

Crafting Communications That Connect with Families

Tips to communicate with families in a way that supports and engages them as partners in their children's education.



1 Break down complex topics into manageable activities.

Families are great partners in building children's academic and social-emotional skills, but they also have a lot on their plates. That's why clear, concise, and actionable communication is a must. Break it down by WHAT, WHY, and HOW.

WHAT do you want families to do or know?

WHY is it important?

HOW can they do it?

HOW can they keep this learning going?

Write a WHAT, WHY, and HOW that leverage families' relationships with their children and fit into daily routines.

Here's an example:

FACT: Describing the things you do builds language skills. These skills make it easier for kids to share their thoughts. Their reading skills get stronger, too!

TIP: Describe your actions during daily activities. As you do the dishes, talk about it. Try, "I'm pouring in the blue soap." Make sure you use lots of details.

GROWTH: Now it's your child's turn. As they play a game, ask "What are you doing?" Ask for details like, "How do you play?" and "Why do you like it?"

2 Write with equity, access, and empowerment in mind.

The words you choose often make the difference between a message that feels overwhelming and distancing, and one that feels inclusive and empowering.

Use the simplest, friendliest way to communicate a learning goal. If you can't explain a concept in a few basic words, it may require too much background knowledge for a parent or caregiver to successfully explore with their kid.

Example:

Standard:

Count up to ten objects using one-to-one correspondence (one object for each number word) with increasing accuracy.

SIMPLIFY IT! When children count objects 1 by 1, they learn that we count to find out “how many”.

3 Level your text to maximize accessibility.

The average reading level in the U.S. is 7th to 8th grade. You can use the **Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level Readability Formula** in Microsoft Word to calculate the grade level of what you write. ([See instructions.](#))

If the grade level is too high, here are some tricks to try to reduce it:

- Shorten your sentences. Use a period instead of a comma.
- Eliminate uncommon words or jargon.
- Choose words with fewer syllables.
- Include fewer descriptors and more action words.

4 Short is sweetest.

Research has shown that people typically only read the first one and a half lines of text in a paragraph. Even fewer read past the first paragraph. Keep your messages short and sweet so that families don't miss out on what you're sharing.

5 Formatting is your friend.

Use formatting to help families find the most important information in your message quickly and easily.

Use these simple strategies to focus attention on the most important words and phrases:

- Use bullet points and numbers
- Choose one pop-out color
- Use bold, but sparingly
- Stick with a single font

RAW TEXT	FORMATTED TEXT
<p>ParentPowered complements the work of teachers by helping families act on teachable moments.</p> <p>We accomplish this by requiring no teacher hours to develop curriculum or enroll families; giving families standards-aligned insights targeted to their child's age or grade and covering a whole-child curriculum that includes SEL, academic and physical development, and adult support content.</p> <p>Research shows this strategy can lead to 2+ months of growth over a school year.</p>	<p>ParentPowered complements the work of teachers by helping families act on teachable moments.</p> <p>How We Support Teachers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• No teacher time is needed to develop the curriculum or enroll families.• Standards-aligned insights and activities targeted to a child's age or grade level.• Whole-child curriculum that includes social-emotional learning, academic, physical development, and adult support content. <p>This research-based approach can lead to 2+ months of growth over a school year.</p>

6 Create a crystal clear call-to-action.

If you have something you need families to do — whether it's to attend an event, fill out a survey, or return a form — make it very clear, unmissable, and easy to act on.

If families don't respond, evaluate. Ask yourself these questions: Did they receive the communication? Is there another way I can reach out, like with a phone call? Did it reach them in their home language? What are other potential reasons they were not able to act, i.e. work schedule, lack of child care, lack of transportation, etc.? Now, brainstorm a list of ways you can shift your events and asks of families to be more inclusive and doable.

7 Grab 'em from the get-go.

If you're sending an email, use your **subject line** to tell the reader why the message matters to them. If you have one message or request to share, put it in the subject line. If you're sharing several pieces of information, put your most important piece of news or request in the subject line.

8 Right-size the context.

Save your personal note for the closing remarks. It will let families know you're thinking of them but make sure they get the primary purpose of your message right up front.

BONUS TIP! Lots to share? Make it a digest.

When you have a lot of news and resources to share, turn your email or letter into a digest. Start off with a skimmable content list, then use headers for each section and include a call-to-action in each section.

This will help readers see everything you have to share without first getting bogged down in the details. If you use Gmail, [make your digest a template](#) to save time creating future issues.

Sample

Today's Digest

1. Tips for Using Your Child's Chromebook
2. Family Read-a-Thon
3. Answers to Question About End-of-Year Tests
4. Free Breakfast Program

1. Tips for Using Your Child's Chromebook

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