



Effective Workplace Communication for Leaders

What to do: Use this tool to explore communications methods and practices to use with staff members, program partners, and families.

Why it matters: Communicating effectively when providing feedback to staff, addressing conflicts, and navigating difficult conversations can be managed by using approaches that respect others' perspectives and come from a mindset that promotes personal growth.

Choosing Methods of Communication

Although it may sound easy to choose a method to communicate, deciding how and when to do so deserves some thought. Whether you're providing feedback to a staff member, reaching out to a current or potential partner, or requesting information from (or providing information to) families, take time to choose an appropriate method.

Be sure to include a way for your contact to reply, if necessary. Both speaking and listening are important to good communications.



in person



virtual



text



phone



email or
snail mail



other written
communication

Tips for Communicating With Staff

Here are some general guidelines:

- Communicate with clarity and purpose, whether you're announcing a schedule change or acknowledging a staff member's contributions to a successful community event.
- Have regular staff meetings and encourage input, questions, and ideas from everyone. Use icebreakers and team-building activities to help create a sense of community.
- If your staff or team uses a group messaging app, make sure everyone has access and knows how and when to use it.
- Make time for one-on-one interactions.
- Be aware of your body language and tone of voice.



Providing Feedback to a Staff Member

Providing effective feedback is an important way to build your staff's confidence and competence. But it's not always easy. Think about a time when you felt uncomfortable sharing your thoughts with a supervisor. What was it about the situation that made you uncomfortable? Could better or more effective communication have resolved the discomfort?

Components of Effective Feedback

When you're reviewing employee performance or offering feedback based on an observation, make sure your feedback is:

- **Focused on improvement.** Begin by opening a dialogue with the person. Let your staff know you're there to support their work and to help them improve their skills.
- **Specific.** Use specific details when offering feedback. If an employee is doing a great job, tell exactly why you think that person is doing a great job, and reference an action you observed to support your assessment. Conversely, if an employee's performance is poor, describe particular actions you've observed so that there aren't questions about what behaviors need to improve.
- **Ongoing.** Review employee performance throughout the year. Don't wait for specific review periods. Provide informal feedback as needed.

A Trusting Environment for Feedback

What steps would you take to create a trusting environment when providing feedback during an employee review or a difficult conversation? Here are some steps to consider:

- Schedule a meeting with the staff member to show respect for that person's time as a professional.
- Consider providing a substitute for the staff member if the meeting is during program hours.
- Choose a meeting area that's quiet, private, and free of as many distractions as possible.
- Smile and greet the staff member when they enter the meeting space. Include brief, personal conversation where appropriate (commenting on the weather, for example).
- Don't blindside the staff member by launching straight into a problem. Begin by discussing the methods of review, or by explaining that the conversation might be difficult.
- Discuss the feedback or situation simply and objectively, leaving out comments such as "I was shocked to see...." Instead, state facts and be specific: "During the first 10 minutes of the group activity, the instructor set the stage for learning by...."
- Provide an opportunity for the staff member to respond. Keep in mind that not everyone responds positively to feedback. Be prepared to answer any questions. Make sure the person understands what's expected and agrees on a plan of action.
- Refer to program policies and use terms like "we" instead of "I" to discuss how you'll work to make improvements. Using the term "we" changes the tone and implies that you're in this together.
- If necessary, follow up with the employee shortly after the conversation to check on progress and provide any needed support.



Tips for Communicating With Program Partners

School and community partners can be valuable program assets and may even be considered extensions of your staff, so pay attention to good communications practices. Here are some practices for using communication to keep or establish effective working relationships with partners:

- Keep communication lines open and talk frequently.
- Keep program goals in mind — yours and the partner's.
- Recognize partners' successes and contributions — not just when speaking with them but also in public ways, such as on your program's website, social media, and print materials.
- Refer to written agreements and the memorandum of understanding (MOU) if you need to have a difficult conversation with a partner.

Tips for Communicating With Families

Communication between your program and families requires mutual respect for the roles and strengths each has to offer. Here are some practices to consider:

- Communicate clearly, consistently, and frequently, using more than one medium to reach as many families as possible. (For example, put urgent information such as temporary changes to program hours on the program website and the school website, in a text, on social media, and in a print message that goes home with students).
- Make sure families know that the communication lines go both ways and that you'll respond if they reach out.
- Find out about and use each family's preferred method of communication.
- Provide information in languages other than English when necessary.
- Find opportunities to build relationships — and to sustain them over time.
- Focus on shared goals for children and their learning environment. Reach out regularly to share observations, ask questions, and learn from the family's experience and knowledge.
- Communicate from strengths-based attitudes such as these:
 - Families are our partners.
 - All children have strengths.
 - Families are the first and most important teachers.

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