QUICK GUIDE

# Handling Bad / Negative Feedback from Parents

## Here are some tips and strategies from Washington, DC principals\* for meetings and one-on-one interactions with parents and caregivers.

"Be open not just to hear, but to listen for the issue. Is the issue particular to the people involved, or is it a systemic issue?"

"Approach any conflict with parents and caregivers from this perspective: Parents always want what's best for their own children, the same as you want what's best for your own child, niece, or nephew."

"Acknowledge and express the parent's emotion - 'I can understand that you are upset: Don't just jump to defend yourself'

"Keeping kids at center makes it easier to have difficult conversations. It puts us all at the same table:'

"You don't have to have the answer for everything right away, but let people know when you can follow up on their question/issue/idea. It's okay to say, 'I don't know: Some things take more time to get information or to find solutions:'

"Be aware of your own emotional reaction - facial expressions, body language, and body positioning especially. If a parent is upset, I try to lean backwards because it indicates openness and receptiveness, versus leaning forward which suggests a more defensive/ combat position:'

"You are the principal. At the end of the day, be personable - but don't take it personallY:'

"You don't have to fix everything in the moment, but you should acknowledge the issue and the emotion:'

*\*Special thanks to DCPS principals Nikeysha Jackson and O'Kiyyah Lyons-Lucas for their insights!*

## Some final thoughts from the staff of Teaching for Change:

These are great tips and they are reflective of lessons we can learn from the research on equity and family engagement.

Because a parent or caregivers child is involved, strong emotions may also be involved. We have seen principals and school administrators handle situations relatively well, even if the parent did not show their appreciation for the response in that moment (especially if an issue can't be resolved right away). However, afterward or in hindsight, they may have appreciated your response, whether you get that feedback or not.

Conflict is a natural aspect of life when people are involved. Training and resources on conflict resolution, de-escalation skills, mediation, and customer service may be helpful if this is an area of growth for you.

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**QUICK GUIDE**

# Planning Your Parent-Principal Chat

*This guide accompanies Teaching for Changes "Parent-Principal Chat Manual" and is designed to help school leaders and their teams think intentionally about planning monthly Chats. We encourage you to address ALL QUESTIONS in this planning guide, with each response having one to three points.*

Location: Potential date(s) and time: \_

I. What **IDEAS/QUESTIONS/CONCERN(S)** have parents and caregivers shared? What is the school community talking about?

1. What **TOPIC(S)** do you want to discuss with attendees? (What are your objectives?)
2. What **QUESTIONS** do you have for attendees?
3. How will you make the agenda **ENGAGING AND INTERACTIVE** for attendees?

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1. What will you - the school leadership - do to **INVITE** the maximum amount of parents and caregivers? How will you utilize **EXISTING** communications channels and also conduct

**PERSONAL** outreach?

1. What strategies will you use to **BALANCE** principal-parent power dynamics? Parent-parent power dynamics?

**Additional planning questions:**

* What materials do we need?
* What kind of food will we have and who will arrange it?
* Who will take the lead(s) on facilitation?
* What kind of ice breaker will we lead?
  + Who will take notes?
* Do your logistics, outreach, and agenda address issues of equity and inclusion?

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