



## **Department of Education & Workforce**

**Lesson Five: Effective communication with students and families**

# OVERALL TRAINING OBJECTIVES

**The focus of the Teaching Attendance curriculum is to support school staff in addressing chronic absence and improving academic outcomes.**

# Six Sessions



- Lesson One: What is chronic absence and why does it matter?
- Lesson Two: Shift to prevention and early intervention
- Lesson Three: The role of teachers in attendance
- Lesson Four: Understanding why students are absent
- **Lesson Five: Effective communication with students and families**
- Lesson Six: A Whole School Approach: Relationships Matter

# Learning Objectives

**By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:**

- Understand effective communication practices.
- Understand how to have caring conversations with families to improve student attendance.

# Video: Effective Communication with Families



<https://youtu.be/WtsWkd9RI-4>

# Full Group: Video Reflection Discussion

Purpose: Discuss what we learned about talking with students and families about attendance.

- When listening to the school staff talk about their approach to attendance, what were some commonalities that stood out to you?
- Why do you think it is important to make a personal connection to learn the “underlying why” a student is absent?

# Forging Partnerships with Families to Support Engagement and Attendance

- Communicate supportive messages (Stay Connected and Keep Learning) throughout the school year
- Provide tailored, personalized and caring messages to students and families who are chronically absent
- Offer actionable steps to improve attendance
- Make sure families know what resources are available for basic needs

# Caring Conversations for Attendance Improvement



# Listening to Parents

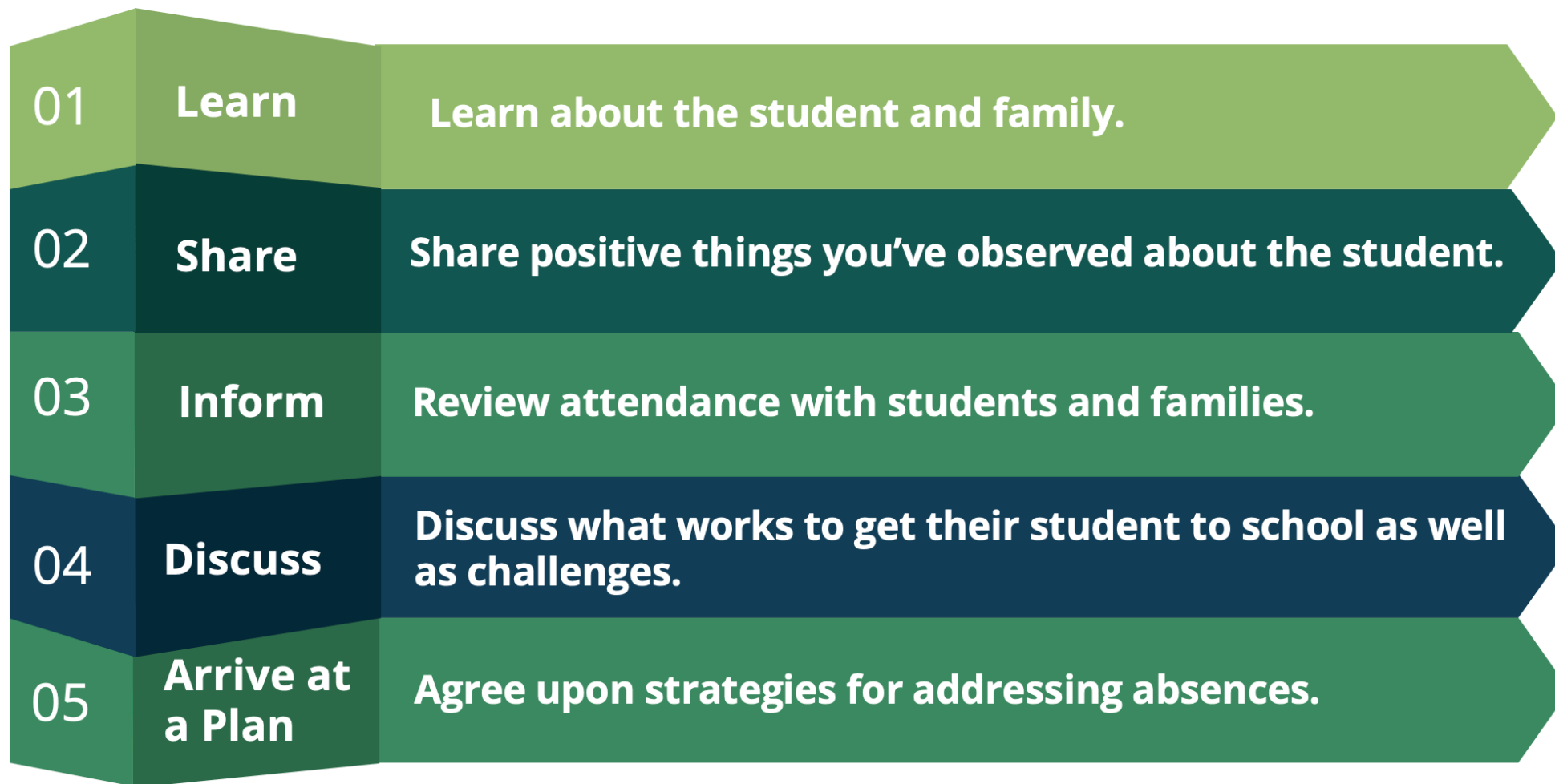


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<https://youtu.be/f93RjyYvHb0>

# CARING CONVERSATIONS



Adapted with permission from materials created by © High Expectations Parental Service, 2011

# Caring Conversations Process

	Key Points	Questions and Messages
<b>1. Learn</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gather information</li> <li>• Ask open-ended, supportive questions</li> </ul>	<i>What is your vision for <u>student's</u> future? (ask parent and student)</i>
<b>2. Share</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive observations about student so far</li> <li>• What you want students to accomplish this year</li> <li>• One goal is helping students acquire good habit of attendance</li> </ul>	<i>_____ is such a good listener. We love having her (you) in our class.</i>
<b>3. Inform</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progress you've seen (start positive)</li> <li>• Areas where child is struggling</li> <li>• Review report card &amp; update parents on child's attendance</li> <li>• Deliver appropriate attendance messages</li> </ul>	<i>_____ is excelling at math! and is making progress with reading. Reading remains the area that needs work.</i>  <i>_____ has been late five times and has missed two days during this first month of school. Absences impede reading and overall learning progress.</i>
<b>4. Discuss</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenges, attendance barriers</li> <li>• Learning at home activities</li> <li>• How to stay connected</li> </ul>	<i>What makes it hard for _____ to get to school?</i>  <i>What helps ____ catch up on learning given their absences?</i>
<b>5. Ask &amp; Arrive at a Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there any questions?</li> <li>• Is there anything you can do to support a partnership between home and school?</li> <li>• Make referrals to community resources</li> </ul>	<i>What questions do you have?</i> <i>How can I help you?</i> <i>Would it help you to work with...?</i>

# Small Group Discussion

How what questions can you ask to promote “learning” and “sharing” with a student and family?

# Large Group Discussion

Based on your small group discussion, share ideas on how you can promote caring conversations with students and families?

# Effective Communication



# National Research Needs to Inform Communication with Families

- Families generally underestimated the number of days their child has missed
- Families believed missing a couple days of school a month does not impact their child's learning
- Families believed that attendance was most important for older youth, especially high school
- Impersonal or auto-generated, negative truancy letters are easy to disregard and parents didn't understand why they received a letter

*Ad Council: School Attendance Research Project (Issue brief). (2015). CA.*

<https://oag.ca.gov/sites/all/files/agweb/pdfs/tr/toolkit/QualitativeResearchReport.pdf>

# Improve Communication with Families About Attendance by following these rules:

Make communication meaningful, messages should be:

- Occurring at key points during the year
- Personalized to family and student
- Timely (close to time student is absent)
- Available in multiple languages and in both electronic and physical format

# Improve Communication with Families by following these rules:

Make things readable:

- Use fewer words
- Content is easy to read and understandable
- Make things skimmable (e.g., use bullets)
- Available in family's native language



# Key Messages

- Communicate effective attendance messages throughout the school year.
- Conduct caring conversations with families about their child's attendance.

# Potential Ideas to Implement

- Identify times of the year to communicate supportive attendance messages to families (e.g., before vacations).
- Have a positive, personal conversation with families whose children are chronically absent.
- Communicate with families as soon as absences start to add-up.

# Resources

- [Ohio Department of Education and Workforce Attendance Support](#)
- Use these family communication tools from [Attendance Works](#):
  - [Handouts and Messaging](#)

# Resource: Better Truancy Notification

- Starts with positive language and moves punitive language to the end
- Fewer words
- Written at 5<sup>th</sup> grade reading level
- Formatted to help readers skim
- Makes connection between absences and achievement

Condition D  
Add-up Notice

We need your help. [STUDENT NAME]'s absences from school are concerning, and your partnership is critical. Students who miss just one or two days of school each month can fall seriously behind.

[STUDENT NAME] is now "truant" because [SHE/HE] missed school (or was more than 30 minutes late) without a valid excuse on:

Thursday, September 12, 2015  
Thursday, September 19, 2015  
Thursday, September 27, 2015

Being absent can lead to doing poorly in school. Students who miss many days of school are more likely to:

- Fail their classes
- Drop out from high school
- Have poor relationships with parents and teachers

We are required by [STATE] law to send you this letter and to warn you of the consequences of additional unexcused absences (see sidebar).

Please remember that every absence matters and just a couple days each month adds up. You are key to improving [STUDENT NAME]'s attendance.

Sincerely,  
Principal X

Truancy- [STATE] Education Code School administrators determine what types of absences are excused or unexcused based on state law and on the facts of the pupil's circumstances. When a child is absent from school and/or tardy in excess of 30 minutes on three (3) occasions in one school year without a valid excuse, the law considers that child to be truant.  
Education Code Section 4826.05 requires us to inform you of the following:  
• That the parent or guardian is obligated to compel the attendance of the pupil at school.  
• That parents or guardians who fail to meet these obligations may be guilty of an infraction and subject to prosecution pursuant to Article 6 (commencing with Section 4829.0) of Chapter 2 or Part 27.  
• That alternative education programs are available in the district.  
• That the parent or guardian has the right to meet with appropriate school personnel to discuss solutions to the pupil's truancy.  
• That the pupil may be subject to prosecution under Education Code Section 4826.4.  
• That the pupil may be subject to suspension, restriction, or delay of the pupil's driving privilege pursuant to Section 15202.7 of the Vehicle Code.  
• That it is recommended that the parent or guardian accompany the pupil to school and attend classes with the pupil for one day.

If you have concerns about your child's attendance or if you believe our records are inaccurate contact the school at «SCHOOL\_PHONE\_NUMBER».



[Writing Truancy Notices That Can Improve Attendance](#)

[Using Behavioral Insights to Improve School Administrative Communications: The Case of Truancy Notifications](#)