

# Talking the Talk:

10 Effective Communication Strategies for Parent/Teacher Meetings

## What Does Effective Communication Mean?

Effective communication involves using strategies for *speaking* and *listening* in ways that helps others to accept your ideas.

The better you communicate the more your words will be accepted.

## What Does Talking the Talk Mean?

Talking the talk means *using* effective communication strategies.

For effective communication to take place, the speaker must not only understand what effective communication strategies are, but most importantly they must be willing to use these strategies for choosing their words during professional conversations.

## How Can Effective Communication Help With Parent/Teacher Meetings?

It can help you:

- discuss student challenges in a positive manner.
- gain parents' trust.
- increase parent involvement.
- make the best use of each of your professional conversations.

## How Can Effective Communication Help With Parent/Teacher Meetings?

It can help you:





- avoid the verbal difficulties that often result from miscommunication.
- gain valuable student information that may help explain the sources of a student's struggles.
- feel more confident about getting the results you want from parent/teacher meetings.

Ok, let's get started with learning how to communicate more effectively!

**Be Prepared to Meet Each Parent**

Being prepared is one of the most important first steps for communicating effectively during parent/teacher meetings.


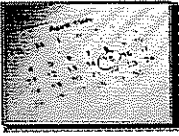

**Good Preparation Leads to Good Communication!**

**Be Prepared to Meet Each Parent**

Being prepared includes:

- Scheduling enough time to talk about school progress, including time to allow parents to share their thoughts.
- Sending home two or more reminders of the meeting's: time, date, location and purpose.








**Be Prepared to Meet Each Parent**

Being prepared includes:

- having students' progress report(s), and all other important documents, on hand.
- deciding which areas of the report you will focus on.




Examples: - Areas where the student has shown significant progress  
- Areas where the student continues

**Be Prepared to Meet Each Parent**

Being prepared includes:





- gathering examples of the student's work that shows progress and/or challenges.
- recalling and writing down one or two examples of the student's behavior that best represents progress and/or challenges.

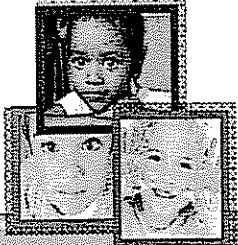
**Be Prepared to Meet Each Parent**

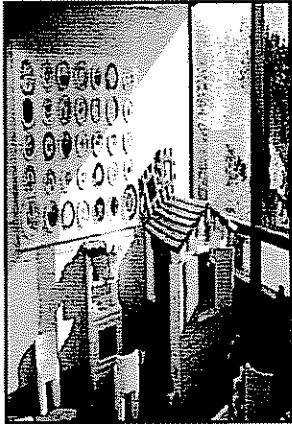
Being prepared may also include:

- having a timer on hand.
- having a familiar activity ready for those students who come to the meeting with their parents.
- having a video or reading materials available for parents who may come early.

After preparing you will be better able to **talk the talk!**





Now, let's explore 10 effective communication strategies that we can use to improve our parent/teacher meetings.

# Effective Communication Strategies

1. Start With a Goal
2. Focus on School Matters
3. Set the Tone
4. Ask Open-Ended Questions
5. Paraphrase

10-End-With-Next Steps

## STRATEGIES

1. Start With a Goal
2. Focus on School Matters
3. Set the Tone
4. Ask Open-Ended Questions
5. Paraphrase

Let's look at the first 5 effective communication strategies. We are going to explore effective and less effective examples of parent/teacher meeting communication.

## 1. Start With a Goal

- First, welcome the parent and thank them for their time.
- State exactly what the purpose of the meeting is for.
- Tell the parent that his/her view on his/her child's progress is important to you.

## To Communicate Effectively Say...

Let's look at an example of Effective Communication

Welcome Mrs. [Name], thank you for coming! I appreciate your input. Let's look at an example of Effective Communication. As we look at her report, it's important that we both share our thoughts on her progress. I'm glad to hear your opinions on her progress.



1. Start With a Goal

## Now, let's look at an example of..

Less Effective Communication

1. Start With a Goal


What's the name of your child? Well, as you know, you're here so I can tell you how your child is doing.

What makes this statement ineffective?

1. Start With a Goal

What's the name of your child? Well, as you know, you're here so I can tell you how your child is doing.




ANSWER:

1. By asking the parent the name of the child, it communicates to the parent that the teacher may not be prepared for the meeting. It's as if the teacher doesn't know who she's meeting.
2. The goal for a teacher/parent meeting is not for the teacher to do all the talking while the parent does all the listening. It's for both of them to talk about school progress.

1. Start With a Goal


**2. Focus on School Matters**

- During parent/teacher meetings, commit to mainly talking about the student's progress.
- Describe progress as compared to your school's expectations.
- Do not compare one student's progress to other students' progress.



**To Communicate Effectively Say...**

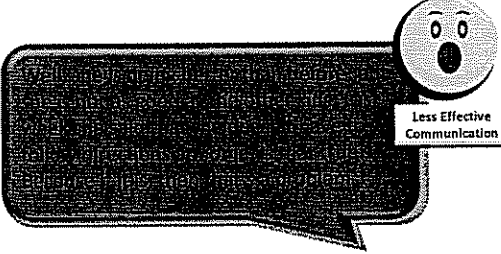
By this time of year, students should be able to listen to and follow simple directions. As you may recall last semester, Cassandra was having challenges with listening. Yet now, Cassandra's listening skills have greatly improved. She is now consistently following directions, for example,



Effective Communication

2. Focus on School Matters



**Instead of...**



Less Effective Communication

2. Focus on School Matters

Well, she is doing better than before, but she is not as good as the other kids.


What makes this statement ineffective?


2. Focus on School Matters

Well, she is doing better than before, but she is not as good as the other kids.

**ANSWER:**


The teacher is comparing the progress of one student against other students, instead of comparing progress to the school's expectations.



 2. Focus on School Matters

### 3. Set the Tone


- Speak to parents in the way you expect them to speak to you.
- Act professionally by being polite, positive and purposeful.
- Remind yourself that although you can not control what others say, you can control the words you choose.




### To Communicate Effectively Say...

During a meeting, a parent gets agitated and says to the teacher: "I can't believe that you think that my daughter has any challenges! At home she is a perfect child."

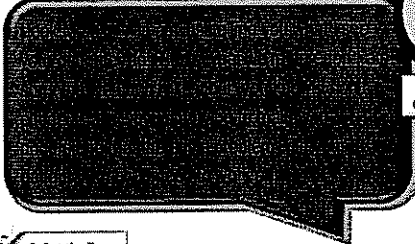
The teacher replies in a calm voice, "I understand. Sometimes children behave differently at school than at home. Perhaps it would help if I share a few examples of challenging behaviors that I have observed in Cassan (19). The latter words, I would very much appreciate hearing your thoughts concerning these behaviors."


 Effective Communication


 3. Set the Tone

### Instead of...


The teacher answers in the same agitated voice as the parent's and says...


 Less Effective Communication




 3. Set the Tone

That's why I am trying to make you understand that there is a problem with your daughter that you need to work on!






**What makes this statement ineffective?**


 3. Set the Tone

That's why I am trying to make you understand that there is a problem with your daughter that you need to work on!

**ANSWER:**

The teacher is responding to the parent's agitated tone by becoming agitated, instead of by taking control of the situation and responding in a calm professional manner.



 3. Set the Tone

#### 4. Ask Open-Ended Questions

What are open-ended questions?  
Open-ended questions have many possible answers.

Open-ended questions:

- invite the speaker to share his/her thoughts.
- do not demand a "right" or "wrong" answer.
- say that there are many possible answers to a question.



#### 4. Ask Open-Ended Questions

What are closed-ended questions?  
Closed-ended questions have one answer.

Closed-ended questions:

- limit the way in which you can respond.
- force you to choose a "right" answer.



#### To Communicate Effectively Say...

Throughout the meeting the teacher asks these kinds of questions...

- What are your thoughts concerning Cassandra's progress?
- What other things do you think we could do to help Cassandra with this challenge?
- Please tell me your ideas about this plan.
- Why do you think so?

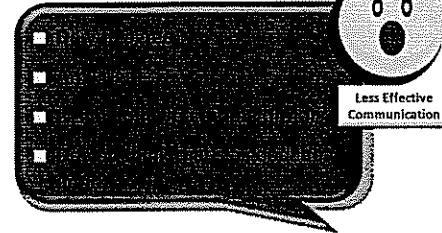


Effective Communication

4. Ask Open-Ended Questions

#### Instead of...

Throughout the meeting the teacher asks these kinds of questions...



Less Effective Communication

4. Ask Open-Ended Questions

Throughout the meeting the teacher asks these kinds of questions...

Do you agree?  
Am I right?



What makes this statement ineffective?

4. Ask Open-Ended Questions

Throughout the meeting the teacher asks these kinds of questions...

Do you agree?  
Am I right?



ANSWER:

The teacher is asking ONLY closed-ended questions. This does not invite the parent to express her own thoughts on her child's progress.

4. Ask Open-Ended Questions

## 5. Paraphrase

### PARAPHRASING REDUCES MISCOMMUNICATION!

Example of paraphrasing: "I want to make sure that I am understanding you correctly. Did you say ... (Then summarize what you think you heard the speaker say)."

- Paraphrasing allows the listener to check for understanding.
- Paraphrasing says to the speaker that the speaker's words are important.



## To Communicate Effectively Say...

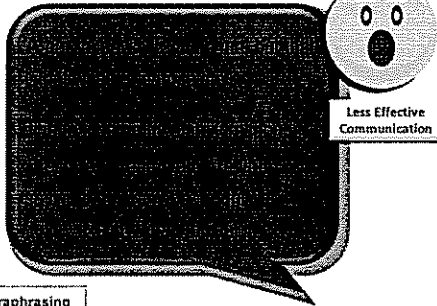
Teacher says: "Mr. ... your views on this issue are very important to me, so I want to make sure that I understand you. Did you say that you feel that ..."



Effective Communication

5. Paraphrasing

## Instead of...



Less Effective Communication

5. Paraphrasing

Are you saying that I can't hear right? I know exactly what you said!



What makes this statement ineffective?

5. Paraphrasing

Are you saying that I can't hear right? I know exactly what you said!



### ANSWER:

The teacher refuses to accept that she may not have understood the parent's words correctly. The teacher becomes defensive because she ASSUMES that the parent is trying to insult her.

5. Paraphrasing