

Listen, listen, listen

Making your communication two-way

“We must listen to parents not just with our ears, but also, as Lisa Delpit (1995) reminds us in *Other People's Children*, with open hearts and minds.”

Babs Freeman-Loftis
"How to (Really) Listen to Parents"

The last four Marketing Corners talked about the importance of providing information to parents in a timely, consistent and helpful manner. But listening to parents is just as important.

As teachers, you are already well aware that effective communication runs two ways. So the ideas below are simply a quick overview of what you already know.

Be available

Being available in your classroom after school is great. Being out in the parking lot is even better.

Listen actively

Researchers in active listening by teachers with parents have recommended a four step approach:

- Listen with empathy (expressing an understanding of the parents' concerns)
- Ask questions and ask permission to take notes (ensuring you hear their full perspective)
- Focus on the issues (summarizing from your notes to clarify you have heard their full perspective)
- Find the first step (determining what can appropriately be done to address any concerns)

Thank parents

I know it is hard to be grateful while listening to parents complain. But at the very least, you can appreciate that they care enough to take the time and effort to tell you.

