

-INFORMATION- DESIGN-CENTRE

Communicating with families

- ◆ Do you feel that families never read the information you provide?
- ◆ Do you put out newsletters and write letters that people don't read?
- ◆ Do families ask questions about things that you've already told them?
- ◆ Do families fail to respond to your requests for information?

These concerns are not unusual. In fact, they reflect the communication experience of many service organisations.

Problems with people

- ◆ People are busy.
- ◆ People don't know you're telling them something of interest, so they don't take any notice.
- ◆ People don't want information until they're asking a question about the topic.

Problems with communication

- ◆ Communication materials are often produced from the perspective of the organisation, not the perspective of the reader.
- ◆ Communication materials often fail to attract attention because they don't have obvious/immediate interest.
- ◆ Communication materials often get lost in the general clutter.

What we know about people's interest in communication

Most people only read/listen to communication if it's about a topic they're interested in. Audience interest is the primary driver of communication. While most families are very interested in their children and will want to know that children are safe in your care, they are probably not very interested in the details of your service. And they're very unlikely to be interested in the administrative aspects of your service. Remember that the reason they're using your service is that they're busy with other parts of their lives.

Audience interest in your communication is likely to be low. It's best to assume that your audiences will not be motivated to read the materials that you produce. Remember: it's interesting to you because you wrote it and it's about your work. This doesn't make it interesting to anyone else.

Two broad solutions

1. Develop materials that interest your audience and answer their questions. Ask your audience about what they want to know. Only communicate about things that the audience will find interesting. Obviously, this isn't a complete solution.
2. Develop the materials that you believe your audience needs. Then, grab their attention in some way.

Ways to grab attention

- ◆ Write about things that interest your readers (or are important to them), not things that interest you and the other staff; put the material that's relevant to readers first.
- ◆ Use pictures – particularly pictures of people your readers know (their kids).
- ◆ Get children to produce the materials.
- ◆ Combine information that you need to provide with information that people will find interesting (for example, combine an announcement about a new policy with stories about the latest craft activities).
- ◆ Write in a friendly, chatty way. Be careful not to sound as though you're threatening readers or aggressively telling them what they must do.
- ◆ Include extra information to create a community feel (gossip, classifieds, give-aways, and so on).

Some final thoughts

- ◆ More communication is not necessarily better. Think about whether you really need each piece of communication. At the same time, try to repeat your message through multiple methods (for example, put the same messages in newsletters, signs, notes home, and on your website).
- ◆ Ask your families about the best way to communicate with them.
- ◆ Remember that you will never communicate with everyone in a seamless way. There will always be people who don't read your messages, and there will always be people who misunderstand what you say. But you should be able to minimise these problems by carefully planning your communication.
- ◆ Don't fall into the trap of blaming families for not reading the information you produce. If you've got something to communicate and your families fail to listen, then it's your problem, not theirs. Taking responsibility for your communication helps you move from anger, frustration, and blame to a place of creatively trying to grab people's attention – it becomes a challenge to improve your success rate rather than something to accept defeat over.

Contact

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-INFORMATION- DESIGN-CENTRE

Collaborative partnerships with families and communities (Quality Area 6)

Questions for discussion

- ◆ What is meant by 'collaborative partnership with families'?
- ◆ What is the purpose of collaborative partnerships with families?
- ◆ How can you build ongoing collaborative partnerships with families?
- ◆ What strategies/resources will encourage collaborative partnerships to develop?
- ◆ Do families want to build a collaborative partnership?
- ◆ What is meant by 'collaborative partnership with communities'?
- ◆ What is the purpose of collaborative partnerships with communities?
- ◆ How can you build ongoing collaborative partnerships with communities?
- ◆ What strategies/resources will encourage collaborative partnerships to develop?
- ◆ Can you share any stories about collaborative partnerships with families and/or communities at your service?

Initial thoughts about collaborative partnerships

Collaborating with families

Collaborating with families is about providing space for families to participate or communicate if they want to. You cannot force collaboration, but you can invite it.

You can provide opportunities for two-way communication with families by:

- ◆ Providing clear, informative, well-written information to families
- ◆ Making it clear that staff are interested and available for conversations
- ◆ Taking the time to acknowledge families when they arrive and depart
- ◆ Making time to talk to families about their child's progress.

You can provide opportunities for families to engage with the service by:

- ◆ Inviting families to participate in the service's planning and management
- ◆ Inviting family members to spend time at the service with their child
- ◆ Providing opportunities for children to explore their cultural heritage
- ◆ Inviting skilled family members to participate in or run activities at the service (either as a volunteer or paid) (examples might include outdoor activities, art workshops, cooking, craft activities, and so on).

Tied up with the concept of collaborative partnerships with families is the notion of respect and support for diverse family structures and different approaches to family management. It's about supporting and valuing different versions of family wellbeing.

Collaborating with the community

Community collaboration should be focused on things that benefit the service's children, families, and staff. It's about recognising the place of the service in the community and consciously:

- ◆ Helping community organisations reach families and children enrolled at your service
- ◆ Helping children understand their local community and respect community traditions
- ◆ Participating in the local community
- ◆ Supporting community development, environmental protection, and sustainability.

You can provide opportunities for community collaboration by:

- ◆ Distributing resources produced by community organisations
- ◆ Providing opportunities for service organisations to reach families (for example, offer the service as a venue for an event about an issue relevant to your families)
- ◆ Participating in local, state, or national activities, projects, and events
- ◆ Linking what you do at the service with broader community issues.

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