



Ask a Conductor

Question 5

What are some of your best practices for communicating with parents and caregivers, specifically when it comes to conflict resolution and expectations?

Welcome to the “Ask a Conductor” section of ChorTeach. In this reader-generated Q&A format, readers submit questions related to teaching, conducting, rehearsing with, or singing with K-12 students. Educators who either currently work in K-12 or who have past experience in K-12 will answer the question, with a new question appearing in each issue. Our goal is for this to be a very practical section that applies directly to current concerns in the choral classroom. Readers can submit questions via the link in this Google form (<https://forms.gle/oVcamzqp4KwXfo5M9>) or by visiting the QR code below.



Ask a Conductor Submission Form

Question: What are some of your best practices for communicating with parents and caregivers, specifically when it comes to conflict resolution and expectations?



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Communicating with parents and caregivers is important. It is paramount to maintain healthy, clear lines of communication, especially when handling a conflict or establishing expectations. Here is a simple list of procedures I have followed during my twenty years of being an educator in order to minimize confusion and set clear expectations:

- Write a choir handbook that contains an overview of the course, attendance policies, grading policies, uniform expectations, rituals, routines, and classroom procedures. Make sure that this handbook is accessible to your school community by creating it in the most common languages that are spoken in your school district.
- Have the parents/guardians and students sign a contract acknowledging the expectations for being a part of your ensemble or course.
- Reach out to the parents (by phone, email, or informal gathering) during the first two weeks of school to establish communication.



- Let the parents and caregivers know the best way to contact you. Consider establishing virtual office hours or using an app like Remind so that you can efficiently send out quick communication, reminders, links, PDFs, or pictures.
- Listen. When a parent is concerned, angry, or upset and needs to talk with you, take the time to listen to the parent. Keep an open mind and hear the parent's concern as if you were the parent and that was your child.
- Make decisions that revolve around what is in the best interest of the children. Even if the parent is not happy with your choice, as long as it is in the best interest of the child and his or her well-being, that is what matters the most.

Lastly, when I was in the classroom, every decision I made centered around the following thought: Is this the program, classroom environment, and experience I want for my own children? If the answer was a resounding yes, then I knew I was on the right path.



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In the midst of maintaining a successful choral program, several moving targets must be managed. These can include: administrative responsibilities, student social emotional issues, finances, community partnerships, program branding, and marketing.

While navigating this ever-changing landscape, wisdom dictates that we add conflict with parents and enforcing program expectations to this list. As a 20+-year teacher I have experienced a multitude of scenarios that create conflicts that must be remedied. Most of these conflicts were easily preventable with some form of communication from myself. *The most valuable gift that you can give yourself is the gift of planning and communication.* Parents and students deserve to have a full perspective of the expectations of participation in the choral program. This allows for a better delivery as

these crucial conversations occur. I employ a few strategies to establish solid expectations and communication for all students and parents.

Handbook

It goes without saying that the syllabus/handbook provides the most fundamental base on which to establish for expectations. We provide a handbook online that covers all of our expectations. This includes our calendar, classroom procedures, grading scales and percentages, a listing of all choirs, uniform contract and fees, expectations and consequences along with a signature page that ALL students and parents must return as proof of receipt. The link to an online version of the handbook is also located on the choir's website.

Google Calendar

We provide and maintain a Google calendar on our website. This calendar contains all concerts, rehearsals, and school holidays. Students and parents can subscribe to the calendar on their personal smart devices. This keeps all interested parties well informed of upcoming dates that affect choir students and parents.


Newsletter

We provide a bi-weekly newsletter for our students with subtle reminders, student highlights, date changes (if needed), birthdays, and upcoming engagement descriptions. For my choir, we have a paid subscription through www.smore.com for \$70 yearly. Through this service we create digital newsletters that can be shared with parents and students through the use of an embed code or hyperlink. The newsletter can also be distributed using Remind, social media, and email.

Website

The choir website is the one-stop shop for all things choir. These sites can be created for free and managed with very little technological skill. On the website, the calendar, newsletter, and handbook can be embedded for quick and easy access by parents and students. Take the time, however, to be familiar with school district rules and policies

before posting images of students or copyrighted material.

In the inevitable event that conflict does arise, prior communication gives the teacher a useful basis for discussion with parents. In my experience, the lion's share of conflict stems from a lack of communication from the music office regarding rehearsals or events. Remaining vigilant and proactive with communication helps to provide transparency and trust in the choral program. Without it, conflict is all but certain. Happy planning, my friends. 

For more on this topic of communicating with parents, see these past articles, online at acda.org:

**“Communicating with Parents—
Help for Music Teachers”**

by Susan Dill

ChorTeach Winter 2015, page 2

Practical communication strategies to help choir directors initiate and foster constructive communication with parents. A sample handbook and strategies for conflict resolution are included.

“How to Share What You Teach,”

by Brandon Williams

Choral Journal April 2015, page 75

Explaining the value of singing and music education in general with parents and administrators.

“The Care and Feeding of Choir Parents,”

by Pamela Burns

Choral Journal June-July 2019, page 38

The author examines the value of maintaining a positive relationship with the parents of young singers.