

SCOTT PSYCHOLOGY TIMES

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Effective Teacher-Parent Communication

Good communication between teachers and parents/guardians doesn't just happen. It requires special skills, such as good listening techniques, kindness, tact, honesty, empathy, enthusiasm, and an understanding of parent-child relationships. No matter how you interact with parents (e.g., telephone, e-mail, written notes, conferences, etc.), good communication and interpersonal skills can enhance your efforts and foster ongoing parental involvement.

Getting Started

Recognize that schools and homes have shared goals. The school and family are both committed to the nurturing, development, and education of children. Parents/guardians and teachers must trust each other and give each other credit for the role each plays in the child's development.

Respect caregivers and communicate that respect. Tone of voice, word choice, facial expressions, body language, expectations, how long we make people wait — all these communicate respect or lack of it. Many parents have personal, family, work, health, or other problems that they have not shared with the teacher. Avoid being judgmental, and give parents the benefit of the doubt.

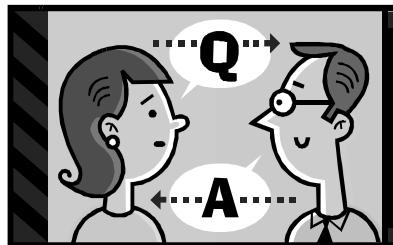
When communicating with parents/guardians, be direct and avoid using educational jargon and long explanations. The substance and style of your communication should enhance parent/guardian understanding of the message.

Be sensitive to cultural differences. If necessary, have your letters and memos translated to the first language of your students' families. Integrate bilingual and multicultural materials into displays and written communications.

Engage your students in the process. For example, students can decorate invitations and letters, which will help ensure that parents/guardians see your communication.

Be persistent. Use a variety of methods to communicate your important information to families. See which format (e.g.,

note, newsletter, phone call, meeting, etc.) works best for different kinds of information. Use alternative methods to follow-up with hard-to-reach families.



Communication Ideas

- Create a class Web site that you regularly update with information about class activities. Use it to remind families about important deadlines, expectations, etc.
- Create a biweekly or monthly newsletter to inform parents of upcoming events and activities. It may also include a few tips for parents/guardians about helping with homework and boosting reading skills.
- Greet parents/guardians personally as they drop off or pick up their child at school. Communicating with parents in this informal manner can help increase a parent/guardian's comfort level and increase the likelihood of two-way communication. It also reinforces the idea that parents and teachers know each other and are working together for the benefit of students. This is not a good time to discuss problems, but it may be an opportunity to set an appointment.
- Try to contact families by phone at least once each grading period. A positive phone call acknowledging a student's improved work or continued effort, thanking a parent for helping out on a class project, or personally inviting a parent to a special event will increase parents/guardians' comfort in approaching you.
- Create a family bulletin board with information about upcoming events, display pictures from special occa-

sions, and offer suggestions for parenting and home-learning.

- Send students home with a weekly work folder (a.k.a. Friday folder) containing completed homework assignments, in-class work, and any tests or quizzes. Staple a blank sheet to the inside cover of the folder so that you can write a quick message to parents/guardians and allow space for them to respond.
- Recognize academic and behavioral achievement. These certificates can be formatted and photocopied in advance so that you can simply write in the child's name and achievement. Certificates can also be used to thank parents for their efforts.
- Communicate personally with parents at least once a month. A quick note can encourage parental involvement by suggesting ideas for home learning activities. Clearly mark a parent response portion of each note to encourage two-way communication. Ask parents to comment or answer one or two questions relevant to the content of your note. Seek parent input and feedback about the most effective ways to communicate with each other.

Adapted from Communicating with Parents and Families, Scholastic.com, and Hows and Whys of Effective Teacher-Parent Communication, www.slc.sevier.org/effecom.htm.

Online Resource

"Neuroscience for Kids" offers memory games for children in grades K-12.



<http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/chmemory.html>

Just a Thought...

Education's purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one.

—Malcolm Forbes

Intervention Central

Classroom Interventions for Struggling Students

What is Working Memory?

Working memory is the ability to hold information in immediate awareness while performing some mental operation on the information. It essentially allows a person to keep information in mind, "online," for a few seconds.

Working memory serves four purposes:

- Providing mind space to combine or develop ideas (e.g., retaining the beginning of an explanation while listening to the rest of it)
- Offering a process to hold together the parts of a task while engaging in that task (e.g., remembering where you just put down the protractor while working on a math assignment)
- Making available a meeting place to connect short-term memory with long-term memory (e.g., remembering the question you were just asked while searching your memory for the correct response)
- Serving as a place to hold multiple, immediate plans and intentions (e.g., remembering to give the teacher a note and turn in homework in the morning while mentally reviewing information for a test)

Working memory is fundamental to planning, sequencing, and executing

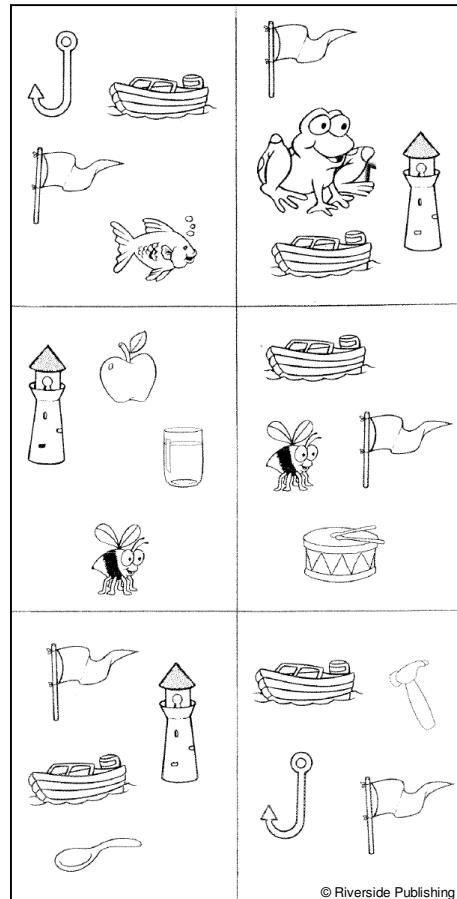
school-related work. It is a critical skill for academic tasks such as:

- Following directions
- Staying focused on a project
- Completing activities independently
- Comprehending reading material
- Completing mental arithmetic
- Writing an essay
- Taking multiple choice tests
- Keeping one's train of thought while speaking
- Remembering a mental to-do list

Researchers have found that the average person can keep just three or four things in their working memory at one time. Working memory difficulties can affect anyone, but are common in children with ADHD and/or learning disabilities. New research suggests that working memory abilities can be improved with intervention. Engaging children in activities from board games (e.g., chess) to educational video games to activities such as the one described below provide children with practice using their working memory.

From a variety of sources. Please contact Dr. Scott for a complete list.

Sample Activity Cards (see strategy below)



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Working Memory Intervention Strategy

Activity Name: Which Two Go Together

Target: Can be modified for children preschool through high school

Materials:

Activity Cards – five to six cards per set (see sample set above, right)

- You will need a total 20 to 24 pictures (from a group of 10 to 14 images). Pictures may be hand-drawn or printed using clip art. They should be simple, easily identifiable, and age appropriate.
- Select two pictures to be the correct answer (e.g., boat and flag in the sample above). Ensure these pictures are on four of the five (or five of the six) cards.
- Using unlined index cards, create activity cards with four pictures on

each card.

- Have approximately six to 12 sets of activity cards.

Activity:

- The "game" is to watch each card appear and remember which two pictures occur together most often.
- Say, "This is a game called 'which two go together.' Watch each card and try to find the two things that appear on the most cards."
- Present each card in the set at five second intervals. When all cards have been presented, ask the child, "Which two pictures went together most often?"

Adapted from Linking SB5 Assessment to Instruction and Intervention for Children, Ages 2 to 16: Updated and Expanded by Gale H. Roid.

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If you have comments or would like to receive *Scott Psychology Times* electronically, please e-mail Dr. Scott (drcscott@scottpsychology.com).

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