



## The Parent Information Center of Delaware

*Inform. Educate. Advocate.*

### Communicating with Your Child's School

#### AT A GLANCE

Strong communication is a key component of the home and school relationship. As a parent, you have information about your child you can use to inform the teacher of your child's learning style, strengths, needs, and also present alternative solutions that might not occur to those who work for the school system. Make sure the focus stays on your child and meeting his or her needs. *"Let's brainstorm and see what we can come up with."*

#### **Step 1. Keep Your Focus Positive**

Keep thoughts of past (or present) problems at school and other negatives from creeping into your mind. Focus positively on your goals and the view that the school wants to do their best for your child. If you expect to have difficulty when meeting with school personnel, your mind and body will be prepared for battle. Take a deep breath, don't let your anger or frustration get in the way of your efforts to share your ideas or concerns for your child's success.



#### **Step 2. Prioritize and Plan**

What's the most important thing that needs to be accomplished for your child? Make a list of the issues, questions, and possible solutions. Rank them. Decide which ones must be addressed immediately and ones you can pass on for now. Plan how you are willing to give and take in order to achieve the higher goal. Map out what you need to say, and practice if that helps.

#### **Step 3. Actively Listen to Understand the Other Person's Perspective**

If you don't understand what someone is saying, tell them. Be Direct. *"I just don't understand what you are saying. Can you explain it in a different way or give me some examples? Is there something you can show me in writing so I can fully understand?"* Keep asking and wait for responses until you fully understand. Resist any temptation to answer your own questions or put words into someone else's mouth.



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PIC is a statewide non-profit organization with a mission to advance effective parent engagement in education.

## **Step 4. Clarify your statements if you see a puzzled expression on someone's face, and ask for clarification in return.**

Restate your issue so that you and others are clear in your understanding. Getting a clear picture of what someone is saying may help correct information that is important to solving a problem.

**To be understood:** *"I must not be explaining this clearly, what I'm trying to say is ...".*

**So that you understand:** *"It sounds like you're saying ...". "If I understand you correctly, you're saying ... is that right?" ... "Is that written down anywhere so I can read it?"*

## **Step 5. Acknowledge the "Good Things"**

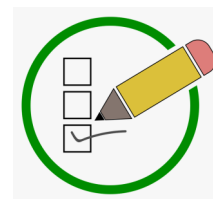
If someone has been particularly helpful, acknowledge their efforts. Sometimes, especially when frustrations rise, acknowledging what has gone well and how hard everyone has worked sweetens the air a bit, and makes it possible for everyone to feel better and push towards the finish line. If by chance you make a mistake, or cause offense, say you're sorry.

## **You're Only Human**

Making an apology says you're only human and sends the message that you can be forgiving of others mistakes as well. "Please and thank you" also go a long way in keeping conversations civil, and not surprisingly, helps everyone say, "yes".

## **ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR FAMILIES**

- ⇒ Become familiar with your child's school district, including understanding the policies and procedures.
- ⇒ Who are the decision makers in the school?
- ⇒ Ask about class rules, routines, and what your child will be learning this year.
- ⇒ Make sure the school has updated contact information including the best time to call you.
- ⇒ Offer to volunteer (in and outside school).
- ⇒ Keep copies of all letters/emails you write to school personnel, advocates and others involved with your child, as well as responses. Write down questions you ask and the answers you receive.



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