

Communicating Effectively

with all Stakeholders in an Afterschool Program

Working in an afterschool program involves taking on many roles and interacting with a variety of people, including staff, parents, and children. Communicating effectively helps maintain a clear vision of the program's goals, clarify expectations of staff and students, and assure parents that their children are in good hands.

PREPARE. Before addressing parents, principals, or employees, take a moment to map out your conversation. Keep your main points in mind, so you can control the direction of the conversation.

ESTABLISH CREDIBILITY. You are the expert when it comes to your program and the needs of your children. When confronted with a difficult conversation, start with assets, not deficits.

MAKE FIRST CONTACT. If you know someone will be calling to express a concern, call them first. Being caught off guard by an upset parent puts us at a disadvantage. Prepare your thoughts and be the first to call, this maintains control of the situation and is proactive.

USE TACTFUL PHRASES. When dealing with conflict, use language that is direct, but tactful. Phrases such as, "Help me understand by explaining why you feel that way" and "I'm glad we have a difference of opinion so we can find the best solution" can do a lot to defuse a situation and help you avoid an argument.

RECIPROCITY. Studies show that if a favor is done for someone, they are likely to repay that favor. Don't pass up the opportunity to invest in people you work with by doing small favors. This will develop a relationship based on mutual trust where there may not have been any common ground before.

GIVE SPECIFICS. Have you ever described a child's behavior as a "tantrum" or "meltdown"? Oversimplifying the behavior does not describe what actually happened. When giving behavior reports, be specific about the child's actions and describe the situation without including summative language or implying how someone felt. Specific language creates a more honest, direct conversation and does not mislead the listener.

THE TRIANGLE APPROACH.

According to "The Visionary Director," a director needs to act as a Manager, a Mentor, and a Community Supporter (Carter and Curtis). This means embracing a broader perspective and not favoring one style of management over another. Support your employees by offering resources for improvement, spending time understanding their struggles, and being the one to make the tough decisions. All three approaches are necessary to communicate effectively through the challenges afterschool leaders face daily.