

Communicating to Parents

by Adam Day

One day while I was shopping in a department store, I overheard a wife say to her husband, "Honey, 'one size fits all' only works if you don't care what you look like." How true!

In today's society, we expect to be catered to. From fast-food slogans proclaiming that you can "have it your way" to individualized keys that adjust your seat when you start up the car, we expect to have our information delivered directly to us on glossy paper with our names highlighted so we don't have to leaf through any unnecessary text. Our fast-paced culture necessitates communicating to parents and families in specialized modes.

Understanding the ins and outs of communicating to parents is a key factor in posturing your ministry for success. And when parents know you value their time by going the extra mile, your stock will go through the roof.

Formats for Communicating to Parents

There are several different formats to choose from when communicating to parents. Using a few of the more notable approaches can prove to be very helpful in your quest for clear communication.

1. *Stickers on kids as they go home.* Stickers are a highly effective way to promote upcoming events that take place in the short term. Placing reminder stickers on kids' shirts before they leave your classroom can greatly increase participation at a class party or special outing. Parents will start to comment, "It's a good thing I saw that sticker before I put Johnny's shirt in the wash or he would have missed out on this opportunity." Using a sheet of address labels is the most cost-effective way to print your own stickers with little hassle.

2. *Kids' bulletins that get handed to parents.* Ask your children's minister to include class-specific information in the weekly children's bulletin. This is a great place for sharing information about service projects or events that involve multiple age levels. Check how far in advance your children's minister needs the information and provide all necessary details in written form.

3. *Postcards.* Cheaper than letters and much more inviting, postcards can display high fun and lots of color. Consider placing a small circle on the postcard with "Put magnet here" printed inside it to help parents remember to post the card on the refrigerator. Or suggest that kids hand their postcards to friends so that you can double your numbers at a class party or an event.

4. *E-mail blasts.* More and more parents are online at work. Send information about upcoming events, reminders to bring items to church on Sunday, or just sporadic notes to keep parents abreast of what's going on in your classroom.

5. *Prayer postcards.* A great way to involve families in your ministry is to ask them to pray. Many times, parents who may not feel as though they can get involved directly with the children's programs will pray for ministry items. This is a great way to communicate needs such as items you would like to have for your classroom or small

maintenance issues you have with your facilities. Placing "Please pray for our 3rd grade Sunday school assistant" on your monthly prayer card to parents will let them know there's a place to get connected in your ministry.

6. *Newsletters.* Parents love to see pictures of their children, and newsletters are a great place to put such pictures. Key information placed conveniently close to the child's picture whose parents need to read it will cause the parents to pay attention. You just never know . . . the whole page might make it on the refrigerator door!

(Remember, *Family Connections* is a quarterly newsletter you can customize to include your congregation's name and information and then send to families. Go to www.21stcc.com and check under Downloads/Connect2.)

Contents of Communication

The format in which you communicate is important, but *what* you communicate is even more critical. Here are some pointers on what to communicate to parents.

1. *Remember the parents' priorities.* Parents are most concerned about safety, security, and that the children are being taught the Bible. Use this important point to filter all the information you send out.

2. *Feature the teachers.* Parents want to know that their children are loved. Including pictures of the people who have spent time preparing lessons for their children is reassuring to parents.

3. *Show successes.* Keep in mind that parents get particularly excited when they see their children growing in positive ways. Be sure to capitalize on dramatized Bible stories, class service projects, and so on. When kids go home talking about a new project that is followed up with written proof and pictures, it's a homerun.

4. *Pass on your expertise.* Most families desire to be involved in their child's development. Take advantage of this by including in your communication prayer concerns, parenting tips, the schedule for the next parenting class in your church, or a list of places to go to for help in their journey as a parent.

5. *Picture your partnership.* Help parents know you are partnering with them for their children's success. When you place in your communication a picture you have taken of Courtney playing soccer, it lets her parents know you are involved with the kids in your classroom and care about the health of their entire family.

6. *Be part of the church.* Families want to know that the teachers of their children are following the church mission and vision. Capitalize on church-wide events where kids in your class can participate and be of help (i.e., leading games for younger children at a church picnic, serving the church by organizing the food pantry, etc.). These are great wins!

"One size fits all" probably won't work when it comes to your Sunday school class's publicity needs. But following a few simple guidelines for format and content of communication can transform your message and add significance to your mission of communicating with parents in a high-speed society.

"Communicating to Parents" has been adapted from Adam's series of articles, "Step It Up Publicity Helps," included in *Children's Ministry Helps: Publicity* (Standard Publishing, Item 42313).