

Communicating *WITH* Teachers & Parents

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Wisdom

James 3: 17 “Wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.”

Wisdom 7: 22-27 “... Wisdom is a spirit that is intelligent, holy, ... an image of God’s goodness ...”

Romans 12: 9-21 “Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

- Prepare: Provide a pre-interview survey or ask for an advance agenda. Gather pertinent paperwork/records/documentation . . .
- Filter out personal (ego) issues; establish personal boundaries; focus on your own behavior.
- Use respectful tone, volume, and body language.
- Convey a sense of quiet confidence. Avoid a confrontational, argumentative, or defensive attitude/approach. Rely on the expression, “Nevertheless...”
- Respond rather than react.
- Adopt an “Imaginary Audience” stance. Interact as you would if other teachers, parents, administrators, staff, or students were observing.
- Adopt the perspective, “Parents/Teachers are doing what they believe to be best. If they knew better, they would do better.”
- Prayerfully prepare a script or automatic responses such as, “I value the perspective that you have shared. I will need time to reflect on it.”

Initiative

Mt. 18: 15-18 “If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. ...”

2 Timothy 4: 2-5 “... proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable, convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching.”

- Build a rapport before the school year begins.
- Feed rapport throughout the year.
- Use a consistent script to interact with groups of parents/teachers.
- If a parent/teacher expresses concern or criticism make follow up contact.
- Be personable. Acknowledge parents/staff with a smile and make eye contact.
- Learn to “read” the interior, intuitive reaction that occurs within you during discussion. “Feed the hunger” rather than react to the behavior. Prayerfully prepare a response for typical situations that will address the parent/teacher need and honor your own needs and limits.
 - (1) If you feel **annoyance**, the person is probably feeling insecure. Provide positive attention. Help him/her to feel a sense of belonging, safety, importance, and worth.
 - (2) If you feel **anger**, a power struggle is in process. The person wants control. Acknowledge that the parent is the primary educator of the child and the teacher is the professional. Seek opinion, ask advice, or invite the person to devise a solution.

- (3) If you feel **hurt**, revenge is operating. The person probably perceives that he/she is being treated unfairly, unjustly, disrespectfully or with disregard. When our feelings are hurt we tend to retaliate, often unconsciously. Honor the dignity of the parent/teacher. Express respect. Acknowledge the hurt, express regret; assure that the hurt he/she is feeling is unintentional on your part. Ask what it will take to repair the damage.
- (4) If you are feeling **frustrated** and thinking, "I give up!" it indicates that the parent/teacher is feeling despair, hopelessness or inadequacy. Focus on assets; avoid criticism as well as pity. Offer hope. Identify with the person's feelings. Suggest reframing "I can't" statements by adding the word, "yet." "I can't do this and so yet!" Ask the parent/teacher to name what tactics he/she has already tried. Offer to pray with the information, to research useful suggestions, and to schedule a follow up to plan together for success.

Truth

Ephesians 4: 14 "Speak the truth in love."

Ephesians 4: 29-32 "Say only the good things that folks need to hear; things that will really help them."

- Three-door Test (Richard Rohr, OFM) 1. Is it true? 2. Is it necessary? 3. Will it be helpful?
- Demonstrate an "A Plus" Approach¹
 - APPRECIATE the person for bringing issues directly to your attention.
 - AFFIRM the person for presenting the issue in a rational, understanding manner.
 - ACKNOWLEDGE feelings, i.e., "Gee, Mrs. Jones, you seem so upset. How can I help?"
 - AVOID becoming defensive.
 - ASSUME positive intentions and motivations on the part of the parent/teacher.
 - ADMIT wrongdoing or guilt. Be secure enough to apologize even when you are not wrong.
- "I am sharing this with you, because I would want to know."
- "There is a PERCEPTION that . . . What would it take to change this perception?"

Hope

Romans 5: 3-4 "... suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character [virtue], and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

- Adopt the attitude of "improvement vs. perfection." "Any positive growth is movement in the right direction." (Todd Whitaker)
- "What is this in the light of eternity?"
- Capitalize assets; devise accommodations or compensations for deficits.
- Prayerfully research examples of people who overcame obstacles of nature or circumstance to develop other gifts, i.e., Edison, Einstein, Disney. Weave messages of hope into the conversation.
- When possible, be prepared to provide an appropriate article, book, or handout that the parent/teacher can keep.
- Offer to follow up the meeting by sending useful information home.
- Foster the dignity of the teacher, parent, and child. All were created in the Image of God. All are valuable and loved and loveable as they are in the eyes of God. God does not make mistakes. All are treasures to be discovered and celebrated. "God who began the good work will see to its completion" (Philippians 1: 6).
- The Savior has already come. You do not have the responsibility of salvation. Yours is the vocation to facilitate awareness within students, parents, and teachers and to offer support along the way.

¹ Whitaker, T. and Fiore, D. (2001). *Dealing with Difficult Parents (and with Parents in Difficult Situations)*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education, Inc., p. 87-96.