

BUILDING A FAMILY-FRIENDLY SCHOOL

Building Blocks

***Telephone Etiquette**

***General Office Etiquette**

***Working With The Community
Within Your School**

Telephone Etiquette

- Answer the telephone before the third ring.
- Focus on the caller; finish other conversations, don't eat while talking, don't chew gum, don't type while talking.
- Speak clearly in a professional manner. Avoid using slang terms.
- If you must finish another conversation, put the caller on hold, don't cover the phone with your hand.
- If it is necessary to transfer the call, alert the caller that you are transferring their call. Give the caller the phone number of the person you are transferring them to, in case you are disconnected. Tell the person to whom you are transferring the call, the name of the person on the line and the nature of their call.
- When taking a message:
 - Don't say – “He is busy”
 - Say – “He is not available at this time. Can I take a message or transfer you to his voicemail?”

 - Don't say – “He's not here yet”
 - Say – I expect him at any time. Can I take a message or transfer you to his voicemail?”

 - Don't say – “She's in the bathroom”
 - Say – “She has stepped out of the office. Can I take a message or transfer you to her voicemail?”

 - Don't say – “She took the day off”
 - Say – “She is not in the office today. Can I help you or would you like to leave a message?”

Smile

It is best to smile before you pick up the telephone. If you are not friendly before you know who it is, afterwards may be too late. You can definitely “hear” a smile. You will find it difficult to be rude when you are smiling. It clearly changes the tone of your voice.

Greetings

Remember, you are the caller's first impression. Your tone of voice sets the stage for the conversation. If you answer in a professional tone, it is likely the caller will follow your lead.

Multiple Lines and Placing Calls on Hold

Sometimes it is necessary to place a call on hold.

- Ask the caller to please hold for a moment.
- Answer the second caller and ask if they can hold for a moment. If they say no, get their number and tell them you will call back as soon as possible.
- If you have multiple lines on hold, be sure to write down their names and who they are holding for so that you do not have to ask them to repeat the information.

Irate Callers

Even with the most irate caller, you need to remain calm and not let your annoyance come through in your voice. Don't take the call personally; the caller is not upset with you, he/she is upset with the situation. Recognize your limits and seek assistance from others if needed. Take a break to ease the tension, and definitely leave the problem at work.

Taking Messages

Have a pen and paper available unless you send messages via email, in which case you should always leave that window open on your computer. Ask for the spelling of the name and telephone number with area code, as well as for details on what the call is regarding.

You as the Caller

Always remember to treat the person you are calling in the same way you would like to be treated. Identify yourself and give a brief explanation of why you are calling. If you are leaving a message on voicemail, speak clearly while leaving your full name (spell your last name), your school or department, the date and time of your call and reason for calling. Don't forget to follow up.

Your Voicemail

Record your personal message. Write it down and read it several times before recording it. Make sure it is professional and includes your school/department name as well as the hours of operation.

If you are on vacation or out of the office, be sure to include that information so that callers will know that you are not available at that time, and when they can expect you to return. Leave a forwarding number for someone in your office in case the caller needs to get in touch with someone immediately.

Time Constraints

Check your messages daily and return calls within 24 hours. Keep your mailbox under control by forwarding messages when necessary, and deleting messages that you no longer need.

Statements to Avoid

- Mrs. Jones is still out to lunch.
- I don't know where he is. May I take your number and have him call you?
- She is in the middle of a big parent problem. Would you like to leave a message?
- He is at the doctor's office.
- She went home early.
- Mr. Smith has not come in yet.

Attitude

You have little or no control over many things in life, but you do have control over your attitude. Disinterested, bored, unmotivated people aren't very productive, and they achieve little satisfaction in life. In contrast, people who make an effort to have a positive and cheerful attitude typically reach many of their goals, and they usually are happier and more fulfilled!

General Office Etiquette

Office staff is the “front line” who creates the first impression of a school or office. You are so important. Every day you have the opportunity to make an impact by your attitude and service.

Many schools have signs informing visitors that they must report to the office, no trespassing, etc. On some campuses, it is not always clearly indicated where the front office is located, nor is there a “welcome” sign. That is why it is so important that you create a family-friendly atmosphere.

Please make visitors feel welcome by your actions. Remember, you have no idea who the person is. It may be a parent, volunteer, business partner, or an individual who can provide many resources to your school. Please treat everyone who walks through your door as an invited guest.

When a visitor walks in:

Look up immediately with a smile and acknowledge them. If you are busy, either on the telephone or speaking to another person, say “I’ll be with you in a moment.” When you are ready, say “thanks for waiting. How may I help you?” Then ask if they have an appointment. If they do not have an appointment, ask them if it is OK for you to tell the person they wish to see, what the visit is about. Tell the visitor to have a seat while you locate the individual.

Try not to allow the visitor to hear you call the person, announce that the visitor is there, and ask if they are available to talk to the visitor. This puts the person in an awkward position if they are unable or unwilling to see the visitor at that time. If the person can see the visitor, tell the visitor the person will be out in a moment. If the person cannot see the visitor, tell the visitor that the person is unavailable to meet at that time and you are happy to take their contact information.

It is a good idea to have a brief greeting written in other languages. This way, if a visitor does not speak English, you can hand them something that will advise them that you will get an employee who speaks their language. If the visitor cannot read, you may want to have a sheet with their language written phonetically for you, so that you can try to say it in their language. It should be a simple statement stating that you do not speak their language and that you will get someone to assist them.

Never assume that another office member is assisting a visitor. If you see someone sitting in the office, ask them if they are being helped. Quite often a co-worker has not acknowledged them. It is better to give a visitor more attention than none at all. Never be engaged in a personal telephone call or a conversation with others while there are visitors in the office.

Keep all food and drinks away from immediate view. Nothing looks worse than to have your lunch scattered across your desk. Keep personal items away as well. It does not look good to have catalogs, mail, etc. out in full view. It looks even worse to see co-workers standing around your desk looking at catalogs.

It is a good idea to have a written list of who is responsible for specific tasks and duties. For example, many assistant principals, deans, or other staff may be in charge of ESOL, ESE, grade levels, etc.

With this information, you will know who handles certain issues, so that you can refer people to the right person. Check to see if your school has a written flow chart or something similar. It helps to know this information in case someone is absent or unavailable.

It is so important to give accurate information. Never be afraid to say that you do not know the answer. However, be sure to explain that you will find out the information or put them in touch with the appropriate party. Don't just pass the person on to someone else.

It is critically important to maintain confidentiality at all times. Make sure that visitors do not overhear you discussing something that is confidential in the office. Additionally, never discuss confidential school matters outside of the workplace, including at home.

Be positive! Try to make people feel good about your school, whether they are students, parents, staff, or the community. Refrain from negative comments and gossip. They only create problems and hurt people.

Give co-workers the same respect you would give to a visitor. Please try to represent the School District in a positive manner. Quite often we are asked many questions and opinions because of our status in the community. What you say can ultimately have a major impact on how you make a person feel.

Take pride in your job! Try to become as helpful and knowledgeable as you can, and never forget that your job is important.

Family-Friendly Schools Checklist

School Climate

- ___ Posted signs warmly welcoming parents.
- ___ There are directions posted for parents to find their way around the school.
- ___ Office personnel greet parents in a friendly, courteous way.
- ___ There is a comfortable reception and information area for parents.
- ___ The principal is available for parent conferences.
- ___ There is an orientation program for incoming students and parents.
- ___ There is a program for students/parents who come to the school after the beginning of the year.
- ___ There are regular social occasions where parents and school staff can get to know each other.
- ___ The school permits parents to observe in class.
- ___ The school has an 'Open Door' policy where parents are welcome at any time during the day.

Communication

- ___ There is a school newsletter with up-to-date information.
- ___ The school sends home a calendar that lists dates of parent-teacher conferences, report cards, and other major events.
- ___ The school sends home a directory containing the names and phone numbers of parent organization representatives and school personnel.
- ___ The school holds annual open houses and back-to-school nights.
- ___ The school has a plan for emergencies and urgent questions.
- ___ Parents know where to go with concerns, questions, and compliments.

Collaboration

- ___ The school requires at least one parent-teacher conference each year.
- ___ The school provides in-service training to help teachers work with parents.
- ___ There is an early warning policy in effect for teachers to consult with parents promptly if a child is falling behind or having social difficulties.
- ___ High schools require parent approval on students' choices of courses.
- ___ The school furnishes information to parents of students enrolled in Exceptional Education programs regarding training and resources available through the District.

Advisors and Decision-Makers

- ___ The school publishes a policy handbook for parents.
- ___ There is a mechanism for obtaining parent input on new policies and programs.
- ___ There is a parent-teacher organization that meets at least once a month.
- ___ The staff informs parents immediately when serious problems arise in the school, and enlists their help whenever necessary.
- ___ Parents are consulted regarding major school policy changes.
- ___ There are varied opportunities for parents to be involved in decision making (SAC, PTA, school suggestion box, etc.)

Outreach to All Families

- ___ There is an opportunity for non-custodial parents to be informed about their children's performance and school events.
- ___ Teachers communicate at times that are convenient to parents, recognizing that they have jobs and may not be able to easily leave their place of work during the workday.
- ___ Written communications are provided in the language best understood and spoken by the family.

Partnership Philosophy

- ___ The school has a written statement about partnerships with parents.
- ___ The school provides in-service training to help teachers work with parents.
- ___ Time is spent during staff meetings discussing working with parents.
- ___ Teachers are encouraged to consult with the principal if they are having difficulty dealing with a parent.
- ___ A staff member substitutes in the classroom to allow teachers and other staff to have meetings with parents.

Volunteer Participation

- ___ The school has an organized volunteer program along with a coordinator.
- ___ There is a wide variety of jobs available for volunteers, including ones that could be done at home or on weekends.
- ___ All parents are expected to volunteer or participate in some way during the school year.
- ___ The volunteer program is reassessed periodically.