

communicating with

FAMILIES IN

**DIFFERENT
CONTEXTS**



FLAMBOYAN
FOUNDATION

introduction

At Flamboyan, we believe communication between families and educators is essential to supporting student needs, building trust with families, and acting as true partners. This resource will help educators communicate effectively with families on a variety of topics, including academic progress as well as behavioral and social milestones.

It is vital to send updates to parents on their children's behavior and achievements in the classroom. But remember, communication goes both ways — if students' families contact you about concerns, you should give a prompt response.

This resource supports educators as they reach out to and respond to students' families. Consider using it before reaching out to families about student achievement or following up with families about behavioral, attendance, or academic concerns.

In this document you will find:

- Considerations and practical tips for reaching out to families, especially when sharing positive news about students;
- Norms and practical tips for responding to families, especially when responding to concerns about students; and
- Sample communication between teachers and families.

reaching out to families

Communicating through text messages, email, an app, or another method is a quick and easy way to share positive news about a child! Reaching out to share positive information early and often can help establish a supportive relationship with a family. And, families can view short, personal messages at a time that is convenient to them.

Teachers Should Consider

Families' communication preferences

At the beginning of the year, ask all families to state their preferred methods of communication. Do they prefer to get in contact via email, text, face-to-face, social media, or another way? Make sure this is documented somewhere for other teachers to reference before reaching out to the family.

Families' preferred language

Teachers should confirm the parents' preferred language and identify translation supports, if necessary, before calling the family.

Timing

Communicate within a day or two of the positive behavior.

Posture

Express enthusiasm or excitement for students' progress, achievements, or milestones.

Pictures!

If possible, attach a picture of the action or evidence, such as work samples.

Tips for Teachers

- If you don't feel comfortable using your personal cell phone number, create a Google Voice number to communicate with families using your cell phone without them having your personal number.
- Send your first positive communication early to establish a method for sharing academic and behavioral information.
- Be specific—don't just say the student had a "great day." Instead, name at least one specific action or moment that made their day great.
- Communicate with all parents or family members that care for the child, and make sure that you are communicating with the appropriate parent or guardian. Not all parents who enrolled their child may have custody. Often, students have other important caregivers, like grandparents or mentors, who may prefer to get exciting news or updates.
- To make the message extra special, send a photo of the child or their work.
- If sending a photo, make sure to send a quick explanation.
- Keep the conversation purely positive!
- Use questions that make it clear you'd like a response.
- Honor a family's preferred mode of communication and language and secure translation services if needed by contacting your district's language access team for support.
- Send texts during hours you are able and willing to have conversations with families.
- Make texting at least one family part of your end-of-the-school day routine to stay consistent.

Sample Outreach Conversations

Thank you again for the update on Joaquín's behavior!

On Thu, Jan 8, Theresa <theresa@email.com> wrote:

-----Forwarded message-----

From: Theresa <theresa@email.com>

To: Xiomara <xiomara@email.com>

Subject: Great Helper

Good afternoon,

I hope you enjoyed your break! I just wanted to let you know that Joaquín did an excellent job of completing his work today and even sat next to another student and helped them with theirs. I told him to keep up the great work!

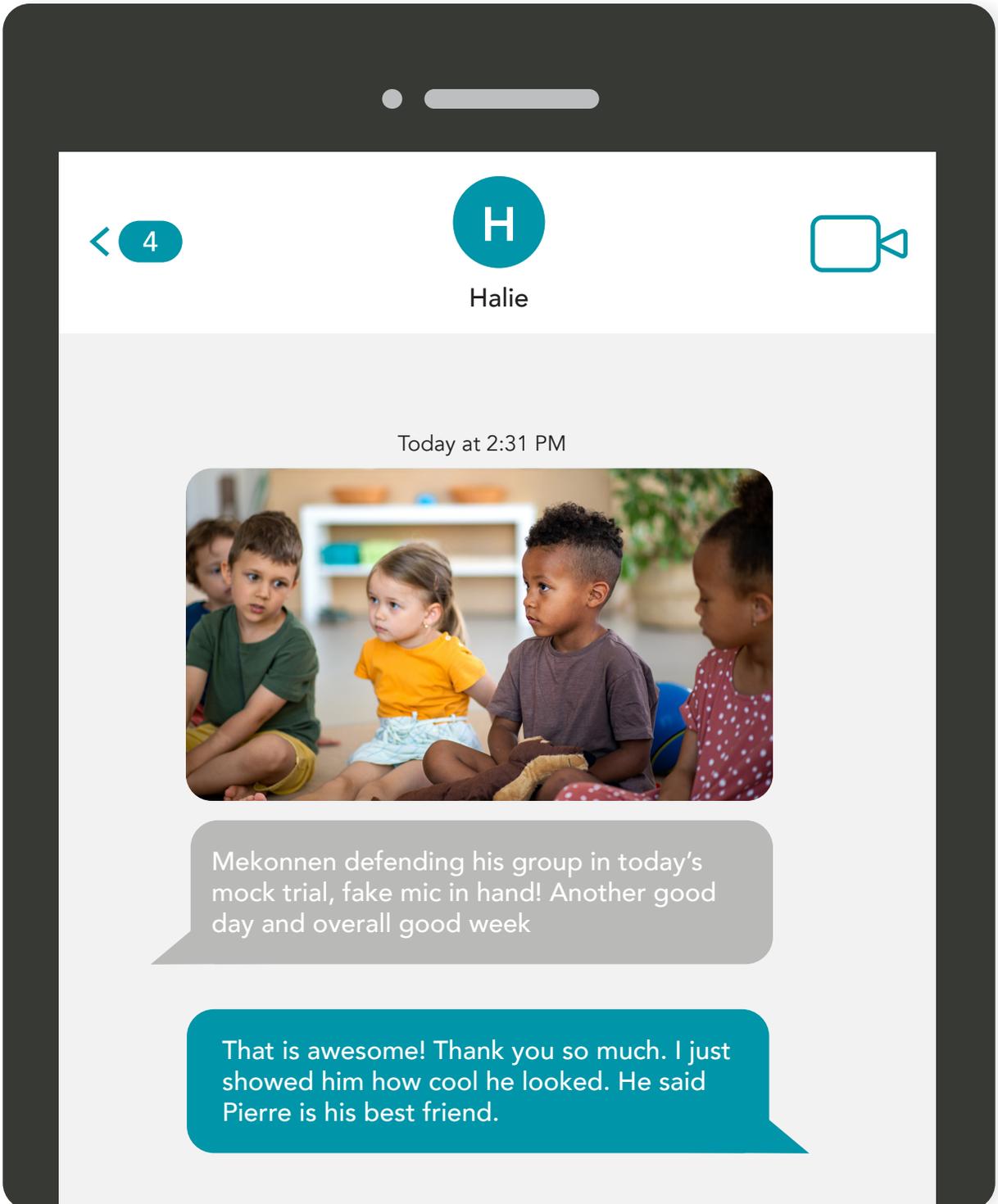
I also wanted to thank you for the lovely gift. I'm wearing it tomorrow! =)

Stay Warm!

Theresa

Sample Text Message

In the following artifact, a teacher reaches out to a family to share how the child participated positively in a class activity. The teacher sends an engaging photo with a brief explanation. As you can tell from the parent response, they are thrilled to see an example of their child participating positively. This teacher has set up the routine of texting the family each Friday afternoon about how the child's week went and includes a specific anecdote to make it more personal.



following up with families

Ideally, there should be five positive or proactive communications for every negative or reactive one. As teachers, you inevitably have tough conversations about behavior, attendance, or academics. In a perfect world, the strong relationships you've built with families will make these conversations solutions-oriented and productive. After having a reactive conversation, it's essential to follow up with the family. It shows them that their involvement in the problem-solving process is invaluable. Text messaging allows families and teachers to communicate conveniently and provides a written record for both parties to reflect on later.

Tips for Teachers

1. Lead with care and empathy. Whether delivering difficult information or being on the receiving end, do your best to do so with respect.
2. When a family contacts you with a concern, respond within 48 hours. Giving a prompt response shows you care about what they have to say and are invested in their child's success.
3. Communicate realistic expectations and be transparent. If you don't have the necessary information to respond, indicate that and let them know your plan to get answers.
4. Invite families to follow up with you if they don't get a response right away. It's okay to acknowledge that you're busy but committed to providing assistance, so they should reach out if they don't hear from you soon.
5. Text during the hours that you would like to receive a text. Assume the best if you don't get an immediate response.
6. Invite families to respond by including a prompt or a question.
7. If you aren't getting a response, check with the front office or child to confirm their caregiver's contact information — numbers change often. In the meantime, try a personal note, in-person conversation, or email.
8. If you're not getting a response using the school phone, try using your cell phone. Sometimes families assume they're getting an automated message and may not answer.
9. Likewise, if a family doesn't answer, leave a message and follow up with a text message that lets them know you'd like to connect with them. Try to avoid any concerning or provocative language that may cause a parent to worry too much.
10. If you're having a hard time getting in touch with a family, bring it up during your grade level or team meeting to see if a colleague has a good relationship and can relay the message for you or serve as a connector.

Norms for responding when given critical feedback

There are times when families reach out to educators or school staff in response to a difficult situation, like a behavior incident or academic challenges. How school staff respond to families in these moments is critical. Below are just a few things to keep in mind when needing to respond to difficult feedback, with a couple of examples.

1. **Be empathetic.** Families don't care what you know until they know you care, as the old adage goes, even if you disagree with it.
2. **Create a space where you listen.** Families need and deserve a space to share their thoughts, ideas, and feedback. Creating this space is critical in building trust.
3. **Make sure you have a plan of action.** Once families have shared their critical feedback or needs, it's essential to share your plan to follow up, even if that plan is just to get more information. Trust is compromised if a family shares a need and no one ever responds. It's critical to be clear on what the family can expect in terms of next steps and follow up.

Examples

Behavior | A grandmother called you because she just received a text message from her granddaughter saying that she's hiding in the bathroom because another student just threatened her. You are unaware of the situation but must respond.

As you answer, key things to remember are:

- Lead with empathy and acknowledge her fear and concern.
- Be transparent and let her know you are unaware of this situation but will get more information and commit to following up as soon as possible.
- Invite the grandparent to reach out if she doesn't hear from you within a specific time frame.

Attendance | A family has received several automated calls indicating that their child was absent when they were out sick. The child's father has called the school several times to no avail and has now reached out to you and is incredibly upset.

As you answer, key things to remember are:

- Begin by acknowledging and validating the father's frustration and committing to follow up with the attendance coordinator.
- Share your plan of action and provide a general timeline.
- Communicate with clarity and be sure to always lead with empathy.

Academics | Report cards have just been issued, and you receive a call from a parent whose child failed your class requesting an in-person meeting. You have not reached out to the family with progress updates, and they have not attended parent-teacher conferences, so this is the first time you're communicating.

As you answer, key things to remember are:

- Be mindful of your feelings before you respond.
- Make sure that you create a space for collaboration.
- Clearly communicate classroom expectations.
- Provide an opportunity for makeup work.
- Offer any available academic support, such as tutoring.



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