

When There Is a Problem

It is worth repeating here. If you have made positive home contacts earlier in the year, the potential for negative interactions is minimized because you have already established that you and the parents are partners in the education process.

If despite your best efforts you need to lead a difficult conference use the following guidelines:

- Keep both feet on the ground. If you are upset, say that now is not a good time to discuss this. Wait until you are calm to call or to continue a discussion.
- When you need to call home to explain a problem, write out a script of what you are going to say before you call.
- Pause before you pounce. Do not say something, write something or email something you will regret later.
- Do not lecture or nag.
- Try as best you can to identify the cause of the problem and match your intervention to the perceived cause.
- If you are a parent, empathize as a parent.
- Ask what they have tried so far.
- Ask what has worked best in the past.
- Use inclusive language such as, "We have a problem" and "Are you hearing/seeing what I hear/see?"
- Use attribution retraining. See page 18.
- Use collaborative problem solving.
- When it seems appropriate, ask if they would like suggestions on what they might try at home. Do not give unasked for advice.
- Also ask if they would be interested in something to read. If they say no, then you at least know that you offered help as a collaborator rather than as a parenting expert.
- Review communication skills on pages 20-21 and translate them to communicating with adults.
- Review dealing with unmet expectations on pages 32-33 and translate them to communicating with adults.
- Consult your colleagues. If the problem or interaction seems bigger than you can solve alone, do not hesitate to ask another staff member to advise you prior to the conference and/or to sit in with you. Staff members to consider including are the guidance counselor, the social worker, the school psychologist, a special educator (as appropriate), or an administrator.
- When there is progress in a negative situation, call home to report the progress.
- Always thank the parent for working with you...even if you would like a little more help! See page 22 for options.