

# Risk factor: Little / negative contact between school and parents (IML)

## IMPROVING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL AND PARENTS

### Activity 1. Changing perspective for a better understanding (2.15 h)

#### Background

In order to implement strategies aimed to improve the school-family relationship, it could be helpful to understand teachers' own communicative-relational approaches towards parents and parents' behaviours associated with specific parenting models. Based on existing literature, the following have been defined:

the three most common parenting models and related behaviours when teachers communicate the positive or negative evaluations of students

the features and risks of the three main communication approaches of teachers

tips to avoid conflicts and strengthen the school-family relationship

#### Learning outcomes

At the end of the activity, teachers will be able to:

- **Recognize** their own style and apply it in a more effective way according to the parents they meet;
- Apply strategies based on different parenting styles to manage conflicts and strengthen the relationship.

**Target group** : Teachers involved in initial or continuing VET. The activity can be implemented in group

**Approach**: The activity is made up by two macro-phases:

#### Phase: 1.1 What communication approach do you adopt with parents? (1 h)

A. Stimulation: three different approaches are presented, only with the description of the characteristics, without showing the part on the risks (10 minutes).

B. Contextualization: working in pairs (20 minutes), participants talk about their approaches and main characteristics.

C. Reflection: after the pair work, participants work in plenary (30 minutes): Guiding questions: Do you think there are risks associated with each of these approaches? Which ones?

Show potential risks associated with each approach, feedback, and conclusions (15 min)

Approach	Features	Risks
<b>The Parental Communication approach</b> refers to an approach where teachers communicate with parents in a manner that reflects understanding, care, and a familial connection.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers engage in warm and affectionate conversations with parents, showing empathy and understanding for the family's situation.</li> <li>2. Teachers may opt for informal meetings or discussions in front of the school.</li> <li>3. Teachers express care and concern for the child's well-being, ensuring that parents feel supported in dealing with challenges their child may face.</li> <li>4. Teachers work with parents to define the child's educational goals, taking into account the contributions and aspirations of both parties</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reinforcement of the parent's dependence on the teacher's decisions. Parental action and resource mobilisation could be limited and inhibited; parental decision-making autonomy relying on teacher input could be restricted; potential tendency to substitute educational roles.</li> <li>2. Lack of structured communication, which may also discourage parents from attending formal meetings.</li> <li>3. Feeling of discomfort and overwhelm by some parents, which may hinder collaboration on more challenging issues.</li> <li>4. Risk of blurring professional boundaries, implying a risk for the balance between support and professional distance</li> </ol>
<b>The directive communication approach</b> involves the provision of clear and explicit directions, instructions, or guidance by teachers who present	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Prevalence of communication is direct and judgmental, with a less personal and affectionate approach.</li> <li>2. Focus on communication primarily</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. From such an approach, parents may experience feelings of incapability of supporting educational and learning tasks, avoiding meetings with the teacher, or</li> </ol>

<p>themselves as representatives of the school, giving more importance to the institutional dimension than to the relational one</p>	<p>aimed at conveying essential information regarding the child's academic performance and behaviour, rather than creating a familial atmosphere.</p> <p>3. Central role of assessment by teachers who provide direct evaluations or feedback.</p> <p>4. Use (almost exclusive) formal communication channels, such as scheduled meetings and official reports</p>	<p>seeking confrontation due to fear of negative judgments.</p> <p>2. Parents might perceive the approach as authoritarian and react defensively, by generating resistance.</p> <p>3. The emphasis on the institutional dimension and judgments may discourage active involvement of parents in their children's school life. Parents might feel marginalized or neglected.</p> <p>4. In situations where students face difficulties or challenges, an overly direct approach may not facilitate effective collaboration between teachers and parents in addressing these issues</p>
<p><b>The Competent Communication approach</b> fosters an environment where the educational relationship is functional, aiming to achieve shared objectives through effective collaboration between teachers and parents.</p>	<p>1. Use of technical and empathetic tools, supporting parents in promoting their child's potential.</p> <p>2. The relationship is seen as collaborative, with the teacher recognizing the parent as a resource rather than a problem.</p> <p>3. Predominantly collaborative, respecting the parent's decision-making autonomy.</p> <p>4. Any issues are reported and managed, highlighting parental competence.</p>	<p>1. Reinforcement of the parent's dependence on the teacher's support and advice, neglecting their own educational autonomy</p> <p>2. An indirect pressure might be exerted on the parent, who may feel obligated to follow the teacher's guidance although they disagree.</p> <p>3. Parents might expect excessive involvement and interference from the teacher in family life.</p>

**Phase: 1.2 What relationship strategies are most effective with the parents of your students? (1.15 hours)**

### **A. Reflect: which parents are we dealing with?**

Work in groups of 4 to 8 participants (15 min): Think about your students' parents and how they relate to their children and you as teachers.

- Guiding questions: how do they behave towards their children? How do they behave when you tell them they got a good evaluation? and how do they behave when they got a bad evaluation?

### **B. Understand:**

-Facilitator shows the Cards with the three most common parenting styles (Card 1) and the Cards with the most common reactions/behaviours (Card 2); (15 minutes)

- Work in groups (4-8 people), associating each style with the behavioural profile presented based on participants' experience with the parents of their students (15 minutes)

NOTE FOR THE FACILITATOR: "Cards 2" below are presented with a heading referring to the parenting style and with different colours. However, to stimulate reflection, it is advisable to remove the heading and the colours that distinguish them. Encourage participants to focus on the content and concepts rather than being influenced by visual cues.

### **C. Act by defining effective strategies:**

- Facilitator shows Cards (Card 3) with strategies to build an effective relationship with all three parenting styles (10 minutes)

- Group work in plenary, discussion about effective strategies presented and those referring to the experience of the participants (20 minutes)

Guiding questions: Does what you usually do reflect any of these strategies? Can you give us a concrete example of a context in which you have applied some of these strategies? What other strategies have you adopted that have proven particularly effective, and with which "type" of parents?

#### **• AUTHORITARIAN\_1st Card**

The authoritarian parenting style is essentially judgmental: it assesses, corrects, and enforces. Authoritarian parents impose rules on their children and demand specific behaviours. They appear detached and rarely encourage the expression of their children's opinions.

- **PERMISSIVE\_1<sup>st</sup> card**

One of the traits of the permissive parenting style is the overprotection shown towards the child. These parents have low expectations for their children regarding rules and discipline. Children are consulted on decisions, and the reasons behind family rules are explained to them. Permissive parents are incapable of implementing direct forms of healthy discipline; disciplining their own children, in their view, would equate to not loving them. Children growing up in this atmosphere tend to develop low determination and little interest in achieving goals

- **AUTHORITATIVE\_1<sup>st</sup> card**

They are parents who, with their child, tend to explain the rationale behind rules and norms in a rational manner; the adoption of rules is flexible and appropriate to the situation; the emotional tone is one of benevolence towards the child. Even though they enforce discipline firmly and decisively, they communicate to their children the reasons behind their behaviours and articulate their educational choices.

- **AUTHORITARIAN\_2nd Card**

In the case of a positive evaluation, they do not seem to appreciate either the teacher's work or the academic efforts made by the child. Instead, they accept the communication content as something taken for granted, expected, and natural.

In the case of a negative evaluation, or even one that is not entirely satisfactory, they may become critical of the school or hostile towards the teacher. They may express their displeasure through sarcasm or overt criticism of the teacher's competence. They perceive the negative evaluation as a direct attack on their parenting style; what they cannot accept is any damage to their perceived perfect image as parents. Their presence at school is aimed at emphasising what is not working.

- **PERMISSIVE\_2nd card**

In the case of positive evaluations from teachers, tend to express appreciation for their child's success and to attribute the merit of success primarily to the child itself, emphasizing their autonomy and ability to make their own choices They might

downplay the relevance of a positive evaluation by emphasizing that academic assessments are not the primary or crucial focus in their child's life.

In the case of negative teacher evaluations, permissive parents have one goal: unconditional defense of their child, as they are not emotionally available to understand any difficulties, either in terms of learning or relationships. They may believe that negative evaluations are unfair or that they do not accurately represent their child's abilities; they may attribute difficulties to external factors dispute the teaching methods or downplay the importance of negative evaluations emphasizing that academic results are not the only indicator of their child's success or achievement.

Permissive parents develop a dependent relationship with the teachers. This can be an expression of passivity that delegates the primary educational responsibility for their child's learning to the teacher. They may be less inclined to actively participate in school meetings or events.

- **AUTHORITATIVE \_2nd card**

In cases of positive evaluations, they emphasize the importance of the experiences and learnings acquired along the way. They show gratitude toward the education received and support provided by the school and teachers. They recognize the importance of school-family collaboration in the child's success.

In cases of negative evaluations, they ask for detailed information about the area of learning in which the child received a negative evaluation to better understand the reasons behind that evaluation; and see the negative evaluation as an opportunity for improvement and growth.

- **AUTHORITARIAN\_3rd Card**

The teacher faced with a parent with an authoritarian educational style should try not to take up the challenges and attempt the proposal of a welcoming relational dimension of the suffering of these parents, who have experiences of low self-esteem, devaluation and anxiety.

**Emphasizing the child's positive resources**, since, many times, their child's school represents, for this type of parent, a place of redemption and possible affirmation and confirmation of their abilities, through their child's eventual success.

**Understanding the authoritative parent's point of view**, listening to their concerns and perspectives, showing **empathy and respect**, even if there are differences of opinion. **Encourage sharing their point of view through open-ended questions.**

**Explain clearly and respectfully the rationale behind decisions** made, **avoiding adopting an equally authoritarian style in response.** The goal to be achieved is to **make them understand that teachers' decisions are based on careful observation and evaluation.**

**Provide information** based on studies and research **on the effectiveness of balanced parenting styles** to show how an approach that combines authority with emotional support can produce positive results-

**Hold regular meetings** to discuss the child's progress, allowing parents to express their concerns.

**Collaborate on learning plans**, by involving them in creating personalized learning plans for the child.

- **PIRMISSIVE\_3rd card**

When faced with a parent using a permissive parenting style, **the teacher should not accept any form of educational delegation** but should work to promote parenting skills, attempting to activate possible resources.

**Set clear expectations** regarding the parent's role in their child's education. Emphasize the importance of structure, consistency, and positive reinforcement in promoting a conducive learning environment.

**Organize informational and training** workshops/sessions specifically tailored to permissive parenting styles. Provide insights into effective parenting strategies, the importance of boundaries, and fostering a supportive learning environment at home.

**Provide successful examples** of how a combination of autonomy and parental guidance has led to academic success and positive development in other students.

**Emphasize the importance of limits and rules**, highlighting how limits and structured routines at home can promote child responsibility and maturity.

**Emphasize the importance of consistency** between home and school environments.

**Develop a step-by-step involvement plan for parents**, recognizing that some may need a more progressive approach, identifying practical steps that can be implemented over time.

**Highlight any positive changes** in the parent's involvement or parenting approach.

**Collaborate on learning plans**, by involving them in creating personalized learning plans for the child.

**Provide educational suggestions that** balance the child's autonomy with more active parental guidance.

- **AUTHORITATIVE \_3rd card**

When a teacher is dealing with a parent with an authoritative parenting style, typically characterized by a balance of warmth and firmness, he or she can adopt some strategies to promote effective collaboration and the child's well-being.

**Involvement in the educational process**, inviting the parent to actively participate. Seek their input on educational goals and teaching strategies.

**Involve the parent in decision-making processes** related to the child when appropriate. This may include curriculum choices or behaviour management decisions.

If appropriate, **provide information about support resources available** in the community or school, such as counselling services or tutoring.

The goal is to **strengthen an already positive partnership** between the school and the parent, putting the child's well-being and academic success at the forefront