

How to Effectively Respond to or Engage with an Angry Parent

1. Model appropriate behavior

Use a calm tone and do not allow your voice to raise if they raise their voice. Continue to smile and speak calmly. Use non-threatening body language that shows that you are open to what they have to say. Eye contact communicates openness. Be careful not to cross your arms or put your hands on your hips as these are seen as negative.

2. Validate their concerns

Let them know right away that you understand that they are upset, and you would like to help. Ask for more information and let them know that you genuinely want to find a solution. Don't be dismissive as if the issue isn't very important, because this will only fuel their anger. You want them to understand that their issue is a *real concern to you*.

3. Let them vent

Listen and nod while they vent. Sometimes they need someone to listen. Letting them vent without being judged will be therapeutic for them.

4. Take responsibility and apologize

It *doesn't matter* whether you are or are not directly responsible for the issue. Taking responsibility is the fastest way to diffuse anger and this works out best for both of you. Let them know that you're taking responsibility and that you're going to take care of it. Part of taking responsibility should also be to apologize. Even if you don't see things their way, you can be sorry that they are upset or sorry that this happened. Sometimes this is what they want to hear. This is a very important way to show them that you aren't on the defensive but that you want to work with them to resolve whatever has angered them.

5. Don't take it personally

Remember that there are many reasons or motivations behind a parent's anger that often has nothing to do with you. Knowing this allows you to take a step back and remove your emotional reaction. Try relaxing your shoulders, unclenching your jaw, and breathing deeply. When you can stay calm, you can stay in control.

6. Set limits and boundaries

You are the leader of your school community, and you make the rules for the conversation! If an angry parent is shouting, you can tell them that you will not continue to listen unless they lower their voice. Your time and peace of mind are valuable, and parents do not get to impose on your feelings. If they do not accept the boundaries, end the conversation, and offer to reschedule a time to talk when they are calm. Don't be afraid to be firm, yet respectful.

7. Follow up with a personal phone call

Let the parent know as soon as you have addressed the issue. Tone and emotion are often misunderstood in writing, so a personal call is always the best way to communicate with an angry parent. Calling may be a bit more time consuming in the short-term, but this is one of the most effective ways to improve parent communication and show compassion.

8. Document Everything

When a parent becomes explosive, document the details of the conversation in case a supervisor or superintendent must get involved.