

Overpowering Questioning Parent 10 Mistakes we make with Parents, Are you Guilty?

1. Expecting every parent/teacher relationship to be the same.
2. Never asking parents about their expectations.
3. Judging the parent's parenting ability by whether they have a good relationship with you.
4. Not making the parents feel their child is important and special.
5. Not put effort into developing individual parent relationships.
6. Only helping the parents as much as they help you.
7. Only helping the parents you like.
8. Not seeing yourself as there to serve the parents and the child.
9. Taking everything personally.
10. Being unprofessional when parents are difficult.

Common Responses to Parent Questions, Suggestions, and Concerns

What are we often thinking when parent express suggestions, questions, and concerns? Have you ever thought or said any of the following?

- That's not the way we do it here.
- This is group care not one-on-one.
- That will never work.
- I'm an early childhood expert and I know what's best.
- Is that parent crazy?
- Does she think that her kid is the only one I have to watch?
- She has got to be kidding.
- I don't make enough money for that.
- No way.

10 Ways to Develop an Individual Relationship with Each Parent

1. Expect relationships to be different.

Some want a lot of contact interacting with us and others maintain a greater distance and seek fewer details about care and education. With my first child, I wanted to know if she got a paper cut. By my fourth child, I didn't need any information from the program unless he was headed to the hospital.

2. Ask parents what is important to them.

How do you know if a parent needs little relational contact beyond exchange of pleasantries and relevant care and education information or the parent is shy or afraid to ask? You ask. Ask each parent when their child enters your program or transitions to a new room what's important to them. Questions like, do you need to leave quickly in the morning or can you stay a bit? I will call you if your child is sick or hurt, but are there other things that are important to you that I should inform you about before you arrive for pick-up?

3. Don't judge the parent's parenting ability by their relationship with you.

It's easy to think that those parents who attend every workshop or social function our programs have to offer and spend time chatting with us is a better parent than one who maintains their distance and is seemingly uninterested. Yes, it is good for children have their parents participate in school event, but sometimes job constraints or even a parent's energy level may keep them from being present. That doesn't necessarily mean that the parent isn't a good parent or doesn't care.

4. Talk about their child.

Every parent wants to hear positive things about their child. The easiest way to develop a relationship with a parent whether he or she is close or distance, or shy or outgoing, is to talk about their child. Share something they said or did. Let the parent know you notice the positive qualities in their child.

Positive Parent Conversation Starters

- Your child is so smart. Let me tell you what I saw him do today...
- Your child works so hard. Today she was trying to...

- Your child is a good friend to others. I watched him...
- Your child said something clever. He said...
- Your child will make you so proud. Today she...
- Your child loves you so much. She told me...

5. Work on the individual parent relationships.

Any type of relationship, friendships, marriages, take work. Notice the types of things that the parent appreciates, like voicemails, special notes, reminders about bringing in supplies and continue those efforts.

6. Give more to the relationship than you expect to receive.

Our efforts to develop an individual relationship with each parent maybe create mutually beneficial bonds between parent and teacher, but it is unlikely that we will experience a personally rewarding relationship with each parent. As humans, we care drawn to certain people and others we will have more difficulty working with. As professionals, it's our job to try and develop a relationship even if the parent does not respond. That does not mean that parents can treat us poorly or neglect their program responsibilities.

7. Help even when you don't feel like it.

Some parents are just easier to love and want to help than others. Some parents will be critical of us and the program, demanding, and uncooperative. Those are the parents who need us the most. Keep working on those relationships, if anything they are opportunities to hone our own relationship building skills.

8. Ask the parent questions.

Developing a relationship means understanding the needs of the other person and responding to them. It's difficult to anticipate what each parent wants or needs. The best way to do that is to ask. "What else can I do to help you?" is a good start. Thinking I must be crazy and parents are going to be impossible? Unlikely, but that also depends on what you mean by impossible. Asking us to change their child into new clothes before pick-up or feed them an extra snack might not be impossible.

9. Don't take things personally.

People who care for young children are usually quite loving and supportive, a good thing. It's also easy to be overly sensitive to the comments and requests of parents. Try not to take things personally when parents don't respond as you want or make comments that make you feel they don't think you are doing a good job. It certainly feels good when parents appreciate our efforts and applaud our work, but keep in mind that we are working for the parent to help the child.

10. Be a professional.

Early childhood educators should always look for ways to put parents at ease. Parents should feel welcomed and comfortable with the relationship they have defined and clear that we really do want to hear what they have to say.

What are some ways in which I can be more professional?

Key Customer Service Concepts

- Smiles and Systems
- No surprises
- Why Not
- Good Enough, Never Is



Gigi Schweikert

Join Gigi Schweikert, early childhood expert, mother of four, and author of the popular *Winning Ways for Early Childhood Professionals* book series, as she takes us down the sometimes frustrating, yet always rewarding road of early childhood education. Gigi's practical ideas and realistic perspective on working with young children have you laughing and learning how to be a more effective educator.

Teaching parents and teachers to help every child succeed is Gigi's life passion. Contact Gigi at www.gigischweikert.com for staff workshops, parent seminars, conferences, and keynotes.