

Know How to Handle Hostile Confrontations

Steps for Defusing a Hostile Confrontation

1. Remain calm and thank the parent for expressing concern.
2. Listen to the parent's complaints without defending yourself or justifying your actions.
3. Show empathy and concern by asking the parent for more specific information.
4. Restate the student's problem behavior and clarify why it is not in his or her best interest to act this way.
5. If a parent still seems critical or angry, point out that it is in the child's best interest that you work together for a solution.
6. Finally, if the parent is still upset, suggest that he or she talk with the principal.

By practicing these steps, if you do have a confrontation with a parent, you can meet the situation with confidence and move toward a productive outcome.

What to Say When You Call About a Problem

Keep the following objectives in mind as you play your call:

1. **Begin with a statement of sincere concern for the child.** Your introductory statement will set the tone for the conversation, so carefully phrase your remarks. Rather than saying, "Ms. Meyer, I'm calling because I'm not please with Molly's behavior," say "Ms. Meyer, I'm calling because I'm concerned about how Morgan gets along with other students."
2. **Describe the specific behavior that necessitated the call.** Tell the parent in observable terms what the student did or did not do. Describe the behavior (such as hitting, shouting, or refusing to participate) and the number of time the problem has occurred. Rather than saying "Molly treats other cruelly," say, "Molly hit three students over the course of the day."
3. **Describe steps you have taken to solve the problem.** Let the parent know that you are not calling in lieu of solving the problem yourself. Explain specifically what you have done to address the problem. "Last week I discussed the rule with her and I had her write down a commitment not to hit other students. Today I sent her to the principal's office and later spoke with the principal about how to help her address this problem."
4. **Get information from the parent.** Ask for any information he or she can add that might help solve the problem. Listen to what the parent has to say to discover what may be troubling the student and exacerbating the behavior.
5. **Present your solutions to the problem.** Prepare to tell the parent exactly what you will do and what you would like the parent to do. Ask the parent to let the child know that you called and that both you and the parent feel concern about the problem.
6. **Express confidence in your ability to address the problem.** The parent may feel anxious and want to know that you have the ability to work with the child to correct the problem, just as a mother would want to know that a pediatrician could make her child well. Rather than saying, "I don't know how to handle this but I'll try," say, "Don't worry. Other students have had this problem. We can help Molly."
7. **Plan for follow-up contact.** Promise the parent that you will follow up on this conversation. Commit to follow-up contact. Say, "I will contact you on Friday and let you know how things went."