**Communicating your concerns to Families**

Preschool Field Officer Service

Communicating with parents/carers can be difficult at times, even for the most experienced Early Childhood Educators. The way you communicate can often either encourage partnerships or potentially fracture relationships. A partnership works best when messages are clear, specific and considerate of the other person’s feelings. Always talk to parents with the goal of strengthening relationships.

Approaching Parents

* It is best practice to approach a parent with the purpose of discussing how you can both SUPPORT the child. Try to avoid saying you want to meet to discuss your concerns. This helps set the tone for the meeting. Instead use language/words such as learning, skills and development rather than concerns, issues or worries.
* It is really important to catch the parent as they are not rushing (eg late for work). Say what you want to say in a calm and relaxed tone.
* Remember: positive – *need – positive*
1. It’s always really helpful to gain some information and feedback from the family initially. Really listening to what they’ve noticed with their child’s development may give you insight to extend your thoughts. For example, if the parent tells you that when they go to friends’ houses, other people have trouble understanding their child’s speech, this gives you some information that the parents are already aware to build on.
2. Start by providing some positive feedback about the child to the family – be specific
3. Discuss the child’s needs in a sensitive manner - be specific and relate to the developmental milestones and provide examples from your observations.
4. Finish on another positive - figure out ‘what are the next steps/plan?’

For example: “I have prepared some notes on Grace’s participation in the program. She is doing really well at remembering and following the routine. (Pause) I am noticing she is finding it difficult to interact with her peers. She is mostly preferring to play alone at kindergarten. Could we meet together so we can work out how we can best support Grace? (Pause) When can we meet?”

Organising the Parent/carer meeting

* Offer to meet and discuss development at a time that suits the family/carers.
* Consider who will attend – provide the opportunity for both parents/carers/grandparents to attend and arrange an interpreter if necessary (see below for more info around booking interpreters).
* Be prepared – have notes/observations prepared to refer to. Base these notes on the child’s strengths as well as areas to work on. Have a section to note actions as a result of the meeting. This is important!
* Consider appropriate setting for meeting and seating; ensure the attendants feel at ease.

During the Parent meeting

* Initially have your notes put away in a folder/diary or similar so that you can listen well to the parents without focusing first on what you want to say.
* The parents should talk first about their child. Listening well to the parents allows you to hear where they are at with their understanding of their child’s learning and development and can give you a place to begin, depending on what the parent says e.g. Yes, we’ve noticed that Ashaz can have trouble talking with his peers at kinder too. I know what you mean… and so on.
* Remember to let parents/carers know at every opportunity that they know their child best. You are after their input to understand the situation better.
* Remind the parents/carers that the purpose of the meeting is to share information with each other, and to work out how to support the child.
* State the factual information you have observed at kindergarten.
* Ask questions as to how this information compares to the child when at home / in other social settings.
* Relate this to child development information.

\*Remember that the outcome of the meeting may not be the outcome that you had in mind. It is our role as Educators to share information and provide options for families to choose what is best for them

***Further information:***

* <https://raisingchildren.net.au/for-professionals/working-with-parents/communicating-with-parents/communication-with-parents>
* <https://www.understood.org/articles/having-difficult-conversations-with-families-a-teachers-guide>
* <https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/relationships/communication-skills-for-educators>
* <https://allplaylearn.org.au/early/educator/educator-guide/>

The PSFO service is able to be accessed (phone or email) if any Educator requires further advice or support with this. A Request for Support form does not need to be submitted for you to receive this support.

**Tel: 9742 8199 or Email** **psfo.service@wyndham.vic.gov.au**

Interpreting Service – Language Loop

**Have you considered utilising the Language Loop Interpreting Service to support building relationships with families & to support their understanding of conversations about their child and services available to support them?**

The Department of Education (DE) has partnered with ***Language Loop (formerly VITS)*** to provide free interpreting services to state funded early childhood services who do not receive direct funding for language services.

This can be used, for example, to support families from a language background other than English and require communication to be undertaken in their first language.

Visit the website for more info - <https://www.vic.gov.au/use-interpreter-early-childhood-education-services>