

BHERO's
Just in **TIME**

Communicating with Caregivers

A TOOLKIT OF SUGGESTIONS & STRATEGIES

BHERO
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

FOR COMMUNICATING WITH CAREGIVERS

- 1** Ongoing caregiver collaboration and conversation throughout the school year allows teachers to create and continue building relationships outside of the pre-established Parent-Teacher Conference schedule.
- 2** Families may encounter barriers to typical written methods of communication such as emails or text messages due to language differences or access to technology.
 - **What resources are available to you to address these barriers?**
 - **How might you communicate differently with families who need additional support?**
- 3** Consider preconceived ideas about student families based on personal knowledge of the student, or even the experiences other colleagues have shared about the student, their siblings, or their caregivers.
 - **How may these preconceptions influence interactions with families?**
 - **How might negative impacts of these perceptions be avoided?**
- 4** Document, document, document. If maladaptive student behavior emerges as a pattern, ensure you are documenting these interactions so that you have an opportunity to bring data to your conversations with caregivers, administrators, and other service providers, if necessary.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

FOR COMMUNICATING WITH CAREGIVERS

5

Inventory your current classroom-wide parent and caregiver communication strategies.

- **How often do you regularly communicate with all caregivers?**
 - What things do you include in this regular communication?
- **What modes of communication will you use for communication with all caregivers?**
- **What are the reasons you may contact a family outside of those regular communications?**
- **What is your plan or process for communication in those extenuating circumstances?**
 - Consider a first reach-out via a written note home, email, or text message to inform caregivers of the topic at hand. If no response is received where warranted, plan to make a phone call or set up an in-person meeting.

6

Normalize student communication with parents and caregivers within your classroom.

- Phrases like “share this with your grown-ups!” or “let your important people know about this!” can let students know that sharing with the adults in their life is important without assuming family structures or that all students live with their immediate family.
- Letting students know that their interactions with their important people are important, meaningful, and fun may encourage them to share consistently. With that, if additional communication between teacher and caregiver is needed, hopefully there is some context and familiarity established.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

FOR COMMUNICATING WITH CAREGIVERS

7

Start communicating directly with caregivers early!

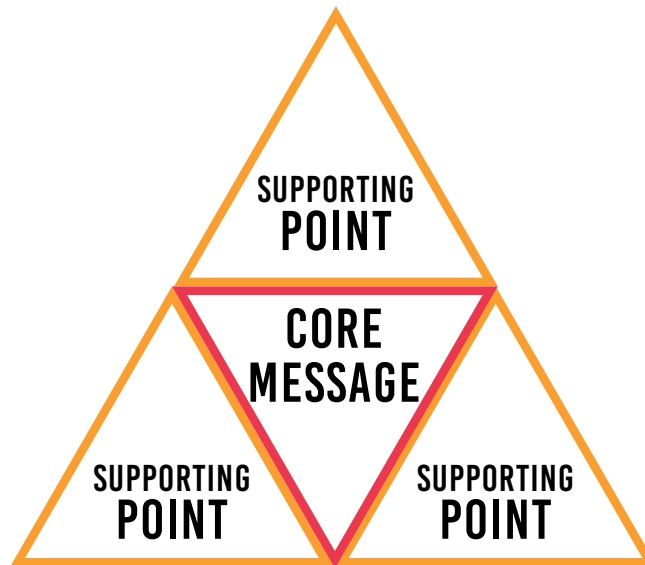
If an issue with a student becomes apparent early on within a term or school year, don't be afraid to reach out to caregivers to keep them in touch with the issue, and to let them know of your plans to address it within the classroom. This way, caregivers will not find out about an issue only when it becomes a more pervasive problem. This eliminates any confusion or wondering why they were not informed of an issue sooner.

PLANNING AND EXECUTING REAL-TIME COMMUNICATIONS

1

When a phone call home or an in-person interaction is needed, consider setting up a frame for your communication in advance.

- Think about the main message you hope to convey and include two or three details, examples, or points of data that can be called upon to support your message. See the frame below for a framework.



2

Plan to begin the conversation with introductions, if necessary, and start with a short greeting to ask how those in the conversation are doing.

3

Try to maintain an even tone throughout the interaction, and do not initiate a communication if you are currently feeling upset about the situation or concern at hand.

If you are feeling apprehensive about the interaction, or still upset from a previous conflict with the student, take a few deep breaths to center yourself before making the call, or wait until tomorrow.

PLANNING AND EXECUTING REAL-TIME COMMUNICATIONS

4

Be clear about your purpose and lead with nonjudgmental language.

- Instead of using phrases that place blame or judgement, “[Student] exhibited unacceptable behavior today,” try to lead with observations and concerns from your perspective. Connect the behavior with the rule or expectation that was not followed.

This can go a long way in ensuring that caregivers do not feel threatened by your message addressing a concern.

Some sample sentence starters include:

- “I am calling today because...” “I wanted to meet with you because...”
 - “... I’d like to discuss...”
 - “... I have noticed that...”

5

Even if calling about a concern, include something positive within the interaction!

- Feedback research shows that growth is achieved with a minimum ratio of 5 positive remarks for every 1 corrective remark.
- While you may not have an opportunity to include 5 positives about a student in a phone call home or parent meeting, know that leading or closing with a positive remark about a student can go a long way in helping parents know that you come from a place of observation and genuine care.

6

Provide space for questions.

- Ensure that caregivers have an opportunity to ask you any questions they may have – and do not be afraid to say, “I’m not sure,” followed by, “but I’ll search for that answer and get back to you.” Just make sure to follow-up! This means scheduling enough time for the communication to take place in its entirety without interruption.

PLANNING AND EXECUTING REAL-TIME COMMUNICATIONS

7

Remember that caregivers and families are educators' biggest partners in supporting student success.

Sending a message of collaboration rather than correction or criticism is important. Here are some phrases to consider:

- "I am hopeful that you can help me address this concern."
- "Is this [concern] something that you notice at home? If so, do you have suggestions?"
- "I wanted to thank you for instilling [this] value in your child. [This quality] makes them an asset to our classroom community."

8

Ask caregivers for their preferred method of communication for follow-ups or additional conversations regarding the topics discussed. Establish a timeline to check back in on the conversation, if necessary.

9

Despite all positive intentions and proactive communication, caregivers may become upset or frustrated as result of your communication, and project their emotions onto you.

Remember to meet parents & caregivers where they are at, just like you might do with your students. They may be having a difficult day or may have their own frustrations with their child. If this situation occurs, consider doing the following:

- **Simply listen – sometimes the caregiver needs to vent. You may gather more information and clues to form a response.**
- **Acknowledge their feelings:**
 - "I hear that you are feeling ____."
 - "That can be frustrating."
 - "I'm sorry you are going through this."
- **Remember that caregivers typically know their child best, and their strong emotions are most likely not intended to hurt you personally.**
- **If the conversation gets too overwhelming, offer to schedule a meeting at an alternative time and possibly invite an administrator to join.**

FOLLOWING UP AFTER REAL-TIME COMMUNICATIONS

- 1** Thank caregivers for their willingness to engage with you in conversation and let them know that their support is valued.
- 2** Let students know that you communicated with their caregivers, and that the interaction was helpful. Do not be afraid to let the student know how you hope to work together to address an issue, if there was one.
- 3** Follow through with your established timeline for follow-up with any answers to caregiver concerns or questions, as well as with progress toward intended outcomes.
- 4** If you have concerns about the communication that took place, debrief your interaction with a school leader. Should additional communications be necessary, feel free to invite your administrator in on a future phone call or in-person meeting. Just be sure to communicate this shift with the caregivers you interact with.