

Sharing Concerns

As a person working with children in after school settings, you do your best to connect with the family members of all students in your program. When you need to share a concern with a parent or family member, these positive relationships help sharing concerns go more smoothly.

Prepare for the Meeting

If you have questions or concerns about a child:

- Document your concerns through observation and consultation with colleagues.
- Invite the parent to a meeting and encourage them to come with their spouse or other adult engaged in the child's daily life.
- Schedule the time for the meeting when you and the family member have time to talk without interruption.

Getting Started

Start the meeting by gathering information from the family about how they see their child. Ask open-ended questions, ones that can not be answered with a "yes" or "no." Truly listen and show an interest in all that they say. Give them a chance to talk without interruption. You will learn more about the family and the child and may be able to identify concerns that you have in common with the family.

Share Strengths

When it is your turn to share, start with what is going well. Sharing positive qualities that you have observed lets the family know that you are paying close attention and care about their child. Both listening to the family and sharing positive things about the child helps the family know that you wish to be partners in meeting their child's needs.

Ask how the child behaves at home and in school; this gives you information for comparison to your observations after school. If the family differs from your view, be open to their perspective, you may also discover that there are different expectations due to the family's culture or values. When done respectfully, this communication can lead to a better exchange of ideas and be the most help to the child.

Before you share your concerns with the family, ask if they have any concerns that they have not already indicated. By specifically asking the family about concerns not mentioned before, the family has another opportunity to voice their own observations or concerns and may provide information that informs what you have seen.

Share Your Observations

As you begin to talk about your concerns, let the family know that you are sharing your concerns to support their child's development and to get some ideas for how to best meet their child's needs. Be sure you communicate what you want to say clearly, without judgment and with concrete examples. It is especially important that you share your

observations without labeling or diagnosing. **Do not** suggest that a child has a specific diagnosis (such as attention deficit disorder). Most after school staff are not qualified to provide such a diagnosis and doing so often gets in the way of the next steps in the referral process. On the other hand, your specific observations and descriptions of what is happening will be very helpful to any specialists who become involved.

Based on the beginning of this conversation, you will have an idea of how your observations will be received by the family. If they are experiencing similar issues, you will be able to work together on next steps. If, however, they have not expressed any concern or indication of similar issues in other settings, they may think that what you have observed is specific to your setting and, therefore, your problem. They may not be very interested in a plan of action. If this is the case, you can still ask for their help with ideas for a plan that you can use, ask them to encourage their child to work with the plan and you can request a follow-up meeting. Sometimes, the issue really is unique to the setting or interactions within that setting. Other times, the parents or family members may have very different expectations for children. There are some instances in which the family member knows that there are concerns, but does not want to share that information with you.

Make a Plan of Action

Once you have heard how the family feels about your observations, you can make a plan of action. The plan should include next steps for you, for the family if they are willing, and for the child, as well as timelines for the actions and how the actions will be completed. If the student attends the meeting, s/he can contribute to the plan.

Plans can be informally written as notes or completed using a format to be filled-in. Either way, the plan will be most successful when written in terms of what individuals will do and focusing on achievable steps. The plan of action can be updated regularly and will be helpful when necessary in bringing in additional resources, such as specialists from the local school district.

When Language is an Issue

If you and the family members or guardians do not speak the same language, careful thought must be given to interpretation during the meeting. This conversation generally has an emotional component, and appropriate interpretation is critical. When sharing information about a child's development, it is likely that some of the words and nuances in phrasing will be challenging for inexperienced interpreters to translate. Additionally, some parents may understand another language, such as English, yet not be able to fully understand and participate in a conversation about their child. A family may use someone (such as another family member or older child) for routine interpretation; however, you or the family might not feel comfortable putting that person in the position of interpreting for this conference. Your after school program should have a plan to access other school and community resources for interpretive services.

Adapted from Brault and Gonzalez-Mena. *Talking with Parents when Concerns Arise*, California Map To Inclusive Child Care, WestEd Center for Child & Family Studies, 2007.

The After School Inclusion Project is administered by the CalSERVES Project at the Napa County Office of Education for the California Department of Education's After School Programs Office.

Sample Plans of Action

Issue: Umberto has solid academic skills but has not been bringing his homework assignment list to the after school program and has not been able to work on the appropriate assignments. He often says that he does not have homework, and disrupts other students during the homework time by tapping their papers, closing their books, and talking to them.

Informal

Plan: For the next two weeks:

1. Umberto will have his homework plan initialed by his teacher (Mr. Alva) each week with due dates clearly marked. If he forgets his plan, he will return to the teacher immediately for the plan (the teacher is on-site).
2. He will work on homework from his plan, regardless of when it is due, until all is completed. Ms. Paula (after school staff) will check the homework for completeness.
3. When he does not have homework, he will
 - a. select a book to read or an activity book to work from quietly or
 - b. assist in tasks around the classroom as directed by the afterschool staff.
4. He will respect the needs of the other children to do their homework without interruptions. To help him do this, a written reminder card will be available for him to review.

**Umberto's
Homework Reminder Card**

Work on homework from plan regardless of when it is due.

When homework is done:

- ✓ pick a book to read
- ✓ pick an activity book to work in
- ✓ ask to help after school staff with classroom tasks

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This plan will be tried for the next two weeks. Umberto, Umberto's mom Mrs. Gonzales, Mr. Alva, and Ms. Paula, will meet again as a group to review the actions and determine next steps.

Formal

Action	Who	How Will We Know?
1. Umberto brings initialed homework plan to the after school program.	Umberto. If he forgets, he returns to Mr. Alva for the plan.	Umberto will have his homework plan daily.
2. Umberto completes homework.	Umberto.	Ms. Paula will check Umberto's work for completeness.
3. When his homework is complete, Umberto will select a reading/activity book or help in the classroom.	Umberto will select books for reading or activity completion. Ms. Paula will have some fun tasks available.	Umberto will list the books he has read or worked from. Ms. Paula will list the tasks Umberto has assisted with in the classroom.
4. Umberto will use a reminder card to help him remember to respect the needs of other children.	Ms. Paula and Umberto will design a reminder card. Umberto will check it as needed.	Umberto will make a mark each time he checks the card. Ms. Paula will keep track of his success in not interrupting the other children while they are doing homework.

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