

TIPS FOR TALKING TO PARENTS

Parents need to know that you think their child is lovable and capable. Before a parent can truly hear anything critical, they need to see that you value their child and truly want what's best for him or her.



"Do I really have to love every kid?" YES! If you want that child to learn and you want that child's parents to value your opinions then you have to LOVE them, even the tough parts. Sometimes you have to DIG DEEP, but in the end it's worth it.

<p>Start With the Positive (And Mean It!)</p>	<p>Even with the most difficult child, there is ALWAYS something positive. In any conversation, make sure to highlight these things FIRST to reassure parents that you love and care for their child.</p>
<p>Give Information (Not Judgments)</p>	<p>There is a big difference between "Your child is terrible at math," and "Your child scored a 60 on the last math test." I know that teachers would never say that a child is terrible at math, but we do say many other things that come across as judgmental.</p>
<p>Follow Information With Questions</p>	<p>Rather than saying "Sam never pays attention," try "During lessons, I noticed Sam is often looking around or distracted. Then afterwards, he asks to hear the directions again. Do you notice anything similar at home?" Now you've opened the door for parents to tell you about the potential problem instead of you making a judgment call.</p>
<p>Speak Like You're a TEAM</p>	<p>Parents need to know that you are in this together with them and that you have the same goals - to help their child. Use "we" rather than "you." Instead of "YOU need to read to your child more," try "Let's make a plan for how WE can help Soriah with her reading. I can work with her in a small group everyday. Can you read with her for fifteen minutes every evening?"</p>
<p>Value Parent's Ideas</p>	<p>For many parents, talking with a teacher is an uncomfortable experience. Some parents had bad school experiences of their own or they might just be overwhelmed with other challenges in their lives. Always validate their opinions and ideas. They need to feel like you trust their judgment as a parent (even if you really don't). Add on and offer suggestions, too, but never dismiss a parent's contribution.</p>

CLEAR LANGUAGE & HELPFUL FEEDBACK

Always have a “script” in mind when you are approaching a difficult conversation with a parent. Start with something positive, give information, ask a question (or two) and end by planning solutions as a team. Below are some examples of how this works. After a few conversations, it becomes a habit!

Instead of:	Try:
<p>Macy isn't good at math. She's really far behind. You need to work with her at home and maybe find a tutor.</p>	<p><u>Start Positive:</u> Macy has a great attitude about learning and works hard in math.</p> <p><u>Give Info:</u> She is struggling with the recent skills we've learned. She scored a 60 on our last test and a 50 on the test before.</p> <p><u>Ask a Question:</u> Have you noticed her struggling with the math homework at all?</p> <p><u>Be a Team:</u> I was thinking we could help her by giving her extra support at home and at school. At school, we can _____. And maybe at home you could _____.</p>
<p>Joe's writing is atrocious. His handwriting is so messy and he doesn't use any punctuation. You need to practice with him at home.</p>	<p><u>Start Positive:</u> Joe is so creative and tells such great stories, but he's having trouble getting them down on paper.</p> <p><u>Give Info:</u> Here is a sample of the kind of writing I'd like to see him work towards. Here are a few samples of his recent writing.</p> <p><u>Ask a Question:</u> Has he said anything about how he feels about writing?</p> <p><u>Be a Team:</u> I was thinking we could help him by giving him extra support at home and at school. At school, we can _____. And maybe at home you could _____.</p>
<p>Paul is lazy. You need to talk to him about putting in effort at school or he's going to fail this grade.</p>	<p><u>Start Positive:</u> Paul is such a bright boy. When I work with him in a small group he catches on so quickly. Even though he's so bright, his grades aren't reflecting his capabilities.</p> <p><u>Give Info:</u> For example, I know he's a good reader, but on our last reading test he turned it in after only 10 minutes. It had no name, the writing was hard to read, and the questions were only partially answered. He scored a 65 even though I know he could do much better.</p> <p><u>Ask a Question:</u> You know Paul better than anyone, what do you think is going on here?</p> <p><u>Be a Team:</u> I was thinking we could help him by giving him extra support at home and at school. At school, we can _____. And maybe at home you could _____.</p>

BE DESCRIPTIVE, NOT JUDGMENTAL

Especially when you are frustrated, it's difficult to come up with productive ways to express your thoughts to a parent. Always focus on giving examples of the behavior you've seen rather than sharing your opinion about the child's personality or traits.

Instead of a Judgment	Try Giving Information (And let parents make their own judgment call.)
Irresponsible	"Didn't turn in last 2 assignments or homework."
Hyperactive	"Always moving and making noises."
Rude	"Told another student "Just go away, idiot."
Bossy	"Upset her group by taking over the project."
Dishonest	"Said she lost the note but later we found it hidden in her desk."
Failing a subject	<u>Show</u> latest tests or test scores.
Never pays attention	"Asks me to repeat directions many times."
Doesn't want to learn	"Drew pictures during one lesson, played with pen in another."
Lazy	<u>Show</u> parents samples of incomplete or messy work.
Messy	<u>Show</u> parents examples of messy work.
Distracting	"Made a paper football and flicked it during math."
Slow	"Hasn't finished the last 3 assignments on time."
Uncooperative	"Turned her back to her small group and stayed that way."
Aggressive	"Hit another child for taking his pencil."
Disrespectful	"Told another teacher to 'shut up.'

Whenever possible, SHOW examples (such as tests, journals, or recent work) or GIVE examples of specific incidents that will highlight the problem.

POWERFUL PRAISE

When you are struggling with a particular student, sometimes it's hard to come up with positive things to say. Here is a list of ideas to help get you thinking. Remember, always be sincere!

Category	Examples
Work Habits	Gives great effort
	Work is always neat and complete
	Follows directions well
Social Behaviors	Friendly to everyone
	Helpful or kind
	Cares about friends
	Always respectful
	Very cooperative
	Shows great leadership in class
Academic	Excels in math, reading, science, etc.
	Loves math, reading, science, etc.
	Always turns in homework
General	Creative thinker
	Artistic
	Positive attitude
	Always smiling
	Athletic
	Always on time
	Organized
	Gives the best hugs!