

Tools for Educators to Listen to and Learn from Families During COVID-19 School Closures

Table of Contents

General Tips and Reminders	1
Email or Text Message Language Letting Families Know to Expect to Hear from You	2
Script for Calling Each Family for a Brief Listening Session	3
Post-Conversation Reflection and Action	5
Follow-up Message for Families You Didn't Reach	6
Sample Survey Questions	7
Additional Resources	11

General Tips and Reminders

- The purpose of these conversations is to listen to families and learn how you and your school can be most supportive during these times.
- While families are struggling right now and have many needs, they also have a lot of wisdom to share about how to support children academically, socially, and emotionally. They are the experts on their children and what their children need right now. You can document any best academic, social, and/or emotional practices that families are using with their children that might be helpful to share with other families or fellow colleagues.
- Some families will not be able to talk to you now and that's okay. What's important is that they know you care and know how to get in touch with you. You can be supportive by considering the words of the Parent Teacher Home Visit Project, "Take some time to reflect on any assumptions you might be carrying about how families "should" be educating or caring for their children during isolation. Then remind yourself that we are all doing the best we can in a seriously imperfect world. So be gentle on yourself and on families."
- Although many educators say that connecting with families during this time has been a high point for them, these conversations also may evoke a lot of emotions. Remember

that it is not your job to solve every problem. Supporting families during this time should be a coordinated effort with your school's mental health specialists, counselors, community partners, and family engagement coordinator (if you have one) and should build on families existing resources and assets.

- Don't worry if you can't reach your students' parents. Right now, it's likely that many children are being cared for by older siblings, grandparents, and other family members. It's okay to speak to whomever is most present right now.
- Close the feedback loop with families. If families offer suggestions for improvement through the listening session or survey, let families know how you have adjusted or changed practices as a result of their feedback.

Email or Text Message Language Letting Families Know to Expect to Hear from You

Sample text

Dear families, In the next few days, I will be calling you to hear how you're doing and hear your feedback about how we can better support your family and child during these difficult times. As we are all still learning how to do remote learning in the best possible way, your feedback and ideas will be very valuable. I will be calling from the number XXX-XXX-XXXX. Please let me know what the best time of day is to reach you. If you would like to sign up for a specific time, please do so here <<Use a tool like *signupgenius.com* to manage this>>.

<<Suggest adding links to local resources in this e-mail, for example *Grab and go food places, online learning support tools, COVID 19 fact sheet, unemployment link, etc.*>>

Spanish version

Estimadas familias: En los próximos días, los llamaré para saber cómo les va y escuchar sus comentarios sobre cómo podemos apoyar mejor a su familia y a su hijo/a durante estos tiempos difíciles. Como todos seguimos aprendiendo cómo hacer el aprendizaje remoto de la mejor manera posible, sus comentarios e ideas serán muy valiosos. Llamaré desde el número XXX-XXX-XXXX. Por favor avisenme cuál es el mejor momento del día para contactarlos. Si desean registrarse para un horario específico, hágalo aquí.

*Note that in Spanish although the masculine form "hijo" is used for the general "child," when speaking about daughters use "hijas" not sons "hijos."

Script for Calling Each Family for a Brief Listening Session

Note that this script can also be adapted for a virtual family town hall meeting with multiple families. It's suggested to offer these at different times of day to accommodate schedules.

Sample phone script

I know you and your family have a lot on your plate right now, but I wanted to quickly check in to see how you and your child are doing and to hear what we can be doing to best support your child and family during this time. Is now a good time to talk for a few minutes?

[If answer is yes]

1. How is your family doing? How is <<child's name>> doing?
 - How is <<child's name>> doing emotionally during this hard time?
 - How about yourself and the rest of the family? Is everyone healthy?
 - Do you have your basic needs met at this time?
2. We are still adjusting to remote learning and really want to understand how it's going so that we can continue to improve. How is remote learning going for your child?
 - Do you feel that teachers reach out enough?
 - Do you have a clear explanation of the lesson?
 - Do your children have the support they need if they don't understand the lesson?
 - Do you feel like the workload is the right amount, too much, or too little?
3. What could we be doing better?
4. What are your goals for your child right now? How can we support you with these goals?
5. Do you have any strategies you would like to share with me and other families for supporting children socially, academically, or emotionally right now? What have you done that has worked well?
6. Would you like to participate in any part of our remote learning experience? For example, reading a book to the class? Singing a song? Modeling a dance? Leading us in yoga or meditation?
7. A few things our school is doing to support families right now are...Are you interested in any of those supports?
8. Do you have any questions for me or anything else you would like to talk about?
9. Before we hang up, I wanted to remind you about a few things...*(Use this time to give parents any relevant reminders and share your goals for your students during this time).*

10. Thank you for everything you're doing right now to support your child and for taking the time to talk with me today. Know that you can always reach out to me. The best way to get in touch is...

Sample Voicemail Script

I know you and your family have a lot on your plate right now, but I wanted to quickly check in to see how you and your child are doing and to hear what we can be doing to best support your child and family during this time. Please call me back if you can. If you can't call back, please look out for a message from me next week with a brief survey.

Sample Phone Script - Spanish

Sé que usted y su familia tienen muchas cosas que hacer en este momento, pero quería saber cómo están usted y su hijo/a y saber qué podemos hacer para apoyar mejor a su hijo/a y su familia durante este tiempo. ¿Es ahora un buen momento para hablar unos minutos?

1. ¿Cómo está tu familia? ¿Cómo va el << child's name >>?
 - ¿Cómo le va emocionalmente al << child's name >> durante este momento difícil?
 - ¿Y tú y el resto de la familia? ¿Están todos sanos?
 - ¿Tiene sus necesidades básicas satisfechas en este momento?
2. ¿Cómo está tu familia? Todavía nos estamos adaptando al aprendizaje remoto y realmente queremos entender cómo va para poder seguir mejorando. ¿Cómo va el aprendizaje remoto para su hijo/a?
 - ¿Sientes que los maestros se comunican lo suficiente?
 - ¿Tienes una explicación clara de la lección?
 - ¿Tienen sus hijos/as el apoyo que necesitan si no entienden la lección?
 - ¿Siente que la carga de trabajo es la cantidad correcta, demasiado o muy poco?
3. ¿Qué podríamos estar haciendo mejor?
4. ¿Cuáles son sus metas para su hijo/a en este momento? ¿Cómo podemos apoyarlo con estos objetivos?
5. ¿Tiene alguna estrategia que le gustaría compartir conmigo y con otras familias para el apoyo social, académico, o emocional a los niños/as en este momento? ¿Qué has hecho que haya funcionado bien?
6. Te gustaría participar en alguna parte de nuestra experiencia de aprendizaje remoto? Por ejemplo, ¿leer un libro a la clase? ¿Cantando una canción? ¿Modelar un baile? ¿Guiándonos en yoga o meditación?

7. Algunas cosas que nuestra escuela está haciendo para apoyar a las familias en este momento son ... ¿Está interesado en alguno de esos apoyos?
8. ¿Tiene alguna pregunta para mí o cualquier otra cosa que le gustaría hablar?
9. Antes de colgar, quería recordarles algunas cosas ...(Use this time to give parents any relevant reminders and share your goals for your students during this time).
10. Gracias por todo lo que está haciendo en este momento para apoyar a su hijo/a y por tomarse el tiempo de hablar conmigo hoy. Sepan que siempre pueden comunicarse conmigo. La mejor manera de ponerse en contacto es ...

Sample Voicemail Script - Spanish

Sé que usted y su familia tienen muchas cosas que hacer en este momento, pero quería saber cómo están usted y su hijo/a y saber qué podemos hacer para apoyar mejor a su hijo/a y su familia durante este tiempo. Por favor llámame si puedes. Si no puede devolver la llamada, busque un mensaje mío la próxima semana con una breve encuesta.

Post-Conversation Reflection and Action

- Reflect on the conversation. What were the high points? What were the challenging points? What would you do or say differently next time, if anything?
- After each conversation, add your notes to this table.

	Result of call (e.g. spoke to someone, left message, wrong #)	Resources family needs	Family's feedback on remote learning	Family's strategies for supporting children at home	Ways family would like to engage in remote learning experience	Action-oriented follow-up steps
Student's name						
Student's name						
Add row for each child						

- After you have completed your first round of conversations, debrief with colleagues to plan together how to address the feedback and needs
 - How did the calls go? What were the greatest successes? What are areas for improvement?
 - What did we learn that we did not expect?
 - How do we need to adjust or change our practices in response to what we're learning from families?
 - What were areas for improvement in remote learning, according to families? How can we address their suggestions?
 - How are families supporting their children? How can we share these strategies with other families? How can we incorporate these strategies into our own lessons?
 - In what ways would families like to engage in the remote learning experience? How can we incorporate these ideas?
 - What resources and support do families need? What steps can we take to help them get these resources?

Follow-up Message for Families You Didn't Reach

Sample text

Hello everyone, I'm sorry we didn't get a chance to speak last week but I know everyone has a lot on their plates right now. Please feel free to fill out this brief survey <<See *sample questions below*>> if that's easier for you. We would love to hear from you.

Spanish version

Hola a todos, lamento no haber tenido la oportunidad de hablar la semana pasada, pero sé que todos tienen mucho en sus platos ahora. No dude en completar esta breve encuesta si es más fácil para usted. Nos encantaría saber de usted.

Sample Survey Questions

Note that these questions are just examples. Feel free to select the most relevant ones and edit them as needed

Name _____

Child's name _____

*If you have multiple children at this school, feel free to fill this survey out for all of your children.

1. What is the best way to contact you at this time? Check those that apply. <<If you don't have contact information then ask for it>>
 - Phone
 - Email
 - Text
 - Mail

2. What is the best language to communicate with you? _____

3. Do you have access to wi-fi at home?
 - Yes
 - No

4. Has internet speed been a barrier to remote learning?
 - Yes
 - No

5. Does your child have access to a learning device at home?
 - Yes
 - No

6. What device does your child use most frequently?
 - Laptop
 - Desktop computer
 - Tablet
 - Smartphone
 - Other _____

7. Does your child need access to school meals?
 - Yes
 - No

8. If yes, have you been able to access school meals?

- Yes
- No

9. If you haven't been able to access school meals, what are the barriers?

10. Do you need food assistance at home?

- Yes
- No

11. Have you received the supports you need related to your child's IEP?

- Yes
- No
- Does not apply

12. Have you received information from school in the language you're most comfortable speaking?

- Yes
- No
- Does not apply

13. Have you received information from the district in the language you're most comfortable speaking?

- Yes
- No
- Does not apply

14. In what ways could we improve remote learning? (Select all that apply)

- More frequent contact from teacher by phone, text, or email.
- Offer different times when classes can be offered
- Give parents more instructions on how to access remote learning resources
- Other _____

15. Are there any strategies you would like to share with other families for supporting children socially, academically, or emotionally right now? What have you done that has worked well? _____

16. Would you like to participate in any part of our remote learning experience? *We know families have a lot on your plates right now and there is no pressure to participate.

- Read a book to the class
- Sing a song/play an instrument
- Model a dance
- Lead us in yoga or meditation
- Talk about your job or career

- Share about your culture
- Share about your family history
- Other _____

17. Are there any other ways our school or district can support your family during this time?

- Safe and affordable childcare
- Academic supports
- Financial assistance/purchase groceries
- Food assistance
- Healthcare access/healthcare costs
- Computer/tablet/reliable internet
- Other needs not listed (write-in) _____

Spanish Version

Note that these questions are just examples. Feel free to select the most relevant ones and edit them as needed

Nombre _____

El nombre del niño/a _____

*Si tiene varios hijos/as en esta escuela, no dude en completar esta encuesta para todos sus hijos/as.

1. ¿Cuál es la mejor manera de contactarlo en este momento? Marque los que correspondan. <<If you don't have contact information then ask for it>>
 - Teléfono
 - Email
 - Texto
 - Correo
2. ¿Cuál es el mejor idioma para comunicarse con usted?

3. ¿Tienes acceso a wifi en casa?
 - Si
 - No
4. ¿La velocidad de Internet ha sido una barrera para el aprendizaje remoto?
 - Si
 - No
5. ¿Tiene su hijo/a acceso a un instrumento de aprendizaje en casa?

6. ¿Qué instrumento usa su hijo/a con más frecuencia?
- Computadora portátil
 - Computadora de escritorio
 - Tableta
 - Teléfono inteligente (el smartphone)
 - Otro _____
7. ¿Necesita su hijo acceso a las comidas escolares?
- Si
 - No
8. En caso afirmativo, ¿ha podido acceder a las comidas escolares?
- Si
 - No
9. Si no ha podido acceder a las comidas escolares, ¿cuáles son las barreras?
- _____
10. ¿Necesitas asistencia alimentaria en casa?
- Si
 - No
11. ¿Ha recibido los apoyos que necesita relacionados con el IEP de su hijo/a?
- Si
 - No
 - No se aplica
12. ¿Recibió información de la escuela en el idioma con el que se siente más cómodo?
- Si
 - No
 - No se aplica
13. ¿Recibió información del distrito en el idioma con el que se siente más cómodo?
- Si
 - No
 - No se aplica
14. ¿De qué maneras podríamos mejorar el aprendizaje remoto? (Seleccione todas las que correspondan)
- Contacto más frecuente del maestro por teléfono, mensaje de texto o correo electrónico.
 - Ofrecer diferentes horarios cuando se pueden ofrecer clases

- Dar a los padres más instrucciones sobre cómo acceder a los recursos de aprendizaje remoto.
- Otro _____

15. ¿Hay alguna estrategia que le gustaría compartir con otras familias para el apoyo social, académico o emocional a los niños/as en este momento? ¿Qué has hecho que haya funcionado bien? _____

16. ¿Te gustaría participar en alguna parte de nuestra experiencia de aprendizaje remoto?

* Sabemos que las familias tienen mucho en sus platos en este momento y no hay presión para participar.

- Lea un libro a la clase
- Cantar una canción / tocar un instrumento
- Modelar un baile
- Guíanos en yoga o meditación
- Habla sobre tu trabajo o carrera
- Comparte sobre tu cultura
- Comparta sobre su historia familiar
- Otro _____

17. ¿Hay alguna otra forma en que nuestra escuela o distrito puedan apoyar a su familia durante este tiempo?

- Cuidado infantil seguro y asequible
- Apoyos académicos
- Asistencia financiera / compra de comida
- Asistencia alimentaria
- Acceso a la atención médica / costos de atención médica
- Computadora / tableta / internet confiable
- Otras necesidades no enumeradas (por escrito) _____

Additional Resources

- Additional guide for connecting with families, as well as list of communication apps: <http://www.pthvp.org/toolbox/stay-home-stay-connected/>
- Institute for Educational Leadership COVID-19 Resource Page: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_9WVcWoeE5ESzfPI85HoSjmYR4rxHvdwk2_qCa_sTxps/edit
- Remote Instruction: Pedagogical Supports for Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Practices: <https://www.weteachnyc.org/resources/collection/remote-instructions-pedagogical-supports-culturally-responsive-and-sustaining-practices/>