

### This Issue:

## DEALING WITH DIFFICULT PARENTS: *A Teacher's Survival Guide*

Do you dread certain parents of students in your classroom? Are you ready to trade your teaching job for the greeter's job at Wal-Mart when you see that difficult parent walk in your classroom door?

You are not alone. Teachers around the world report that dealing with difficult parents ranks among the top three stressors in their profession.

You don't have to feel ill prepared to diffuse an angry or unreasonable parent. You can learn techniques for dealing with demanding parents; manipulators, critics and passive aggressive individuals.

Kathryn Phillip's new book **DEALING with DIFFICULT PARENTS: A Teacher's Survival Guide** will skillfully guide you in developing a toolbox of insights and actions which will dissuade even the most challenging parent.

### It's All About Timing

Returning that dreaded phone call to the negative parent calls for expertise in timing and tact.

**First:** try to find out what issue the phone call is regarding.

**Second:** Gather any information, files, and notes that you can so that you are prepared with the information you need.

**Third:** Make the phone call when you are relatively stress-free and have time to listen to the parent.

**Fourth:** Take notes and make verbal comments to indicate that you are listening. Paraphrase and clarify as necessary.

**Fifth:** If you cannot resolve the issue within fifteen  
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### Facts About Parents Who Are Difficult:

1. They don't care about you.
2. They won't change on their own.
3. Their perceptions are their reality.
4. They CAN change in how they work with you.
5. You cannot ignore them and they will not go away.

### Also In This Issue:

- 7 Tips for Diffusing Explosive Situations
- Confrontation Response Styles: Which Are You?
- Unscheduled Visits from Parents & Guardians

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## It's All About Timing (continued)

minutes, let the parent know that you will need to do some further investigation and call them back.

If you have difficulties with a perpetually needy or complaining parent, or one who talks for a long time, return a phone call before your next instructional time begins. Let the parent know that it was important for you to return their call but that you have to get to the next class and you only have a few minutes to hear their concerns. This way you will encourage them to keep their issues "short and sweet". If they do not get it all out during this time, suggest another time to talk (also helps you to get more support or information as necessary).

## What you say and how you conduct yourself is critical in diffusing an elevated or explosive situation:

1. Allow the parent to be accompanied by a person who will act as a second set of ears. Someone who will offer support to the parent.
2. Put yourself in the parent's shoes. Try to understand the nature of the parent's concerns. Be practical and supportive. Set egos to the side.
3. Find a common ground with the parent. Keeping the child's best interest in mind at all times.
4. Listen, listen, and listen. Do what you need to understand; paraphrase, clarify, suspend judgment, allow time to process.
5. Be aware of your body language. Remember 50% of communication is nonverbal.
6. Be aware of your tone, volume and cadence. Avoid sarcasm or anything that could be construed as derogatory.
7. Watch the parent's body language. Look for signs of confusion, anxiety, fear, sadness, or escalating behaviors. Know when to end a meeting.

## Unscheduled Visits from Parents and Guardians

These visits often take you off guard and can be frightening if the person who is "dropping in" has hostility in his or her step!

Above all let the visitor know that building protocol must be followed. If the person has not followed the expected safety rules for visitors, ask them to retrace steps or you should call the office to announce the uninvited guest. Ask your visitor to go to the office on the way out of the school as well, that way the guest will be reminded of the protocol

Additionally:

1. Listen to parent using reflective listening techniques.
2. Be sensitive to the concerns. But do not take notes.
3. Let the parent know that the concerns are too important to discuss at this time. Let us know that your current obligations prevent you from being able to be fully present to the discussion.
4. Then offer to attend to the issue at another mutually agreed upon time.

Remember that your safety and the safety of your student are most important. Call for help if there is ever a question of security.

## TEACHERS TYPICALLY HAVE ONE OF THREE RESPONSES STYLES WHEN DEALING WITH CONFRONTATION

*Which Style Are You  
Likely To Become?*

### REACTIVE?

Lacking in confidence

Unspecific

Vague

Wishy-washy

Undocumented

Offer no solution/resolution

### AGGRESSIVE?

Unprofessional

Blaming

Unspecific

Insulting

Argumentative

Gives up on students

### PROACTIVE?

Professional in all interactions

Clear in expectations

Direct and specific

Supported by documentation

Has a plan

Defines a replacement behavior

Follows through

Takes action

Insists on parental support

Answers parents questions