



Communicating with Parents: A Confidence Guide for Early Years Teams

Introduction

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Communicating with parents is the skill that shapes everything else in your setting. A practitioner can plan a beautiful curriculum, keep spotless records and still lose a family's trust over one clumsy conversation at pick-up. Parents don't judge your nursery by your policies folder. They judge it by how you talk to them on a Tuesday afternoon when their toddler has bitten someone, or when you need to raise a concern about a child's development.

The good news is that confident communication isn't a personality trait some people are born with and others aren't. It's a set of habits. You can build them the same way you build any other skill in this sector: with clear expectations, a few useful scripts and enough practice that the awkward moments stop feeling awkward.

This guide walks through five practical areas: building trust from the outset, handling the daily handover, delivering difficult news, getting written communication right and keeping your whole team consistent.



1. Why Communicating With Parents Well Starts With Trust

Trust doesn't arrive because you send a polished welcome pack. It builds through dozens of small, ordinary exchanges before anything difficult ever comes up.

Front-load the positive contact. In the first two weeks of a child settling in, aim for at least three unprompted, positive updates: a photo of them enjoying snack time, a note about a new word they said, a comment about how they played with another child.

TRY THIS TODAY

Pick one child in each room and send their parent a two-line positive update before the end of the day, unprompted. Do this daily until it becomes automatic.

Be honest about the small stuff early on, too. Parents forgive rocky starts. They don't forgive discovering they were kept in the dark.

Consistency across the team matters here. If one practitioner is warm and communicative and another barely makes eye contact at pick-up, parents notice the gap immediately.



2. Master the Two-Minute Handover

The handover at drop-off and pick-up is the moment most practitioners dread, and most parents remember. Confidence here comes from having a structure, not from winging it every time.

- One specific moment from the day, not "she was good", but "she asked to do the puzzle three times in a row"
- One practical note: nap length, food eaten, any accident or incident already logged
- One forward-looking line if relevant: "we're doing a mud kitchen session tomorrow, wellies would help"

Keep it to 20 to 30 seconds unless the parent wants more. If a parent asks a question you can't answer on the spot, don't guess.

SCRIPT TO BORROW

"I wanted to flag something we've noticed this week, and get your thoughts, because you know him best." This single line does more to keep a parent on side than almost anything else you can say.



3. Deliver Difficult News With Honesty and Care

This is where confidence matters most, and where most practitioners feel least prepared. The instinct to soften or delay the message usually makes things harder, not easier.



Lead with the fact, not the apology. For safeguarding or development concerns specifically, always follow your setting's escalation procedure and involve your designated safeguarding lead or SENCO before speaking to the parent alone.

- Book a proper time rather than raising it at the door
- Describe behaviour, not character
- End with a next step, not just a description of the problem

KEEP IN MIND

[Keeping Children Safe in Education \(KCSIE\) 2026](#) took effect in September 2026. For the first time, it explicitly cross-references the EYFS safeguarding requirements, and it requires every member of staff, including non-child-facing roles, to read the full Part One document rather than a condensed summary. Before using this guide for induction, check your setting's escalation procedure has been updated to reflect KCSIE 2026, and confirm it with your designated safeguarding lead.

4. Get Written and Digital Communication Right

Most nurseries now run daily updates through an app rather than a paper diary. Tone is harder to read in text, so keep written updates specific and warm rather than efficient and blank.

For anything with emotional weight, a phone call or face-to-face conversation beats a message every time. Reserve the app for routine updates, photos and logistics.



5. Build Consistency Across Your Whole Team

None of the habits above stick if they live in one confident practitioner's head. Build good communication into induction, use short team huddles to flag anything that needs consistent messaging, and target training at where each practitioner actually feels least confident.



Key Takeaways

- Build trust early with small, specific, positive updates before you ever need to raise a concern.
- Structure your handover in three parts: a moment, a practical note, a forward look.
- Lead difficult conversations with the fact, not the apology, and book time rather than raising serious issues at the door.
- Match the format to the message: routine updates suit an app; anything emotionally weighted deserves a real conversation.
- Make good communication a team standard through induction, huddles and targeted training, not a talent a few people happen to have.

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Guidance current as of September 2026, reflecting Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026. This guide is intended as practical support for early years teams and does not constitute legal advice. Always follow your setting's own safeguarding policy and consult your designated safeguarding lead for current escalation procedures.

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