Relationships that work are built on trust and open communication. Finding methods to communicate with families is a challenge for teachers who already have many responsibilities within their classroom.

Communication Methods
- One-way communication from a class or school can inform families about events or plans or attempt to educate parents. This is the traditional method that many schools have used to communicate with families.
- Two-way communication encourages and facilitates true dialogue, with families actively reacting and responding.

Daily Conversations
- Nothing is as important as personal, face-to-face conversation for building relationships. Frequent daily conversations when parents drop off and pick up their children are extremely important in building trust by fostering a sense of familiarity. Important things happen during these brief exchanges. Parents want to know that their child is known and recognized as a person.

- This can be a time for brief but substantive exchanges on child-and family-related issues. Studies indicate that these conversations may be the most frequent form of parent involvement, although the substance of the conversations may not progress beyond social niceties.

- One study found that the average length of conversation between caregiver and parents at transition times was 12 seconds! Sixty-three percent of all “conversations” were greetings or other small talk with no real exchange of information. And in the nearly half of the situations observed, the parent and caregiver did not even greet each other.

- The frequency and quality contacts depend primarily on factors in classroom routine and center policy that can be planned and regulated. Preparing materials before parents arrive, or saving cleanup for after parents depart, keeps a teacher’s attention from being diverted away from the door as parents arrive.

- When both members of a teaching team are in the classroom, making definite assignments for either child care or adult conversations clarifies expected behaviors for both teachers and parents. Some teachers complain they can never think of anything to say when a parent comes in.

- Teachers striving for daily contact with all parents are helped to perceive their own patterns by keeping an informal tally briefly recording who was spoken to, for how long, and the topic of conversation. One study indicates that almost 30% of child care parents do not enter a center when leaving their children for the day.
When parents ask teachers for lots of detailed information at a busy dismissal time, teachers may answer briefly, and then set up an arrangement to give more information later by note or telephone.

**Telephone Calls**
- For teachers who cannot be in daily contact with families, the telephone offers an opportunity for personal conversation. A most important use of the phone call is to share **positive** personal observations about a child.
- Using the telephone is especially important to connect with parents who are not in frequent contact with the teacher, either because of work schedules or transportation arrangements.

**Personal Notes**
- A teacher sending a personal note home with a child can also accomplish sharing positive, personal observations or anecdotes. Notes tend to be perceived as one-way communication, but a teacher may design them to invite response.
- All notes, e-mail messages, and letters should be personalized. The adults should be addressed by name and title or first names if the teacher is on a first-name basis with the family.
- Teachers should be sure they use the correct names, recognizing the different family structures of individual children. Refer to children by name rather than “your child”. Teachers can end the notes by writing their first and last names or first names if that is the basis of the relationship.

**Electronic Communication**
- Now that many teachers and families have access to computers and e-mail. Electronic communication offers another option for two-way communication. Although electronic communication offers additional options for communication with some families, teachers should also be aware of its limitations and cautions regarding its use.

**Bulletin Boards**
- Bulletin boards offer another form of reaching out to parents. A bulletin board needs to be clearly visible in an area well traveled by parents, preferably just outside a classroom, so families make clear connection between the information offered and the teachers as the source.
- The information offered by a bulletin board will be chosen by a teacher as she listens to parents’ questions and comments or finds areas where they need resources or help.
- If a teacher wants a bulletin board to be used, it is necessary to change it frequently; a board that stays the same for weeks teaches parents not to look at it.

**Daily News Flash**
- There are a number of ways of connecting with parents who are too busy for conversation. A daily news flash is one method of letting parents know what’s going on and information that teachers want parents to know. Classroom daily
flashes are not earth-shaking, but they offer some-thing tangible form the day that parents can pursue with their children.

- Many programs use daily information sheets for individual children and families, with a section on top for parents to fill out at the beginning of the day to update staff about how the child is feeling and a bottom section to tell families how the child’s day went.

Newsletters
Another communication technique involves sending regular newsletters to all families. Newsletters have four main objectives:

- To keep families informed about classroom activities and plans.
- To give parents insights into the educational purposes underlying classroom activities.
- To enhance children’s and parents’ abilities to communicate with each other.
- To reinforce and extend learning from school into the home.

Newsletters need to be fairly short—one printed page is enough so that parents do not set them aside unread, thinking they are too time-consuming. Newsletters sent regularly, monthly or biweekly, will not get too far behind on current activities. Letters can be made visually interesting with bold headings, graphics, changes typeface, or content divided into sections and enclosed in boxes.

Traveling suitcase, Libraries, and circulating literacy activities
- Teachers can make contact with parents by sending home with a child a “traveling suitcase.” On a rotating basis, each child had the privilege of overnight or weekend use of several items selected from the classroom. Most children are pleased to be able to show their parents something that has been enjoyed at school and a child’s enthusiasm often guarantees that the materials will be used and discussed.
- Another teacher may use the suitcase to support a family literacy activity that is later shared at circle time. Offering parents the opportunity to borrow materials they can use with their children is further evident of caring.
- Another idea for circulating materials between home and school is to have classroom videos available for checkout.

Classroom Displays
- Teachers who want to promote communication with families about the learning and development of their children use many opportunities to inform families about daily activities and their purposes.

Suggestion Boxes
- It is useful for teachers to devise several methods of obtaining feedback from parents about the classroom, their goals and the methods of involving them in the program. A suggestion box should be prominently located and its use encouraged. Some parents are reluctant to raise issues with teachers directly and may be more comfortable with the anonymity of forms or printed materials.
Traveling Suitcase to Promote Literacy

Suggestions: (Home, School, and Community; Carol Gestwicki)
• A book about a bear, a stuffed bear, and a blank page for child and parent to write their own bear story.
• A book and a blank tape for a parent to use to record a story.
• A tracing of the child’s foot that has been cut out of cardboard, and a list of things in the house. Parent and child measure and list the things that are longer, and those that are shorter, than the child’s foot.
• A calendar with spaces for parent and child to write in special family dates and hang in the child’s room.
• A collection of pads, markers, envelopes, and stickers for child and parent to write mail to send to family members.