. He wasn’t finished yet. When it became necessary to move on to another activity with the rest of the class, he began that behavior. We assured Johnny that he would have another opportunity to have more free play later on. We attempted to comfort him, but he could not be soothed. I would say this lasted about 15 minutes until he was finally able to calm down. What concerned us most was that he lashed out physically by trying to kick and hit the teacher. We love Johnny and know that we have to help him with the skills he will need to handle a more structured environment next year and want very much to see progress with this behavior. That is why I am discussing this with you today.”

Page 8 – Three Highly Effective Communication Skills

- We will go into more detail about these in the next few slides.

Page 9 – Active Listening

- Be aware of body positioning: Open vs. closed, arms not crossed, fully facing the parent, focusing not only on their words but the feelings and meanings that are not being expressed verbally (reading between the lines - just like when reading a novel).

Page 10 – Validation

None

Page 11 – Empathy

- NOTE: Spend some time with the group talking about a recent experience they may have had with another person who truly listened, validated and empathized with them. Ask them what that was like.

Page 12 – Additional Suggestions

- NOTE: You may want to have some additional vignettes written out or read them aloud to the participants for role playing.

Page 13 – Summary

None

Page 14 – Questions

None

Page 15 – Resources

None

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