

Strategies for Effective Home/School Communication

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Communication between a student's home and school can have a significant impact on his school program, the on-going development of skills and on the relationship between parents and teaching staff. Many parents report that they wait anxiously to read the communication book at the end of the day and that their emotional state can be considerably influenced by its content.

- As soon as possible, at the beginning of the school year, the principal, teacher, teaching/educational assistant and parent should meet to discuss and agree on the parameters for home/school communication with due consideration given to format, information to be included both from school and home, as well as the time constraints of all parties.
- At school, the classroom teacher is responsible for the content of home/school communication. In some situations, a teaching/educational assistant, under the direction of the teacher, may do the reporting or guide the student through the process.
- It is important for the teacher to write in the book at least once per week to update the family on the student's activities and progress. Some teachers may prefer a weekly phone call.
- Generally, a parent wants to know about the activities in which their child participated during the day, as this information can be used to engage their child in communication and/or give the family topics for conversation at the dinner table, such as:
 - Which activities the student participated in during the day
 - New or improved demonstration of skills
 - Socialization with peers
 - Songs, stories, videos, thematic units
- School staff will want to know if the student had a good sleep and got off to a good start that morning. This may influence his or her performance during the school day. News about special events and activities provides topics for communication, as well as literacy skill development activities.
- Use this system to celebrate successes both at home and at school. This is an important and positive experience for all involved.
- Both teachers and parents need to be sensitive to how messages may be perceived. Small things, such as pen pressure, capital letters or large script can convey anger. The communication book is not the place to carry on a difficult conversation. A person-to-person meeting is usually the best way to deal with any difficulties.

Health Issues

Some children have serious health issues, such as seizures, about which parents need information every day. Parameters for reporting must be clearly outlined. Collaboration between parent and school is critical: Decide on a way to report on health-related issues that is efficient for both home and school.

Reporting Behavioural Difficulties

- Parents find it difficult and disheartening to receive a daily listing of their child's misdeeds. Most parents are only too well aware of the

behavioural difficulties their child may experience. It is unnecessary to report daily incidents of non-compliance, off-task behaviour, etc. if these are a typical component of the child's behavioural profile.

- Guidelines for reporting significant behavioural issues need to be clearly established with the principal, teacher, teaching/educational assistant and parent.
- Occasionally, significant behavioural incidents do occur and must be reported. The communication book is not the forum for sharing this kind of information. The principal decides how this information is to be shared and often assumes this important role.

Tips for Setting Up a Successful Home/School Communication System

- Involve the student in creating the system. It might be a notebook or binder. Students can be partners in preparing the pictures and content. This gives the student a sense of ownership and responsibility for the process.
- Often, the job of writing in the communication book is left until the end of the day. However, by relating the student's visual schedule to the daily home reporting process and recording periodically throughout the day, both the schedule and communication with parents are reinforced. The preparation and maintenance of the communication book can be a valuable component of the student's literacy program.
- When possible, pictures of the student involved in school activities can provide the student with an excellent stimulus tool for information retrieval and communication. Importing digital pictures to a Word document is a simple process.

- School boards usually have very clear policies about e-mail communication between home and school. Generally, it is not encouraged or permitted. Forwarding or replying to a message can alter original content, making all parties vulnerable. If you do not know your board's policy, find out.

A Guiding Thought: What if a student's home/school communication book fell off the bus and was found by a stranger? Would the child's or the family's dignity or privacy be compromised?

Always consider the ultimate purpose of home/school communication: We are reporting for students who, because of the nature of their disability, cannot do this for themselves.

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