



Handling Problems

(Complaints and Disagreements)

When to Talk...

Choose a time when neither of you is tired and when both of you have a free moment.

How to Talk...

Talk in a polite, helpful manner. Phrase your comments more positively and ask for the parent's help or advice. "Timmy seems more tired than usual today. Has he had trouble sleeping?"

How to Get Them to Listen...

It will be easier for parents to accept your complaint if they know that you see their child's good points too. Comment sincerely on helpful things the parents do for their child. If you let them know you think they are doing a good job, they may be more open to hearing your suggestions.

Steps for Solving Problems

Step 1 - State the Problem

Provider: Laura, I noticed that you picked Jon up late every day this week. If you will remember the mutual

agreement you signed when Jon began coming here, you agreed to pick him up by 5:30 p.m.

Step 2 - Listen to the Parent's Explanation

Mother: I'm sorry, but things have been so crazy at work. They are talking about layoffs, and I'm really trying to put in a little extra effort so that I don't lose my job.

Step 3 - Summarize to Check Your Understanding

Provider: I see. So you are putting in extra time because you are worried about your job security? How long do you feel you will have to be staying late like this?

Mother: As long as it takes. It could be a few more weeks or months.

Step 4 - Share Your Thoughts and Feelings

Provider: I can understand your dilemma. However, I really need to spend time with my family. Also we have evening activities like softball practice and church that we need to get to. When you pick Jon up so late, it really puts a hardship on my family.

Step 5 - Brainstorm Solutions

Provider: Let's try to think of some solutions.

Mother: Well, I guess I could arrange for someone else

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to pick Jon up. My mother could do it on most evenings, I think.

Provider: You might also hire a teenager to watch Jon for about an hour. There are two teens next door who might be interested in the job. I'd be happy to introduce you.

Mother: What if I brought Jon early, around 6:15 a.m.? Would that be as much of an inconvenience for you? I'd be willing to pay extra.

Provider: I would be willing for you to bring Jon early, but it might be hard on him.

Step 6 - Try to Reach an Agreement. Be Specific as Possible.

Mother: I guess your're right. Mornings are hectic enough already. So I guess we're back to having someone pick him up.

Provider: Why don't you check with your mother tonight and give me a call. If she doesn't feel up to it, then I'll make plans to introduce you to one of the teenagers tomorrow. If that doesn't work out, then we will look at the early morning arrival idea again.

When a Parent Complains

- ① **Listen carefully**, not just for the words, but for the feelings.
- ② **Try not to react defensively** or in hurt or anger. And never resort to name calling or blaming. That only makes it more difficult to reach an agreement.
- ③ **Hear parents out.** Remember, as your

customers they have a right to complain. Their comments may help you improve the quality of your services.

④ **Once the parent has finished talking, summarize** what she has just said so that you can be sure that you understood her concern.

⑤ **Next share your thoughts** and feelings about the problem so that the parent can understand your point of view.

⑥ **Together each of you can propose several solutions** and try to reach an agreement. Try to be as specific as possible about what you will do to remedy the problem.

If Problems Cannot be Solved

If despite your best efforts things just don't work out, don't blame yourself. It may be the result of a personality clash, differences in beliefs about child rearing, or unrealistic demands made on you or the child. But this doesn't mean that you're not good for the child, just that you and the client are mismatched. So refer the parent to the child care resource and referral agency, and keep your complaints confidential.

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Care NNCC. (1993) Oesterreich, L. Holt, B.G., Karas, S.
"Handling Complaints and Solving Problems" Iowa Family Child
Care Handbook. Pp. 61-63. Iowa State University Extension.

For Further Information Contact:

Ames, Iowa.



The Center for Parent Involvement (FCPI) was funded by the U.S. Department of Education; Goals 2000, Educate America Act from 1994-1999. Guided by an advisory board of parents and professionals, the FCPI's goal was to tap the power of parents.

The FCPI gathered information on parent needs, coordinated the information, and created a series of resources organized by theme, including fact sheets for parents and professionals, "Beyond the Basics" resources, and resource identification lists. Many of the resources have been translated into Spanish language versions, and every effort has been made to preserve the meaning and flavor of the original English documents. This series of materials provides a wealth of current information for both parents and providers; the complete set of resources can be obtained in PDF format on the Department of Child and Family Studies Website at www.fmhi.usf.edu/cfs/dares/fcpi. The staff of the FCPI are hopeful that their work will continue to help children get ready to learn for many years to come.

The series' themes include:

- Family Empowerment
- Parent Involvement
- Parenting Support
- School Readiness
- Violence in the Lives of Children
- Transition to Kindergarten

The Center was one component of a project led by Hillsborough County Center of Excellence in collaboration with the Department of Child & Family Studies at USF's de la Parte Institute and the Florida Children's Forum. Other project partners include HIPPIY (Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters), Hillsborough County Head Start and Hillsborough County Even Start. For more information about these projects, call 813.974.4612.

Family Empowerment Series, Parent Tip Sheets, #2: Transition: Handling Problems

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