

Communication tips and ideas for teachers

Telephone Calls

- **For classroom/homeroom teachers:** at the start of the school year call the parent/carer to
 - introduce yourself, perhaps explain what you'll be doing in the first few weeks at school,
 - ask if there's anything you need to know about their child,
 - ask for any relevant information regarding the family and their child's learning,
 - ask how they would like to be contacted if there's something you need to discuss with them about their child (positive and concerns),
 - to know which parents/carers require an interpreter or translated information and
 - explain how they may contact you during the school year.

Remember, it's always best to make sure there is some initial positive contact with the family, rather than the first call being about a problem.

- **For the school leadership team:** telephone new families starting at your school, perhaps prioritising those who may be unfamiliar with the Victorian education system or who have children who may be at risk of experiencing difficulties within the school.
- Use a **voice-messaging system** where parents can call and listen to the teacher's daily or regularly updated message (about homework, what is being learned at school, any reminders etc). If the system has capacity for parents to leave messages, this would facilitate two-way communication. The system could also be linked to the school's website.
- **Automated out-bound messaging** that provides up to date information on upcoming events or delays in bus returns from excursions. Advanced versions of this system can automatically call parents with information they need to be aware of, such as changes to opening or closing times. Multilingual messages can be provided where appropriate.

Written notes / emails

Write your students' families a short personal note inviting them to feel welcome to visit the school or to email or call you. Notes and emails can also be used to let families know about classroom events or special activities. Let families know the best time and method to use to contact you. Keep the language friendly, simple and easy to understand. Remember, many people have languages other than English as their primary or only language and for some, their home language doesn't have written form.

Informal records

Keep a record to remind you of the contacts you have had with families. This helps provide continuity in communication and also to keep track of any family considerations or concerns.

Family cards

Get students to fill out cards about their own family (either on paper or electronically) with family members names, interests, hobbies, and information of interest about their families and the languages they speak, understand, read and write.



Classroom newsletters, calendars and blogs

- Let families know what is happening in your classroom and how they can help their children with their learning. Newsletters might also include handy parenting tips such as how parents may help their child's learning, recommended TV programs, and family activities that support the learning focus for that term/semester.
- Utilise Blogs which enable parents to communicate directly with each other as well as you in an online environment.

Class / whole-school presentations

- Ask students to create personal invitations to their families for classroom presentations or events. Hold the events at different times and on different days of the week to assist families whose commitments mean they might not otherwise be able to attend.
- Provide families with as much advance notice as possible of the event, especially for whole school events.

Open house

Holding an 'Open House' for your classroom or the whole school welcomes families and community members into the school. This is an opportunity to celebrate children and young people's learning and provides an opportunity for families to come into the school and your classroom. This may assist in encouraging further interaction with the school. Have translators/bilingual community members present to help build a welcoming environment.

Celebrations

Harmony Day, community celebrations, and important cultural dates and festivals are great opportunities to welcome families and community members from diverse cultures into the school, to showcase their culture and help build cultural competence amongst staff and students. Ask community members to help plan and organise such events.

Shopping centre / community displays

Take news of your school out into the community. Shopping Centre displays, information booths, community notice boards, school students participating in community events – these are all ways to showcase your students and your school.

Behaviour

- Think about welcoming behaviours and how to welcome families into your school and classroom. Encourage children to invite their parents in to see their work, where they sit, etc at a convenient time. Remember, parents may feel intimidated in coming into a school or classroom.
- Think about how your behaviour and body language may discourage parents from feeling welcome, eg standing at the door entrance with arms folded can communicate that parents are not welcome into the class room. Perhaps invite your students to bring their families into the room 'for a look' when they do school pick to help 'break the ice'.

Social media

If it is appropriate for your school's population demographics, consider using social media such as face book, blogs, twitter etc to communicate with your families. Some teachers use these tools to communicate with families about what's happening in the class that week and post news/photos etc. You can restrict access to your posts to families of your students.

Additional resources

DEECD School Communications Toolkit can be accessed at

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/schooloperations/commstoolkit.htm>