

Family Communication *Strategies & Boundaries*

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“Our goal is to build an amiable school, where children, teachers, and families all feel at home.... It must embody ways of getting along together, of intensifying relationships among the three central protagonists, of assuring fullness of attention to the problems of education, and of activating participation and research. These are the most effective tools for all those concerned—children, teachers, and parents—to become more united and aware of each other’s contribution.

Loris Malaguzzi



What are we going to talk about?

- ① 5-Step Communication Template
- ② *REAL LIFE* Examples from Group 4
- ③ Communication Do's & Don'ts
- ④ Setting Boundaries



What Parents Want

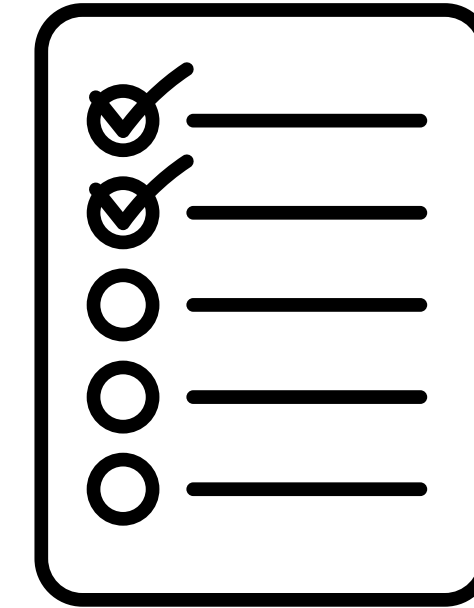
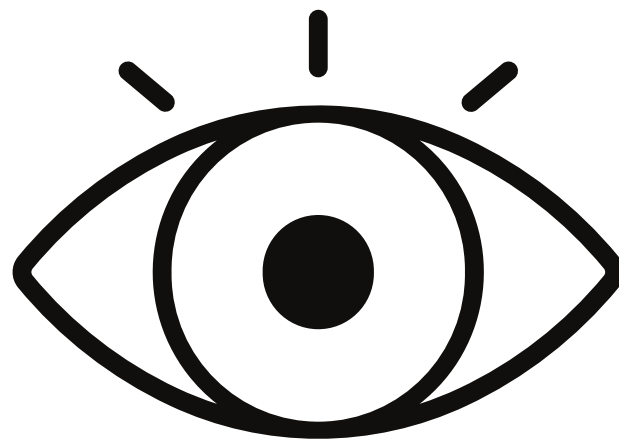
*Teacher-Parent
Relationship Goals*

What parents want...



To be **heard**

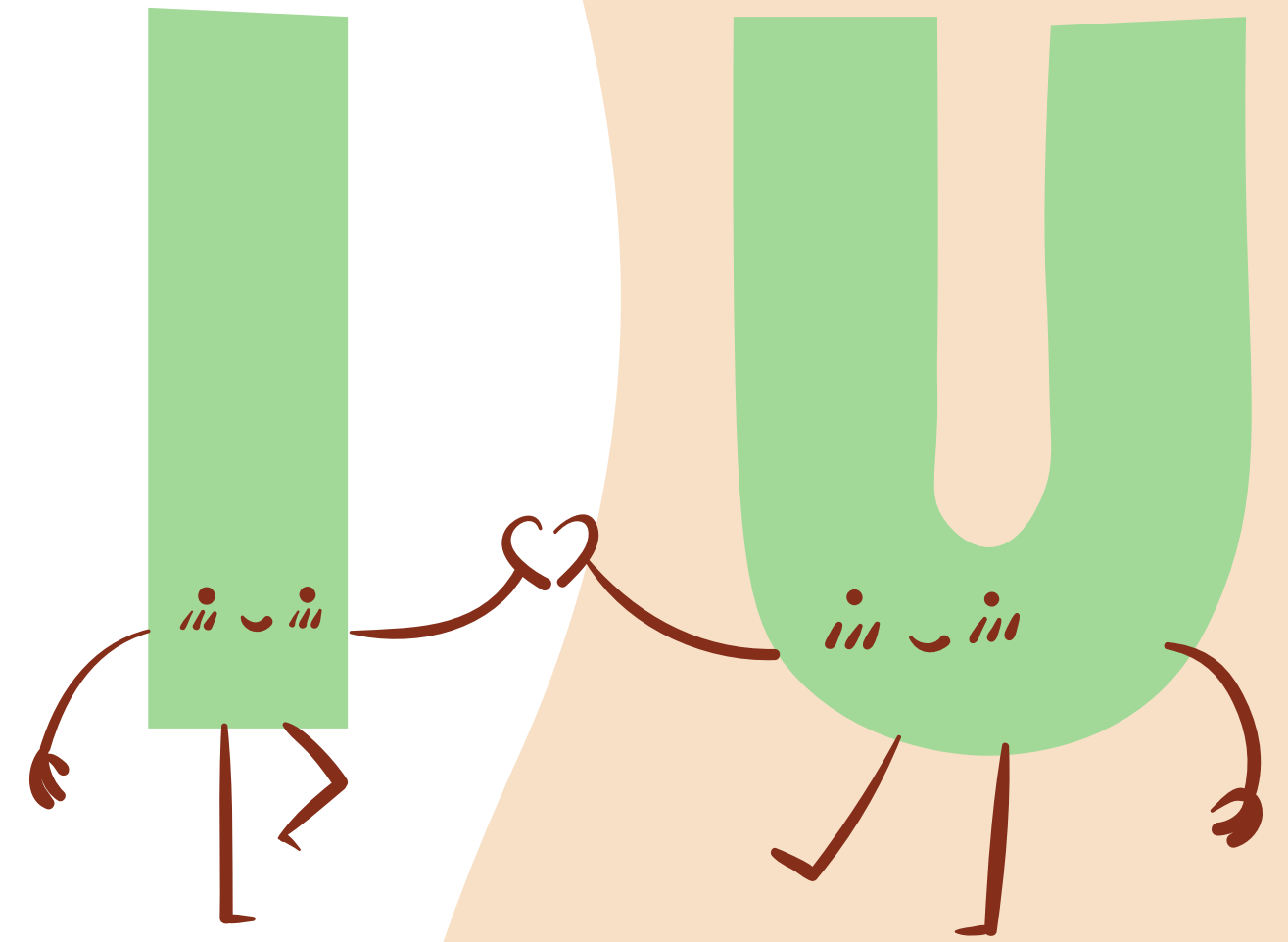
To know
that you **see**
their child



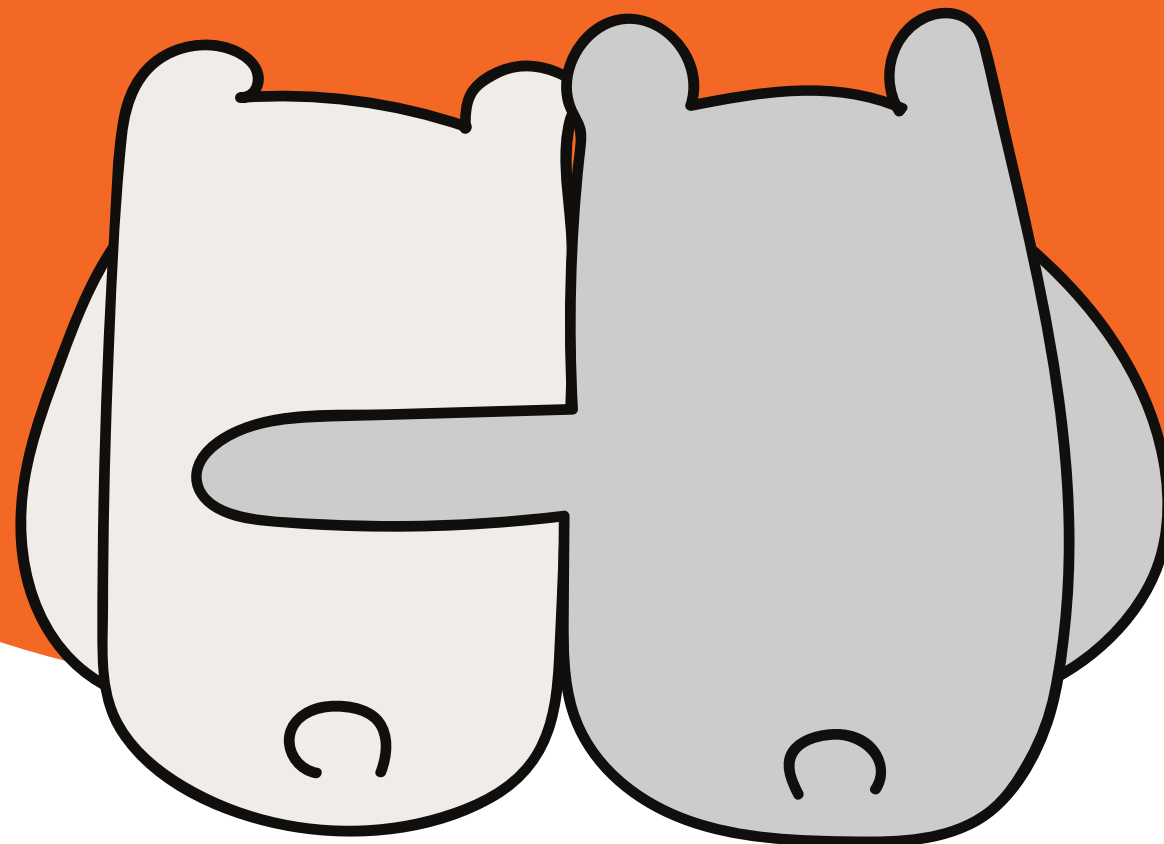
To know
that you
have a plan

5-Step Communication Template

1. Validate the relationship
2. Validate the concern
3. The no-fluff explanation
4. Your plan
5. Validate the relationship (again)



Validate the Relationship





The underlying message
of all communications

We are a team, families and teachers, working together in the best interest of the child. The parent's perspective is always **valid**, **important**, and **appreciated**.



Replies

“Thanks for the wonderful and insightful e-mail. It is so very helpful for us to get a little glimpse into the kids' interactions and patterns at home.”

“Thank you so much for sharing with us what goes on at home. This information is really valueable and appreciated.”

"Thank you so much for the message. It's good that you tell us what's happening at home. We really want to keep the communication open between our families and us."

"We would love to hear how you handle X situations at home."

"We strongly feel it's important that we work together on this."

"It's a part of our teaching philosophy to work as a team with parents."



*Initiating
Communication*

Validate the Concern





I hear you

Make it clear that their message has been heard. This can often be done by simply repeating or summarizing their concern.



Why it matters

Make clear the why of your concern. How it affects the child, the child's relationships, their development, other children's experience in class, etc..

The "No-Fluff" Explanation



Say it as it happened

Straight Talk

Parents want to know what's happening. Be as forthcoming as possible and describe the situation in detail. Give specific examples.

Details show you're paying attention and that you really "see" their child. The parents feel they can really "see" what's happening.

They DON'T expect things are always picture perfect and can even get nervous if they only hear positive things from you (especially if they hear negative things from their child).

***AVOID USING OTHER CHILDREN'S NAMES.**

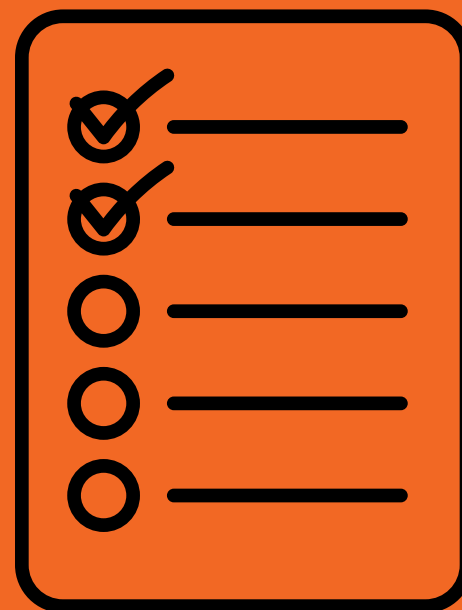
Be Proactive!

If there has been a negative incident in your class, it's possible that the children will tell parents about it. If it's a recurring behavior, it's even more likely.

This can lead to gossip between parents.

It's better if you can get out in front of the situation and be the first to explain what's happening from a neutral perspective.

Your Plan



What are you going to do about it?

Classroom Strategies

What is your response when this situation occurs?

What tools are you working on building to help their child and other children handle/ process the situation?

What can the parents do to implement similar strategies at home?

Provide Resources

When sharing your strategies with parents, it can often be a good opportunity to share your pedagogical inspirations.

For example, we use the Conscious Discipline and Non-Violent Communication methods in our classroom. We often share resources about these methodologies with families.

This shows parents you are educated and competent, and use research-backed methods in your teaching practice.

Real Life Examples from Group 4



Why does my child keep getting hit?

A child was getting hit repeatedly by another child. This incident occurred after a conversation with the parents about the ongoing issue. It was very important to them that they heard specific details and that they knew how we were handling the situation when it occurred. We sent a WhatsApp voice message to both parents to inform them. We also informed the family of the child who did the hitting.

[LISTEN](#)



Why does my child cry so much?

Hi,

X said something about one of the kids hitting her in the back yard. I would love to hear more about it from you guys as well.

Also, regardless of this incident, I'd love to know if (when) X cries during the day and why. Over the past month she's been crying more easily over stuff. We've been working on it and there has been an improvement, but it still goes on a little bit. So I would love to know how it is in gan where she spends most of her day.

Thanks,



Thank you so much for the message. It's good that you tell us what's happening at home. We really want to keep the communication open between our families and us.

There was an incident today where a child became very upset when a big creation he made was taken down from the climbing dome by a few children who wanted to climb (including X. He did hit some children in that moment, but thankfully no one was seriously hurt. Unfortunately, X was pushed and fell. Teacher Maya attended to her, making sure she was physically OK, comforting her, and talking over the incident. I helped the child who was angry and hitting. I sat with him apart from the other children until he was calm and ready to return to play.

I believe X was physically OK after this. Did she complain of any pain at home?

Regarding crying... With many of our children in Group 4 there are small moments throughout the day where big emotions cause them to cry. Usually, these incidents are resolved within a few minutes. The child cries, is comforted, hopefully has their need met, and moves on. It is not unusual for X to cry at gan, but these are typically short moments and she returns to play quickly. For example, today she cried when she fell from the climbing dome and another time she cried when she was playing a game with two other children and there was some arguing over how it should be played. She also cried when she was pushed. All incidents were resolved fairly quickly with the help of a teacher.

Personally, we are not concerned about the tears. Even though X cries when she feels a big emotion (hurt, frustration, pain), she almost always "gets back on the horse" (ie returns to play) quickly. We think we can support her by building her confidence and letting her know that she is capable of solving her own problems and comforting herself. I imagine we will see a lot of progress this year as her emotional regulation skills continue to develop and she learns how to better cope with big emotions.

I wonder also if you might be seeing more crying at home simply because of the break from school... she might need some time to readjust to the routine of going to gan everyday.

Why does my child say she "hates gan"?

We (the Group 4 teaching team) discussed together your parent-teacher meeting. It was very helpful for us to better understand X outside of the classroom, so that we can better help her inside the classroom and empower behaviors that she will hopefully carry into her home environment. We also brought Maya Lan into the conversation.

We are observing X closely as a team to see how she is doing socially. Interestingly, yesterday Maya Lan observed an interaction between X, A, and B that matched the dynamics you described to Danielle. In short, A and B were enjoying a giggly, intimate moment and X was on the periphery trying to join in and not succeeding. In this moment, we could see your thoughts and intuitions reflected: perhaps X feels the absence of a close friendship this year and is still looking for her place socially in the group. We would like to spend some more time observing and get back to you next week with our own reflections and next steps.

In the meantime, Maya Lan gave us some helpful history of X. She enlightened us that X has been having similar behavioral issues at home for some time and that it hasn't always been connected with this feeling that she "hates gan." We would like some more information about the "breakdowns" you mentioned (screaming and crying every half hour or so): (1) what causes them; (2) how do you react to or "deal with" them.

Why can't my child bring food from home?

Hi X and Y,

Maya Amitai told us about the request to bring rice crackers for X to gan and we checked with Nurit and Maya Lan on the policy. In short, we try to avoid bringing outside food but we have some possible alternatives we would like to try out. In short #2, we can order rice crackers in bulk for the whole school to eat during snack time, so no need to bring them in especially.

Why don't we allow "special" meals or snacks? It may be helpful to start with a bit of background. We've tried before to allow children who don't eat the food on menu to bring in special food that was plain and tasty (white bread, plain pasta, etc.). The result is two-part. One, the child who now has a favorite food readily available loses their biggest motivation to try other, more nutritious foods on menu. Two, all the other children in the class also want the plain and tasty food to the point of refusing the other options. A bit of balagan!

What can we do instead? In the past, we had a student in Group 4 with very similar eating behavior to X. The creative solution was this: the child came up with a list of foods she likes to eat and this list was given to our cook Chani. Chani then incorporated one item into a single meal each day (either breakfast or lunch). This invited the child to eat and also let her know she was seen. We would like to try this with X!

How do you feel about creating a menu with her over the weekend and bringing it in on Sunday? We recommend you take some time and make it fun! Perhaps make a menu creatively with art supplies you have at home. We can recommend the first item that X already eats as part of our Monday lunch -- corn!

What to do in the meantime? We of course don't want X to feel hungry to the point that she loses enjoyment in her day. At the moment, because we have had such little time with her, we can't truly say if the no eating is having a big effect but we will keep an attentive eye on it. While we work out a menu that works for X, please send her to school with a full belly (big breakfast) and be ready with a snack when she returns home.

We are available for any questions, thoughts, etc..

Communication Do's & Don'ts



Don't Jump to
Conclusions

Do Approach
communications with
curiosity

Have your theory, put it aside and be open to the parent's perspective. Approach communications with parent's from a place of curiosity, rather than judgement.

Don't Respond immediately from
an emotional or defensive
place

Do Take your time and plan
an empathetic,
professional response

When dealing with an emotional or accusatory email from parents, time is your best friend. Take a step back, discuss with your team, and plan your response.

Oftentimes, the best response to high-emotional issues is to schedule a face-to-face or Zoom meeting. When emotions are high, written communications are often misinterpreted.

Don't Accuse parents of wrongdoing

Do Explain the situation from a neutral perspective

If you observe or assume that a child is being negatively affected by a situation at home, it is important to communicate this to parents. However, it should be done in a judgment-free manner. For example, explain the behavior and be curious about the home environment.

Real life example

"X is having a bit of a rough day today. She keeps getting into small conflicts, grabbing toys from other children or pushing them out of the way to take a turn, etc.. No one has been seriously hurt and we are managing. I am wondering how things are at home? It seems like there is a bigger feeling she is battling under the surface. Or perhaps it's just a bad mood that will pass. Either way, we wanted to communicate it."

Don't go at it alone

Do communicate as a team

All communications should be "approved" by the entire team. Especially in more serious or emotional matters, all voices of the team should be present.

This can be a conversation beforehand or by having team members read over a draft.

Don't talk about serious issues in front of the children

Do find a place to talk it about privately as a team

Boundaries



Communication Expectations

- ① WhatsApp is for emergencies and logistics ONLY.
- ② Email, face-to-face or calls for everything else.
(Email has added benefit of record keeping!)
- ③ Communicate during work hours and set clear boundaries about your "off" hours.
- ④ If you say you'll follow up, make sure you do.

Set Clear Expectations. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.

Friendly email reminder

"We want to send a kindly reminder about the desired use of our individual family WhatsApp groups. Our intentions for these groups are for the purpose of emergencies or logistics only. EI: a child needs to go home sick, a child is staying home from gan, who is picking the child up from school, etc..

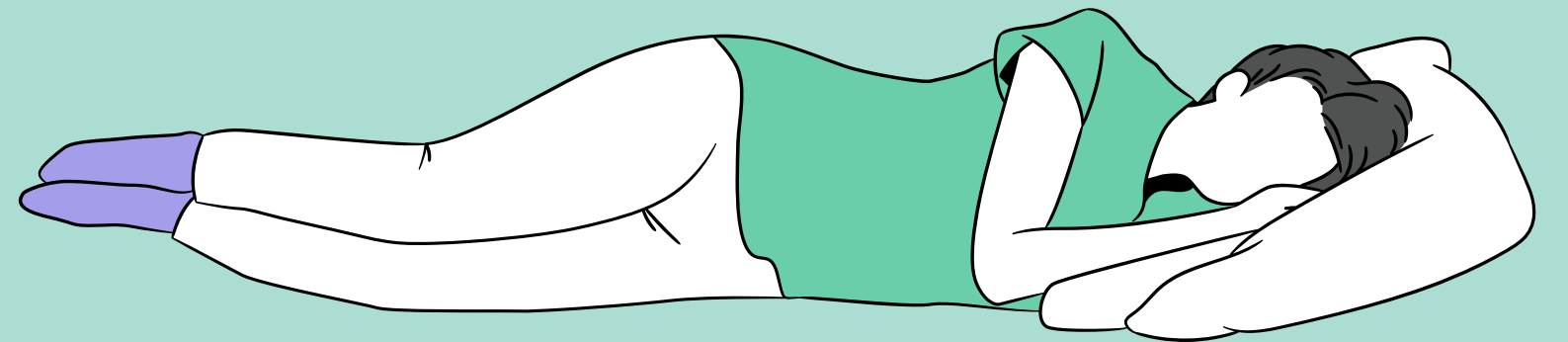
If you have a concern about your child that requires more detail and attention from our team, we kindly ask that you send an email. This allows us to receive the message and respond during work hours, when we can give it the attention it deserves and the eyes of the entire team. This method also allows us the personal space of our evenings for our own families and rest."

Response to a late-night text

"Hi X - thanks for filling us in! We will def keep an eye on Y today and update you.

Also - we ask that you send these types of messages via email, especially if this late at night. Via email, we can respond during work hours with input from the entire team."

Communicate
how you want to
be communicated
to.



If you don't want to get WhatsApp night messages, don't respond at night. Wait til morning and remind re expectations.

Thanks!

