

# Managing Conflict Encounters

## BEFORE THE CONVERSATION

- Check your assumptions; rein in your imagination.
- Look closer; look deeper; seek the positives.
- Own your challenges; admit your capacity for defensiveness.
- Make notes.
- Practice the conversation.
- Picture a positive outcome.
- BE PROACTIVE; make the first contact.

## DURING THE CONVERSATION

- Make an opening collaborative statement.
- Establish a contact boundary.
- Create and project an expectation of collaboration.
- Seek and establish common ground.
- LISTEN; VALIDATE; JOIN.
- Acknowledge your role; admit your challenges.

## AFTER THE CONVERSATION

- Reflect, alone and with others.
- Follow up to reinforce collaboration.
- LEARN; REMEMBER; REUSE.

## **COLLABORATIVE LANGUAGE**

- I know that we both care about Johnny....
- I'm so ready to listen and to hear your concerns....
- Johnny's a great kid. Let's talk about how things are going....
- I can tell you're concerned. I want to help....
- Your message/email let me know that you are frustrated. I want to work with you to reduce that frustration....
- I'm so glad I've reached you quickly. I wanted to talk to you as soon as I possibly could....
- I'm glad you've shared your concerns with me....
- I'm confident that we can talk this through....
- Let's talk about ways to resolve this....
- I understand that Johnny is disappointed/hurt/frustrated and that you are, too....
- I know that this has been difficult....
- How can I help...?
- I'm sorry to hear that....
- I know that we can work together to reach a smoother path for Johnny....
- What feels right to you...?
- What would you like to see happen next...?
- I'm so glad that we are talking about this....

## **CLOSING LANGUAGE**

- I'm glad we've talked about this....
- I feel we've made progress....
- You have been heard....
- I understand your feelings better now....
- It's clear how much you care about Johnny....
- I am glad you reached out to me....
- I'm glad we connected quickly....
- I know how important it is for us both to continue this conversation....
- I'd like to set up another time for further conversation....
- Before we next talk I will....
- Before we next talk, could you...?
- I will continue to....
- I will also talk to....

## Try this....

- Call back as soon as you can.
- Make proactive contact, especially if your teacher radar tells you that something's up.
- When returning a call, ask colleagues and administrators for advice to strengthen your approach and execution.
- Return an email with a call. The only exception is if you judge that the parent needs a short cooling off period. If so, send a return email with collaborative language saying you will be calling, with a date and approximate time.
- Prepare for the conversation, in your head, on paper and with a colleague/administrator.
- Always imagine a positive outcome.
- Set a clear time frame for the conversation, while reiterating that the goal is collaboration or resolution.
- Let the parent talk first, uninterrupted.
- Be absolutely sure that you acknowledge the parent's concern, verbally and with your body language.
- Start as many sentences as possible with a joining or collaborative introduction.
- Thank the parent for expressing their concerns and for creating an opportunity for collaborative resolution.
- Always remember that very few parents are truly imbalanced. Irrational behavior almost always stems from fear, anxiety, protection of their child, or an external motivating factor.
- Remember that you can, and should, always try again with a parent or with an attempt at resolution.
- Try to picture conflict resolution like other teacher skills (such as classroom management or technology integration). Like other master teacher skills, it takes practice You **can** become competent and confident at conflict resolution
- Always talk to an administrator after a significant conversation.
- Make brief notes after the conversation.

## Avoid this....

- Don't avoid returning the call. It will not go away, and most parents don't need a cooling off period.
- Don't listen to parent "horror stories". It's cold comfort to hear from others about how that parent might have treated them. It's likely to color or cloud your opinion, which will probably make the conversation harder for you.
- Don't rush into your own agenda.
- Don't feel that you can't "win" the conversation if you don't get your point across.
- Don't wait to talk. Listen.
- Don't cut the parent off or rush the end of the conversation.
- Don't get stuck in the details of the issue.
- Never squeeze a conversation into an inappropriate time frame, assuming that your next commitment will cut it off or "rescue" you.
- Don't let the conversation reach an impasse. Find common ground elsewhere if you can't agree on certain points.
- Don't let others make you mad ("I can't believe he said that to you...that's outrageous...you shouldn't stand for that...etc").
- Try not to hang up unless there's been some degree of resolution or a rescheduling of the conversation.
- Don't assume that one negative conversation will lead to another.
- Don't let a truly unkind or unreasonable tirade continue. Excuse yourself respectfully and gracefully and arrange to reschedule.
- Don't be afraid to own your own challenges or role in a situation.
- Don't avoid sharing details of an unresolved conversation with an administrator.
- Don't forget to follow through after a conversation. A note or an email to thank the parent for the dialogue is always a good indicator of collaboration.