

September 2021

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inside

Dealing With Irate Parents and Difficult Board Members

When it's not possible to prevent people from getting angry, the best thing you can do is learn how to defuse that anger safely. Read these tips for a new perspective and some tactics for calming the situation to help you find a solution.

Developing the Message

It is challenging to slow down to develop a thoughtful, accurate message when the situation demands urgency, but the benefits are less confusion and greater trust with your audiences. Read tips for developing a message and ensuring that all staff understand the details and are able to stay on message.

Resource Roundup: Help Parents Cope with Pandemic Uncertainty

These are uncertain times. The Delta variant of COVID-19 has brought greater fear and uncertainty after months of pandemic fatigue. We could all use some tips to help us cope for the next wave. These recommendations from a school social-emotional learning and behavioral health expert may help.

School-to-Parent Letter Templates

At the start of the school year, it is helpful to update the resources in your files. These letter templates may help with fast responses to common situations. Included are templates for a back-to-school welcome; mask requirements and guidelines; student injuries; head lice; and tips for child safety.

What School Administrators Need to Know about PR to be Successful

Good administrators are good communicators, which is more than just talking to, or at, people and sending newsletter updates. Communication must be two-way and transparent. The goal is to build trust. The key factors include learning about people, avoiding assumptions, managing projects well, understanding your mission, valuing feelings and prioritizing direct communication.

INSIGHTS FOR PARENTS: Exercise Helps Kids Learn

Exercise has been shown to improve academic performance and behavioral issues in kids. In addition, regular exercise offers substantial health benefits and can help develop lifelong healthful habits. Read these guidelines for helping your child engage in helpful activities.

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Dealing with irate parents and difficult board members

We all have to deal with angry people and difficult situations at one time or another. While we'd prefer that didn't happen in the first place, it is reality. Sometimes, you are simply in the wrong place and time when you are on the receiving end of someone's pent-up irritation, or you're the representative for your administration on a day when things went horribly awry. Or sometimes, being human, you genuinely made a mistake that people are angry about. It happens!

When it's not possible to prevent people from getting angry, the best thing you can do is learn how to defuse that anger safely.

Safety first

While raising one's voice, gesturing wildly, and making abusive comments does not necessarily mean that the situation is going to become violent, you should understand that a person exhibiting those characteristics has already lost some form of control. In situations where the person you're speaking with is escalating, the safety of you and the people around you needs to be foremost in your mind.

"I will note that it seems our conversation is not being productive," says Scott Wilson, Former Pasco [Wash.] Teachers Union President. "Then I tell them I'll discuss it with our administration and they will get back to you." He suggests that teachers not take it upon themselves to deal with the parent once the parent has lost control. "I tell the administrator that I need them to intervene, and that if the parent continues this way of communicating and badgering, I will be asking you to handle communicating with them as well."

Wilson also notes that it is against Washington State law to verbally abuse, yell at, or curse at a teacher. "[Board] members should know that abusive parents are the responsibility of administration and telling a teacher to handle it or get over it is completely unacceptable. Good administrators know the importance of protecting the staff."

Any person who shall insult or abuse a teacher anywhere on the school premises while such teacher is carrying out his or her official duties, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor; the penalty for which shall be a fine of not less than ten dollars nor more than one hundred dollars. RCW 28A.635.010

If your irate board member or angry parent can be calmed down enough to be able to discuss ways to resolve their problem, then you are in a good place to continue the discussion. Sometimes, however, the anger seems to have no end, and then you have to start looking at the less logical reasons.

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Anger is a symptom

Defuse Anger
Safely

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Licensed clinical psychologist Nadia Persun, Ph.D, points out that behind the obnoxious behavior, shouting and gesturing, most angry people are suffering from a core issue of feeling that their needs are not being met or respected. “Most likely, they are trying to tell you that they are feeling hurt, ignored, disrespected, unappreciated and unloved,” said Persun. <http://psychcentral.com/blog/archives/2012/07/26/how-to-switch-off-an-angry-person>

“When parents get frustrated, it is usually because they feel like their concerns for their child are not being heard or understood,” explains Kalina McCreery, an Enrichment Teacher who has worked in Chicago, Atlanta and Los Angeles. “Just like the kids, when they get frustrated, logic can shut down and emotions can lash out. In these moments, I like to step back, stand silent and still and let them yell themselves out, then hand them a cup of water.”

McCreery then goes on to state that she is listening and wants to help reach a resolution that works within existing rules. “This will be easier for me if we both remain calmer. Will you let me help you find that resolution?”

Neill Gibson, author of *What's Making You Angry*, suggests that it is important not to take anger personally, because their anger is never about you. “This can be challenging, but you can start learning how to avoid taking things personally by understanding this: Everything people do or say comes from a desire to meet their needs or to support something they value. For example, an angry person may need consideration or value responsibility. And they are doing the best they can to express their needs and values.”

Give out an imaginary cupcake

Once you're able to recognize that the angry board member or colleague in front of you has some core feelings that are not being appreciated, Persun has a silly-sounding suggestion with some good psychology behind it. She suggests giving out an ‘imaginary cupcake’ to soothe your angry colleague.

“Cupcakes are sweet, peaceful, calming and smile-inducing,” she explains. “Raging people often are in dire need of an imaginary cupcake. A big part of their anger is driven by their belief or feeling that they never get any or someone stole or damaged their cupcakes,” Persun says. “So, generously give them one or even a couple, even when they seem to be undeserving of any sweetness.”

Persun suggests that listening and responding to the angry person's unmet needs calmly and emphatically can serve as the key to getting more cooperation from emotionally agitated people. She suggests that you say, “I think I understand what is going on here, but feel free to correct me, my friend,” and so on. “Then offer some reflective listening, validating their concerns to an extent,” she says. Even if you do not agree with their point of view, you can usually find a way to agree with them in theory, without assigning any blame or offering any argument.

What if I've used up all the cupcakes?

Time is also a tool to calm things down. “When I could sense the parent was worked up, I just said I would like to sit down with them to discuss the issue,” explains Paula Dibble, a former preschool teacher in Washington State. “I always made it for the next day, which helped diffuse things for both parties.

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Sometimes, despite using all of the above techniques, your colleague or parent still remains upset. What do you do then? Fortunately, beyond a certain point, anger isn't your problem — it's theirs.

After you have done your best to actively solve the problem at hand, taken responsibility for mistakes you or your department made and/or put in place methods to prevent the problem from occurring in the future, the way someone feels about it really is beyond your control.

Clarkson has her own technique for dealing with an angry person who simply refuses to be soothed or helped. She says, "That's when I have a cup of tea and move on."

Contributed by Megan J. Wilson, a Los Angeles-based freelance writer and communications consultant

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Developing the Message

In this era of constant “Breaking News,” it’s understandable that school districts want to provide staff and parents as much information as quickly as they can.

But unfortunately, the result is often mixed messages and confusion.

The superintendent is quoted on the evening news saying one thing. The communications staff writes something else in a press release. A principal tells her staff something else.

Staff at one Oregon district expressed frustration that they received five different announcements from the superintendent and assistant superintendent about the return to buildings during the COVID pandemic.

It’s not just schools sending out muddled messages. Communications from politicians and health officials about COVID often left people frustrated and uncertain about what to do.

Masks aren’t necessary, except for medical personnel. If you really want a mask, use a non-medical one. Actually, it’s better to wear a mask all the time. You must wear a mask.

While districts may feel pressure to communicate quickly, a more prudent approach is to slow down and follow these guidelines:

- Take time to thoughtfully craft your message before distributing it to the world.
- Make sure it’s accurate and includes all the pertinent details.
- Make sure all of your communicators are on the same page, so that the same message is given by all. If more than one person is going to deliver the message, make sure the message is in writing, so everyone provides the same information and context to their different audiences.
- Make sure your communication doesn’t raise more questions than it answers.

That sounds simple but can be challenging, especially in a rapidly changing landscape. It’s better to take a few extra hours, or even an extra day, to release accurate information than to spend the next several days backtracking and trying to undo the confusion and frustration that comes with misinformation.

If you feel the need to communicate before you have complete details, remember that it’s OK to just say, “We don’t have all the information, but we will provide an update just as soon as we do.” Staff and community will appreciate your efforts to be transparent and to share whatever you can as soon as you can.

During the initial stages of COVID, when situations and rules were changing at breakneck speed, many districts issued weekly (and sometimes daily) updates, offering parents and staff whatever new information they may have. Sometimes the message was just that they didn’t
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have any new information, but it helped assure patrons that the district was staying abreast of the latest developments.

Messaging

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Transparency and timely, accurate communications help strengthen relationships with your staff and community. Delivering a clear message helps them understand what's going on, how it affects them, and what they need to do. Backtracking after inaccurate or confusing information raises doubts and erodes trust.

Some key points for crafting clear messages and delivering in a timely manner:

- 1. Be clear and consistent.** Set up a schedule for communicating regularly with your audiences, not just when there's a crisis. If there are important decisions or developments, communicate sooner and more frequently. It is important to assure people that you are staying on top of things and that you are making thoughtful, well-informed decisions that you believe are in the best interests of students and staff.
- 2. Tell parents how you plan to communicate different messages.** If you use a parent notification system, such as FlashAlert, to notify parents about school closures, provide information about how they can sign up to receive these alerts. If you send a weekly newsletter home in elementary students' backpacks, let parents know to check those backpacks every Friday. If you send important information via email, make sure parents provide their email addresses and inform you when there are changes. Whatever tools you use, make sure parents are aware of them, what kind of information you plan to share with them, and most importantly, how to sign up to use them.
- 3. Beef up your website.** There are a myriad of communication tools available, and it can be tempting to try them all. But your website should be your "go-to" communication tool, the place where you post all important information. Regularly reinforce with parents that your website is where to go for calendar items, to review school board policies and to find other items of importance. The key is to keep your website current and relevant. People won't continue to go there if the information is outdated or was never added in the first place.
- 4. Be strategic in choosing communication tools.** Electronic newsletters, email, social media and mobile apps are just a few of the many tools that schools use to communicate with parents and staff. However, less is more when it comes to communication tools. When you use too many different tools, parents get confused about which messages are located where. Social media is great for photos and short announcements. Newsletters are great for more detailed news and feature stories. Choose a couple of effective tools, educate your audiences about how to use them, and then be consistent in using them. A strong website, an electronic newsletter and a social media presence (such as Facebook) offer plenty of opportunities for communicating well.

Most importantly, make sure your message is clear, complete and accurate, so audiences can easily understand it and trust its content. A straightforward message, delivered in a timely manner, is a key step in building trust and strong relationships with your staff, parents and community.

Contributed by Connie Potter, communications consultant

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Resource roundup: Help parents cope with pandemic uncertainty

Schools will open this fall, but the pandemic is still here — along with the mask and vaccine debate, fatigue, mistrust, fear, uncertainty and possibly chaos as we tackle the next challenge: the Delta variant.

Although most restrictions have been lifted — for now — and we are returning to “normal,” it is still a difficult time. Consider helping your parents navigate the current pandemic messages, warnings and rules by including coping tips in your back-to-school materials. Add some helpful, positive messages to your school newsletter, principal’s back-to-school message, parent hand-outs, social media posts and website messages.

Get started with these recommendations from Chris Moore, Social-Emotional Learning & Behavioral Health Coordinator for Salem-Keizer Public Schools, Ore.

Go easy on yourself

If there’s one thing families should keep in mind, it’s this: Go easy on yourself! Forget being perfect. None of us is perfect, especially during a global health crisis.

Strengthen your emotional skills. The pandemic forced us back to basics, so focus on relationship-building and self-compassion. Growth and learning start with social and emotional strength. For example, if you’re struggling as a parent, it’s OK for your kids to see that, but let them see how you navigate it in appropriate ways rather than just having an outburst. They’re getting life lessons on managing a crisis. That means they’re getting tools to be resilient. When you feel like you want to scream, breathe. Then breathe some more, Moore said. Give yourself time to calm your brain; go from raw emotions to reasoning.

Practices he suggests to boost resilience and capacity:

- Get on a regular sleep cycle.
- Move your body daily.
- Connect with people who care about you.
- Take scheduled breaks from screen time.
- Get outside.
- Try a free, evidence-based self-care app, such as the SuperBetter website (www.superbetter.com) or Mindshift CBT or MindDoc apps.
- Ask for help and let people help you. You’re not alone.
- Offer the same kindness to yourself that you would to someone you care about.
- Be mindful and accepting of how you’re feeling in the moment without judgment.
- Recognize our shared humanity and reality that sometimes being human is just really hard.

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More practical suggestions on talking to kids, based on ages:

The simple advice is: Be firm. Be kind. Be flexible. Find specific tips in this list of guidelines for parent-child communications from the Child Development Institute. <https://childdevelopmentinfo.com/how-to-be-a-parent/communication/#gs.7ovlax>

Some of the basic principles of good parent-child communication include:

- Show interest and offer help.
- Turn off the TV, avoid calls when your child wants to talk.
- Keep conversations private and avoid embarrassing your child in front of others.
- Physically get down to your child's level to talk.
- If you are angry about a behavior, regain your cool before you communicate so you can be objective.
- Listen carefully and don't interrupt. Be courteous. Don't ever put your child down with name-calling or insults.
- For specific incidents, if you have knowledge of a situation, confront your child with the information you know about.
- Show your child that you accept them, regardless of what they have done.

Recommended resources for more information

Books for adults:

- "Thrivers" by Michele Borba
- "The Whole Brain Child" by Dan Siegel & Tina Bryson
- "Brainstorm" by Dan Siegel
- "How to Talk so Kids Will Listen (& Listen so Kids Will Talk) by Faber & Mazlish
- "Anxious Kids, Anxious Parents" by Wilson & Lyons

Books for kids:

- "What to Do When You Worry Too Much — A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety" by Dawn Huebner
- "Ruby Finds a Worry" by Tom Percival
- "Change Your Brain, Change Your Life (Before 25)" by Jesse Payne

Websites:

- **Child Mind Institute:** <https://childmind.org/>
- **Greater Good Magazine:** <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu>
- **Anxiety Canada:** www.anxietycanada.com/articles/parent-child

Free Apps:

- **MindShift CBT:** www.anxietycanada.com/resources/mindshift-cbt/
- **SuperBetter:** www.superbetter.com
- **MyLife:** <https://my.life>
- **Stop, Breathe & Think Kids:** Focus, Calm & Sleep: www.common sense media.org/app-reviews/stop-breathe-think-kids-focus-calm-sleep
- **MoodMission:** <https://moodmission.com>
- **Happify:** <https://my.happify.com>

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Letter templates from schools to parents

A return to normal school operations means a return to normal parent communications. Letter templates are a helpful way to send out parent messages, especially during a crisis. Here are some ready-to-revise letters to help make your communications processes more efficient and less stressful.

These letter templates address some common school crisis situations. Adapt them for a faster, easier response when a crisis hits.

They are addressed to parents from the school principal. Have the school print them on school letterhead and ask the principal to sign. *Replace any italicized text with your own school information.*

Don't forget to post the key messages on your websites and social media.

Letter topics include:

- Back-to-school welcome
- Mask requirements and guidelines
- Student injury on school grounds
- Remove head lice and nits
- Child safety tips

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**From the principal or teacher:
Back-to-school letter**

Date

Dear Parent or Guardian,

We're so excited to welcome you back to *(name of school)*. The first day is *(day and date)*, and we are busy getting ready for a safe, fun, productive school year.

We are excited to see you and welcome you to come to the office if you have any questions or need any information to help you prepare for the new year. Our school office will be open *(hours here and dates if not open every day)*. You may also call us at *(office phone number)*.

To help you with start-of-school planning, here are important dates for the first month of school. Find additional information on our school website and Facebook page *(include addresses for each site)*.

Other information to include:

- Health and safety information, COVID protocols.
- Important dates: Student orientation, registration, parent club meetings, meet-the-teacher events. First day of school for each grade (if they differ) and the times that students are to be in school each day.
- Bus ridership information: Bus stops, times, driver names, transportation department information.
- Dress codes requirements
- Immunization requirements
- Other information for students: discipline policies, field trip schedule, cell phone use, etc.

We are looking forward to a great year, and we can't wait to see you back at school! Please contact me if you have questions or need assistance as you prepare for the coming year.

Sincerely,
(Principal name)
Principal

**From the principal:
Mask requirements**

Date

Dear *(school name)* Parent and Guardians:

The new school year is an opportunity to come back together to learn in person. We are hoping that this year will operate like any other normal school year, which will be good for our students and our whole school community.

We are following guidance from state health authorities and plan to follow recommendations to keep everyone safe. As new variants emerge, potentially posing greater risks, we want to make every effort to ensure a safe environment. This may include mandatory mask-wearing.

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If masks are required, we will be sure to communicate the rules in advance. We understand that some people oppose masks; we are committed to following any safety rules that may help protect individuals from sickness and that allow us to come back together.

We will be sure to share helpful guidelines, and we will have masks available for students who lose or forget their masks.

Here are some helpful tips for effective masks:

- Masks are less effective if wearer touches them frequently or swaps them with peers.
- Cloth masks should be washed daily.
- Students should have a plastic bag or holder to carry their mask when they are not using them.
- Paper masks need to be disposed and replaced if the user coughs or sneeze into them, so users will need more than one mask on them for school.
- Masks should fit properly with the elastic bands around your ears and the mask covering the nose and mouth.

We will be sure to communicate any changes to our policies or recommendations. Your child's safety is our priority. Please feel free to contact our school office if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

(Principal name)
Principal

**From the principal:
Student injury on school grounds**

Date

Dear Parents,

Your child may have told you about an incident that took place at school today. I would like to take a moment to share some information with you about it in case your child has questions or concerns.

Add brief information about the incident.

Sample incident: In your child's shop class today, an unfortunate accident took place, and a student was injured. We called paramedics and they transported the student to the hospital. The accident happened while a teacher was demonstrating work on a table saw. A student was injured when a piece of wood struck the student. Staff reacted quickly, and the student received medical attention as soon as possible.

Providing a safe learning environment for our students and staff is our top priority. This was a very unfortunate incident. We are investigating it and will take steps to prevent incidents like this from happening in the future.

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We are also providing counseling for students who need to discuss this issue. If you have any questions or concerns about this incident, please feel free to give me a call at (*phone number*)

Sincerely,

(Principal name)
Principal

**From the principal:
Head lice**

Date

Dear (*school name*) Parent and Guardians:

Head lice or recently laid nits have been found in the hair on your child's head. Head lice have nothing to do with cleanliness or parenting skills.

Head lice are spread mostly by direct head-to-head contact and, less commonly, sharing hats, combs or hair accessories.

We don't want your child to miss any learning opportunities in school. Please send them to class, but it is important to follow treatment guidelines to eliminate lice and lice transmission.

Remove head lice and nits:

- Use a fine-toothed louse or nit comb. They are available at drug stores and are usually packaged with chemical lice treatments.
- Before using the fine-toothed nit comb, hair should be cleaned and combed or brushed to remove tangles.
- Use a bright light with magnification, if needed to see the nits. Work on a small section at a time. Repeat until no active lice or nits are visible.
- Comb every day for two weeks. It's important to continue this procedure, even if it appears the lice are gone. To occupy your child, play a video for them to watch.
- Be sure to carefully watch hair near the shaft where eggs are laid.
- If it is too difficult to comb your child's hair, ask your doctor or pharmacist for advice on anti-lice products or treatments. There are shampoos as well as chemical and non-chemical treatments. Read the instructions and warnings carefully.

Treatment of clothes and household items:

- To eliminate any lice on clothes and home items, you must wash them in hot water. Any items that can't be washed (e.g., large pillows) should be sealed in a garbage bag for a few days. Lice and eggs do not live longer than two days away from hair and scalps. Small items can be placed in a bag in the freezer.
- A clothes dryer set at high heat or a hot pressing iron will kill lice or their eggs on pillowcases, sheets, nightclothes, towels and similar items your child has been in contact with during the previous two days. (Lice and their eggs do not live more than one to two days off the head.
- It is a good idea to thoroughly vacuum the house and clean all surfaces.

Lice are unappealing and inconvenient, but they can be treated. Please follow these steps to ensure that your child's routine is not disrupted. You can find more information on the school website.

(Over)

Please contact me if you have any questions.
Sincerely,

School Nurse or Principal
Phone #

**From the principal:
Child safety**

Date

Dear (school name) Parent and Guardians:

As children will be traveling back and forth to school, we want to send a reminder about child safety. Your child's safety is our highest priority, and we are your partners in your child's well-being during their school years.

The single most effective way to protect your child is to have regular and open communication with them. The first step is to practice communicating with your children and help them understand that they can talk to you. When children are comfortable discussing sensitive matters with you, they are more likely to tell you when they have been put in an uncomfortable situation by a stranger.

We follow approved policies for student safety procedures. We continue to update our practices and recommendations based on guidelines from child safety experts.

Please review the following safety tips and discuss them with your child:

- Be aware of the common lures, such as candy, puppies and requests for help. Don't ever accept a ride from a stranger.
- If someone follows you on foot or in a car, stay away from him or her. You DO NOT need to go near a car to talk to people inside.
- Grown-ups who need help should not be asking children for help; they should be asking other grown-ups.
- No one should be asking you for directions or to look for a lost puppy or telling you that your mother or father is in trouble and that he or she will take you to them.
- If someone tries to take you somewhere, quickly get away from them and yell or scream, "This man is trying to take me away!" or, "This person is not my mother (or father)." Run to other people or call 911 if you have a cell phone.
- It is safer to be with other people when going places or playing outside, so always use the buddy system.
- If someone tries to touch you in ways that make you feel uncomfortable, or frightened, tell them "NO" and go tell a grown-up you trust what happened.
- Know it is NOT your fault if someone touches you in a way that is NOT okay. You do not have to keep it secret. Tell your parents or teacher.

Sincerely,

(Principal name)
Principal

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What school administrators need to know about PR to be successful

School administrators don't get a lot of training in effective communications techniques. Most learn on the job, yet research shows that the success of any leader depends on the quality of their communication skills. In surveys of business leaders, communication is consistently ranked one of the most important skills for employees. Within this ranking are interpersonal communications, listening, persuasion/motivation and presentation.

Successful communication is at least three-fourths of the job for any leader. In schools and public agencies, it may be even greater than that since almost everything a school administrator does is considered "public" and affects publicly owned resources and staff time paid for with taxpayer dollars.

Successful school administrators know that communication is much more than just talking to people or sending them a newsletter. Good public relations depends on building strong, positive relationships with constituent groups that include students, families, the business community, members of religious organizations and community residents.

Here are some core concepts that are necessary to the success of every school administrator. They are not listed in priority order. All are important.

Learn about people.

Understand people, what motivates them and how to reach them. A successful school administrator is part psychologist, part communicator and part business manager. First, know your audiences and where to find the members of those audiences and the most effective ways to listen to and speak to each audience.

Don't make assumptions.

Rather than guessing or assuming, be sure to actually find out what parents think and believe. A sure path to failure is to think you know about parent, staff and community opinions without really finding out. Administrators need to be able to motivate people, but they can't do that without understanding what mobilizes them. Proactively listen, watch, repeat. Ask the right questions and listen again. Look at body language. Consider a person's actions compared to what they are saying. Then test your perceptions and start listening and watching again. Taking time to do this is critical to your ultimate success.

Be a project manager.

Timing and planning are everything. Who you tell and when you tell them may be more important than what you tell them. If your timing is wrong, or if you tell the wrong groups in the wrong sequence, the results can be almost as bad, and sometimes worse, than not telling them at all. People who feel uninformed or "left out of the loop" may take actions that are

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harmful to the organization. Think through what groups need to know about any particular topic, the order in which they need to learn the news and how you will manage the flow of information.

In almost every case, you will want to start by sharing information on the “inside” with fellow administrators and staff. If the news is something that affects students and parents, they may be next in the sequence of contacts. If it affects volunteers, key communicators and others, include them. Think about the timing, quickly make a list and make sure those who need to know something have the information at the appropriate time.

What is your mission, and who will help you complete it?

Have a clear vision and mission, and articulate it so well that your “followers” rush ahead of you to carry it out. Make prioritized lists of what you need to do, and measure each action against how close it gets you to your goal.

Put students and those who work directly with them first on your list of those with whom you communicate. A successful administrator knows that staff must have information before the community and have enough background and details to help provide information to other groups and thus help shape attitudes.

Staff members are important members of your communications team.

All too often, the general public’s disenchantment with education or a given school starts with staff. Staff attitudes can shape all attitudes. One example: a research project found that half the adult population in this country did not believe that a diploma meant a student “knew the basics.” This belief, the survey also found, was rooted in the same perceptions shared by one-third of the teachers in this country felt the same way. The project demonstrated that the attitudes of the general public reflected the beliefs of those who worked in the schools. People believe teachers and other school staff members. The opinions and perceptions of staff members spread like wildfire.

Remember that staff members are not just teaching staff. The successful administrator knows employees who serve as support staff — secretaries, custodians, instructional aides, bus drivers, etc. — are as important components in successful public relations efforts as members of the certificated staff.

Adjust your own attitude.

Successful administrators don’t “head up” a community; they build community. They place a higher priority on what the school community wants than on what they personally want. When educators talk about community support, they are often talking about support for what they, their school or their district are doing. When the community talks about supporting schools, they are thinking in terms of having a voice at the policy table and being an integral part of the process.

A cohesive community has similar values, depends on one another, makes decisions together, and is committed to the good of the entire community. Ideally, each member believes that he or she is part of something larger than that person would be alone.

Feelings are important.

Emotions are more important than facts. The relationship built between a school administrator and any one person or group colors their perceptions toward the entire school district organization. No matter how many facts you present, they will not be accurately “heard” unless the person receiving the facts is open to hearing them. If that person has had a negative personal experience with an administrator or someone else at a school, they will have a

negative view of the district. If they have had a positive personal experience, the reaction will likely be positive.

Direct communication is the most effective communication.

Printed materials are seldom completely read. If they do read something, it seldom changes their attitudes. Thus, they retain very few of the facts in written material.

Face-to-face communications work much better than written communications. Written materials are still an important way of presenting facts and assuring a consistent message; however, they are most effective when they come from someone who has first built a personal relationship with the readers.

If you use written communications, write different types of materials for different audiences. Studies show that nearly half of readers read below the ninth-grade level, about a quarter read at or below fourth-grade level and about a tenth read even lower than that. Yet most school newsletters are written for higher reading levels. Aim for an eighth-grade level to ensure that it is accessible to all. Your word processor can measure that for you.

Embrace transparency.

Resist the urge to go back to “old ways” of communicating. It may be tempting to withhold information, tell people only what they have to know, make decisions in isolation that affect others, and rely on written communications. This is faster in the short-term; however, the long-term consequences to your career can be disastrous when people do not trust you anymore. The extra effort will benefit you, your students, your staff and your school.

Contributed by Marcia Latta, communications consultant



Exercise helps kids learn



**September
2021**

INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Insights is produced by Marcia Latta, communications consultant.

Active children do better in school. Many studies have found a mind/body connection linking increased blood and oxygen flow during physical activity to enhanced brain function and improved moods through the release of “feel-good” endorphin hormones.

This mood and wellness boost from regular physical activity also includes better classroom concentration, more energy, greater confidence and improved sleep.

Exercise offers substantial health benefits

Aside from obvious physical benefits of regular activity, there are enormous mental health benefits, including lower stress and anxiety. Experts say physical activity enables a better outlook on life by building confidence, managing anxiety and depression and increasing cognitive abilities.

Students who engage in physical activity that they enjoy also see fewer behavioral health disorders. The key is finding exercises that your child wants to do and motivating them to get up and move.

Help your child get moving

Physical activity is essential to children's health. It can be a challenge to get the recommended 60 minutes of activity every day. With homework, television and computer games competing for your child's time, getting enough exercise takes guidance and planning.

What counts?

If health experts recommend a minimum of 60 minutes of movement each day, what does that include? It should be moderate or vigorous aerobic activity, like typical playground activity. In addition, children should do muscle-strengthening and bone-strengthening activities at least three days a week. This doesn't have to mean lifting weights — jumping rope counts, too.

Tips to move more

Exercise is a lifelong habit for good health. Starting early means greater and longer benefits.

Set a good example. Model an active lifestyle for your child. Make physical activity a priority for yourself and your whole family. Make it fun for your child, but don't stress. Good activities include playing catch or taking a walk or hike.

Limit screen time. Set time limits on screen time. Don't place a TV

in kids' bedrooms. Turn it off during meal times. If they enjoy video games, choose active ones, such as dance or team sports.

Establish a routine. Set aside daily active time for activity. Take the dog for a morning walk or head outside before or after dinner.

Listen to your child. Team sports don't appeal to all children. Choose activities they like, and be sure to introduce new ones. Make it easy: dance in the living room or bike around the block. Play tag on the way to the mailbox.

Promote activity, not exercise. Make it about fun; not a chore that they may resist. Let your child choose the activity for the day or week. It doesn't matter what it is as long as it's active and fun. Search your memory for classic kids' games, such as red light/green light, tag and touch football. For more ideas, do a web search for kids' fitness activities.

Exercise recommendations for children

Ages 3 to 5

Engage in a variety of activity throughout the day. Go to the playground. Play ball in the backyard. Chase the dog.

Ages 6-17

Kids in this age group can do anything they choose, but a combination of aerobics, muscle-strengthening and bone-strengthening options are best. Think push-ups, pull-ups, burpees, mountain climbers.

Creative exercise ideas for the family

- 1. Create an obstacle course in the house or garden.** Print out a certificate for completion or time them. Hold a parents vs. kids challenge!
- 2. Play yoga games.** Yoga games for kids are fun and improve overall body awareness. Do a web search for directions.
- 3. Join the gym, and sign your kids up too.** Some gyms offer special kids-only areas where kids get to climb walls and take challenges. Get your child their own gear — water bottle, towel, gym bag. Next time you go, take them along.
- 4. Do a Hula Hoop workout.** Turn up the music at home and challenge each other to see who can go for the longest time or who can hoola with the most hoops.
- 5. Make it an outing.** Get out of the house and try something new. Ice-skating, rock climbing, roller-skating, and mountain biking are a fun way to beat boredom.
- 6. Sneak in a little bit of exercise.** Don't park as close as you can to the mall; park farther away and walk. Take the stairs instead of the elevator, if possible. You can even turn this into a game by guessing how many stairs there are and counting them to find out who was the closest when you reach your destination.

<https://blog.pretzelkids.com/fun-ideas-physical-activity-for-kids-daily-routine/>