

Winning Ways to Partner with Families

Common Responses to Parent Questions, Suggestions, and Concerns

What are we often thinking when parent express suggestions, questions, and concerns? Have you ever thought or said any of the following?

- That's not the way we do it here.
- This is group care not one-on-one.
- That will never work.
- I'm an early childhood expert and I know what's best.
- Is that parent crazy?
- Does she think that her kid is the only one I have to watch?
- She has got to be kidding.
- I don't make enough money for that.
- No way.

Come on and admit it, we've all had those thoughts at times. Unfortunately, sometimes that's the way we express them. *So what do we do to provide good parent care, balance the needs of the each child with the needs of the group, and not go insane?*

We simply keep an open-mind to parent suggestions, questions, and concerns and realize that improving and enhancing our program is good for everyone.

Key Parent Customer Service Concepts

1. Smiles and Systems
2. No surprises
3. Why Not
4. Good Enough, Never Is

Smiles and Systems

- Smile even if you don't feel like it.
- Have systems and policies that determine quality.
- Evaluate the policies consistently.



No Surprises

- Flood parents with information.
- Call when things happen.
- Know each parent preference.

Why Not?

- Approach each request with a “Why not?” mindset.
- “Why not?” does not always mean, “Yes.”
- Know there is an essence of legitimacy in every issue.

Good Enough, Never Is

- Expect change.
- Search for new and better ways to do things.
- Be a problem-solver.

10 Ways to Develop an Individual Relationship with Each Parent

1. Expect relationships to be different.

Some want a lot of contact interacting with us and others maintain a greater distance and seek fewer details about care and education. With my first child, I wanted to know if she got a paper cut. By my fourth child, I didn't need any information from the program unless he was headed to the hospital.

2. Ask parents what is important to them.

How do you know if a parent needs little relational contact beyond exchange of pleasantries and relevant care and education information or the parent is shy or afraid to ask? You ask. Ask each parent when their child enters your program or transitions to a new room what's important to them. Questions like, do you need to leave quickly in the morning or can you stay a bit? I will call you if your child is sick or hurt, but are there other things that are important to you that I should inform you about before you arrive for pick-up?

3. Don't judge the parent's parenting ability by their relationship with you.

It's easy to think that those parents who attend every workshop or social function our programs have to offer and spend time chatting with us is a better parent than one who maintains their distance and is seemingly uninterested. Yes, it is good for children have their parents participate in

school event, but sometimes job constraints or even a parent's energy level may keep them from being present. That doesn't necessarily mean that the parent isn't a good parent or doesn't care.

4. Talk about their child.

Every parent wants to hear positive things about their child. The easiest way to develop a relationship with a parent whether he or she is close or distance, or shy or outgoing, is to talk about their child. Share something they said or did. Let the parent know you notice the positive qualities in their child.

Positive Parent Conversation Starters

- Your child is so smart. Let me tell you what I saw him do today...
- Your child works so hard. Today she was trying to...
- Your child is a good friend to others. I watched him...
- Your child said something clever. He said...
- Your child will make you so proud. Today she...
- Your child loves you so much. She told me...

5. Work on the individual parent relationships.

Any type of relationship, friendships, marriages, take work. Notice the types of things that the parent appreciates, like voicemails, special notes, reminders about bringing in supplies and continue those efforts.

6. Give more to the relationship than you expect to receive.

Our efforts to develop an individual relationship with each parent maybe create mutually beneficial bonds between parent and teacher, but it is unlikely that we will experience a personally rewarding relationship with each parent. As humans, we care drawn to certain people and others we will have more difficulty working with. As professionals, it's our job to try and develop a relationship even if the parent does not respond. That does not mean that parents can treat us poorly or neglect their program responsibilities.

7. Help even when you don't feel like it.

Some parents are just easier to love and want to help than others. Some parents will be critical of us and the program, demanding, and uncooperative. Those are the parents who need us the most. Keep working on those relationships, if anything they are opportunities to hone our own relationship building skills.

8. Ask the parent questions.

Developing a relationship means understanding the needs of the other person and responding to them. It's difficult to anticipate what each parent wants or needs. The best way to do that is to ask. "What else can I do to help you?" is a good start. Thinking I must be crazy and parents are going to

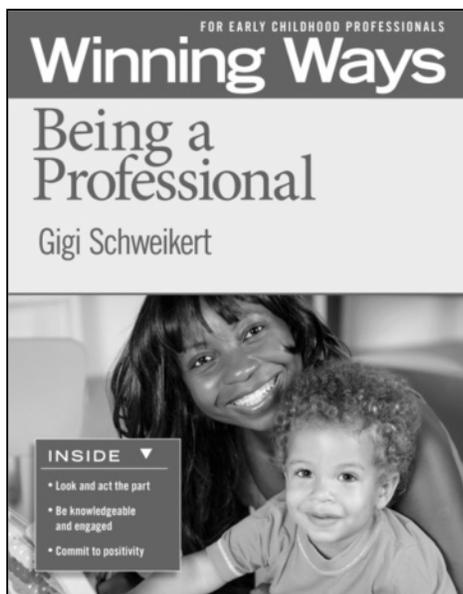
be impossible? Unlikely, but that also depends on what you mean by impossible. Asking us to change their child into new clothes before pick-up or feed them an extra snack might not be impossible.

9. Don't take things personally.

People who care for young children are usually quite loving and supportive, a good thing. It's also easy to be overly sensitive to the comments and requests of parents. Try not to take things personally when parents don't respond as you want or make comments that make you feel they don't think you are doing a good job. It certainly feels good when parents appreciate our efforts and applaud our work, but keep in mind that we are working for the parent to help the child.

10. Be a professional.

Early childhood educators should always look for ways to put parents at ease. Parents should feel welcomed and comfortable with the relationship they have defined and clear that we really do want to hear what they have to say.



Gigi Schweikert

Early Childhood and Parenting Expert

"Inspirational, encouraging and real," that's what audiences and readers have to say about Gigi Schweikert. Known for her humor and practical messages, Gigi is a popular keynote speaker for early childhood conferences and parenting seminars. She has worked with Head Start, NAEYC, Prevention, YMCA, Bank of America, Merck and many other organizations.

Gigi is the author of fifteen published books on early childhood education and parenting. Her latest book series, Winning Ways, includes three new resources: Partnering with Families, Being a Professional, and Becoming a Team player. Gigi also wrote Prime Times: A Handbook for Excellence in Infant and Toddlers Programs, with Jim Greenman and Anne Stonehouse. She has several books on parenting including the bestsellers

There's a Perfect Angel in Every Child: Discipline Tips That Work and I'm a Good Mother, for the not-so-perfect Mom. She contributes to periodicals and journals including Head Start's Children and Families, eFamily News, Northwest Baby & Child, Cricket Magazine and Exchange.

Gigi has over twenty-five years of experience in Early Child Education. She managed the Johnson & Johnson Early Education Programs and directed the United Nations Child Care Centre in New York City where she attended Bank Street College of Education. Gigi lives in Hunterdon County New Jersey with her husband and four children. Teaching educators and parents to help every child succeed is Gigi's life passion. Contact Gigi at www.gigischweikert.com for keynotes, staff workshops, and parent seminars.