

Talking to Parents about Behaviors

If you are a ministry leader, talking to parents about a child's behavior can feel tough, especially if that child may have a hidden disability. However, learning how to handle these conversations well is important. So, BEFORE you reach out to parents, ask yourself the three questions below.

Question 1 - "What is life like for this family?"

Before talking to parents, stop and think about what life might be like for a family who has a child with extra challenges. Educate yourself on the type of disability that the child has and ask yourself what would it feel like to have to navigate these obstacles every day, everywhere you went. Then think about how hard that family may have had to work just to get to church in the morning. Though the behaviors will still need to be addressed, looking at life from a family's perspective will give you the empathy that you need to connect with parents.

Question 2 - "What do you want to communicate?"

Remember that communication is about what you say AND how you say it. So use relaxed, open body language and a warm, calm, neutral tone of voice. Then start the conversation by talking about what is best for the child. For added positivity, start the conversation by sharing something that the child is doing well, before talking about the problem behavior. Remember to be clear about the situation and to frame the conversation in a positive way by asking how you can help support the child better.

Question 3 - "What is the objective, really?"

Parents may not always know how to solve a problem. So, the objective of the talk is not to find a solution, it is to form a partnership. Invite parents in by asking open-ended questions and forming a plan that can be implemented, evaluated and changed if necessary. Know what to do if your first idea doesn't work. Being on the same page with parents is a win! Then keep investing in that relationship, even after the problem is solved.

Talking to Parents about Behaviors

Questions to Ask Parents when Working on Plans

Invite parents into forming a plan by gathering information with these open-ended questions below.

1. Is there anything we should know that will help us understand your child better?
2. What has helped in situations like this before?
3. How is this handled at school?
4. Have you noticed what often triggers this behavior?
5. Are there any signs that this behavior might be about to happen. If so, have you found anything that works to prevent it from happening?
6. Has there ever been a time when you expected this behavior was going to happen, but it did not. If so, what was different about that time?
7. Is there anything that you have noticed that can intensify this behavior that we should avoid?
8. What are some of your child's favorite things, books, activities, characters, etc...
9. What calms your child?
10. What do you think would be a reasonable expectation for your child?
11. Is there anything else that you would like to share?
12. How can we be praying for your family?