

Connecting with Parents: “But He Doesn’t Do That at Home!”



Linda bites her classmates. Nate’s rude talk upsets everybody. But the parents seem stunned when you tell them you would like to find ways to help their child get along better at school. “That doesn’t sound like our child!” they exclaim. “We’ve never seen that behavior!” If this sounds familiar, here are some suggestions that may help when parents say, “He doesn’t do that at home!”

Trust what the parent says. Maybe the child only acts that way at school!

- Keep in mind that a child new to a group setting is dealing with the stress of unfamiliar people, places, and schedules.
- Remember that even children familiar with your program may still be working out how to interact with people outside their families.
- Accept that the parents are puzzled. Ask them to help you figure out possible causes for the challenging behaviors.

Observe the child carefully, and keep a written record of what you see.

- Be specific: Exactly what does Nate do? What does he say? Note when and with whom incidents occur and what else is going on in the room at the time.
- Share this record with the child’s parents. Ask for their perspectives on it.
- Be sure to focus on positive behavior as well as difficulties!

Invite the parents to observe the child in the classroom.

- Give them chances to see the behavior that is causing concern. Then ask what they think about it.
- If visits are not possible, ask parents’ permission to videotape parts of the child’s day so they can see him or her in action.
- Keep in mind that parents are more likely to be helpful when they see that the child’s behavior gets in the way of friendships or learning experiences.

Stay in touch with the family.

- Let parents know that you value their views of their child. Show that you welcome their input in helping the child adapt to school. Avoid the impression that you think the child is “hopeless.”
- Make a plan with the parents for dealing with the challenging behavior. Ask for their suggestions again. Let them know what your goals are: “We want Linda to know that she can show feelings without biting. When the biting stops, other children won’t run away when she tries to play with them.”
- Let them know that you will keep them posted on the child’s progress. Find out if they prefer a phone call, a note, or an email message. Then be sure to follow through.
- Keep in mind how uncomfortable parents might be about the child’s behavior. Make sure they know you don’t blame them for what the child does.

(Portions of this Tip Sheet were adapted from an IEL Web Talk with Karen Stephens, available at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/chat/stephens-webtalk.htm>.)

For related Web resources, see “Connecting with Parents: ‘But He Doesn’t Do That at Home!’” at <http://illinoisearlylearning.org/tips.htm>.

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