

Activity 1: Learning From Stories¹

Time: 30-45 minutes

Materials: Pen/pencil, “Positive Communication” worksheet

Objective: To help participants understand how positive statements can facilitate more effective communication with parents.

Procedure: On the “Positive Communication” worksheet, write a story about a time when you had a positive communication experience with a parent. Alternatively, tell your story to someone in the room.

Each story should address the following questions:

- Why do you think the experience was a positive one?
- What was your goal?
- What approach did you use?
- How did this communication make you feel?
- How did this communication affect how you saw yourself as an educator?

Now, share your stories with the group. Discuss any patterns in the stories that make them positive experiences. Create a list of five tips or strategies for positive communication with parents.

¹ Source: This activity idea was adapted from Activity 1-2: Communication Stories in the *Training guides for the head start learning community: Communicating with parents*. This guide is available at: www.headstartinfo.org/cgi-bin/pubcatstore.cfm?CatID=97&do=

Activity 2: Taking Concrete Steps

Time: 30-45 minutes

Materials: Pen/pencil, “Parent Voices” handout

Objectives: To be aware of different parental perceptions of the role of the teacher. To recognize how knowledge/lack of knowledge of parents’ perceptions can strengthen or weaken teacher-family relations. To gain practice in understanding parents’ perceptions.

Procedure: Read each quote on the “Parent Voices” worksheet. Discuss each quote and the corresponding questions.

Parent Voices

Quote 1

The teacher's role here is not the same as the teachers' roles in Somalia. I believe that the teacher in Somalia usually plays the parent and the teacher role at the same time. But the teachers in Canada play only the role of the teacher and that is not the same as the roles we used to expect from teachers back home. It is a very difficult situation and getting used to it is also difficult.

- What is your role as a teacher here in Canada?
- How do you think parents feel when they begin to realize that the role of the teacher in their home country is different from that in Canada?
- If a parent were sharing this with you, what would be your next step?

Quote 2

Yes, that changed a lot, because there was a good relationship established between parents, the principal, and the community. When the teacher realized that the principal is welcoming and respects parents, they also started to respect us. So the principal plays a key role. If the principal is a good one, there will be good relationship between the teachers and parents. If the principal is a bad one, who ignores the parents and does not welcome parents, so the teachers will also behave like the principal. So I believe that the principal is a key part in the teachers, parents, and school triangular relationship.

- How do you think this scenario plays out in a school that is not welcoming to parents?
- What kind of behaviour would you observe among school staff?
- If you had heard this being said about the school you worked in, what approach would you take?

Quote 3

Although in some schools the number of the Somali students is higher than the numbers of other newcomers, you still see a couple of immigrant teachers in the schools. Although we are more in number, you will not see one Somali teacher in the schools. So other immigrant students have someone who went through the system, understands the system, understands the culture back home and this culture, and knows the expectations on these children and can bring all these information together. Before the parents get involved, these teachers can be at least interpreters for the students and act as role models. Our children do not have role models in the schools; we are new and have ourselves many other problems. So I would suggest that the TDSB should look at where the number of the Somali children is high and hire Somali teachers. We have now some Somali teachers, who have done their education here, can take over. Even if it is one or two, they can be role model for our children.

- How do you think parents may feel about the school system and its teachers in this situation?
- How do you think this situation could be changed?
- Do you think having different cultures represented in the school staff is valid?

Activity 3: Cross-Cultural Practices in the School

Time: variable

Materials: Pen/pencil, “Cross-Cultural Observation Chart” handout

Objectives: To discuss suggestions from Flett (2001) to promote cross-cultural communication about the role of the teacher. To determine current practice in schools. To suggest next steps to improve practice.

Procedure: This activity can be done individually, in pairs, or in groups. Read the *Recommendations* for cross-cultural communication on the “Cross-Cultural Communication Observation Chart” provided. Take some time to observe or reflect how these recommendations are being employed in your school. In the *Current Practice* column write about what is being done in your school to meet the recommendations. In the *Next Steps* column write how you could improve the situation, if needed.

At the next meeting, discuss your findings and suggestions for improvements with the group. Start with the *Current Practices* column. Are there any similarities or patterns across schools? Are there certain recommendations that need attention than others? Next, discuss what you wrote for *Next Steps*. Listen to others’ suggestions for ideas that might work in your school. Fill them in on your chart where appropriate as a reminder.

Cross-Cultural Communication Observation Chart

Read each recommendation.

In the *Current Practice* column write what is being done in your school to meet these recommendations.

In the *Next Steps* column write how you could improve the situation, if needed.

Recommendations	Current Practice	Next Steps
1 Explore parents' personal beliefs, values, and expectations that influence their interaction with others.		
2 Learn about the family's culture to effectively build a trusting relationship with parents.		
3 Respect and recognize the family's culture and beliefs.		
4 Make use of casual contacts with parents. Research shows that parents prefer communication with teachers to be informal and frequent (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997).		
5 Provide an orientation session for families in their native language so that the role of the teacher and the school policy and procedures can be discussed.		

Recommendation	Current Practice	Next Steps
6 Develop a school resource book that details the policies and procedures of the school, as well as instructional methods. Handbooks can be translated.		
7 Involve interpreters for major language groups at school council meetings/parent workshops.		
8 Be specific about how you wish parents to assist their children at home. Hold an introductory meeting with interpreters to explain your program to parents.		
9 Share with parents the tradition in Canada of parents helping out in the school. Be specific about how parents can become involved in the school setting.		
10 Use sensitivity when communicating with parents.		

Activity 4: Personal Reflection

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: Pen/pencil, “Personal Reflection” worksheet

Objective: To reflect on your role as an educator working with parents from different cultures.

Procedure: This is an individual activity. No sharing is required. Take a few minutes to consider and reflect on the questions in the “Personal Reflection” handout. Take as much time as you need to think through all the questions. When you have finished, use the lines below to summarize your thoughts.

Personal Reflection

Read through the personal reflection questions. Take some time to think through your answers. Summarize your thoughts on the lines below.

Personal reflection questions

- Have your views of the role of the teacher changed at all? If yes, how?
- What have you learned about the role of the teacher in different cultures?
- What have you learned about parental expectations in different cultures?
- What have you learned that will help you negotiate cultural expectations with parents?
- Are you aware of the personal beliefs and values of your students' parents regarding education? If yes, how did you become aware? If no, what could you do to become more aware?
- Do you encourage informal interactions with parents or do you require an appointment to meet?
- Do you (or your school) provide an orientation session for new families in their native language?
- Do you (or your school) have written materials in a variety of languages that explain teachers' and parents' roles for newcomers?
- Are interpreters readily available for informal and formal meetings with parents?
- Would you like parents to be more involved in your classroom? If yes, how could you make this happen? If no, think about why not.
- Do you let parents know how they can help their children at home? If yes, how is this done? If no, what can be done to make sure parents are more aware?

Personal reflection
