



So you want to know more about...

Resolving Caregiving Conflicts

Handling Conflicts with Caregivers

Whether you have nagging doubts or see an incident that simply must be addressed, it's important that you be able to trust your caregiver and the center. That trust will only develop with open communication. Unless a child is in physical danger, **think about concerns overnight**. Taking time to consider the issues and detail your concerns will help you make your point more clearly and diffuse some of the emotionality of the issue.

First, **determine the problem**. The initial thing that comes to mind may just be a symptom of a larger issue. What are you seeing that makes you uneasy? What does it mean for children?

Make time for a conversation. Hectic drop-off or pick-up times

are not appropriate for serious issues, but are a great time to **touch base**.

When you voice concerns, talk in concrete, objective terms. **Define** your own expectations and **detail** how they are not being met.

Using **"I messages"** will help your listener respond less defensively to complaints. Saying "I feel sad when I find Tommy crying at pick-up time" enables listeners to identify with your experience rather than rush to explain the circumstances.

Once you have had a chance to voice your concerns, **ask for feedback**. Is there anything *you* can do to help the situation? Perhaps your expectations are out of line with the center philosophy. Are there reading materials you can

explore to give you a better understanding of our goals? At Gretchen's House, we consider parents to be our partners. We all need to **start with the same information** in order for meaningful dialogue to take place.

It's important to end any conversation with an **action plan**. Reiterate any changes you discussed as well as whose responsibility they are. Set a time to touch base. Communication is a two-way street, and caregivers become uneasy when they sense parents have concerns that aren't being discussed. Chances are you'll all feel better after you bring issues out into the open.

Chain of Command

Whenever possible, address any concerns you have about your child's care **with his own primary caregiver**. A friendly note or quick phone call during naptime can clarify many minor issues.

If you have talked with your caregiver and aren't satisfied with the outcome, follow up with his or her **direct supervisor** (often a Head Teacher). Discussing complaints with other staff will exacerbate the issue and stymie communication.

Feel free to contact your **Director** whenever you have concerns about quality of care. If you have conferred with your teachers and director and you still feel dissatisfied, it may be time to speak with **Gretchen**. We do recommend that you take every step possible to resolve problems before bringing them to Gretchen. The **process** of solving problems is how you will build a trusting relationship with your child's caregivers. Gretchen can help with supervisory issues, but she isn't the person who will be caring for your child each day.

Further reading

- *The Anxious Parents' Guide to Quality Childcare*, by Michelle Ehrich
- *Nothing But the Best: Making Day Care Work for You and Your Child*, by Diane Lusk
- *Without Spanking or Spoiling*, by Elizabeth Crary

Ages & Stages

Here are some tips for smoothing out the wrinkles in day-to-day communication at the center:

- **Take time to listen.** Give yourself a few minutes at drop off and pick-up to touch base. If your schedule is tight, call during naptime.
- If you don't understand what someone has said, **ask right away.** "It sounds like you're saying..." Going home and fretting over an unclear conversation does no one any good.
- If it's important, **put it in writing.** Putting information in writing gives it more heft and is a physical reminder of the issue when face-to-face communication is less than perfect.
- Don't just talk about the bad stuff. Take time to comment on positive things you see in the classroom. **Establishing a rapport** with your teacher will make her more familiar with your personality and less likely to misinterpret ambiguous statements.
- **Define your terms.** If your teacher is using terms you don't understand, ask her to clarify. If you sense confusion from her, clarify your point.
- **Be respectful.** Although you may have a valid point, being humiliated will set up roadblocks for your caregiver to understand what went wrong. Being vague helps no one, but try not to berate your caregiver. A bit of tact and professional courtesy go far.
- **Pick your battles.** If you nitpick her every move, your caregiver will feel defensive. If you give her some breathing space, *when and if* big issues do arise, she will know something is important.

Little Things Mean a Lot

Sometimes it's easy to overlook the little gestures that mean so much as adults work together to take care of small kids. Stop to smell the roses when:

Teachers:

- Write thoughtful notes that let you really share your child's experiences at the center;
- Keep track of umpteen socks, pacifiers, and mittens;
- Plan activities that captivate your child;
- Help your child make gifts for mom and dad;
- Inform you about possible signs of illness.

Parents:

- Send thank you notes to teachers or supervisors;
- Donate toys, books, or supplies to the program;
- Help with other children at drop-off or pick-up;
- Pack extra clothes, label belongings, or respond to requests quickly;
- Send tokens of appreciation;
- Share affectionate remarks their child makes about the teacher or center;
- Join field trips or volunteer at the center.

Frequently Asked Questions

I don't seem to have a thing in common with my caregiver. I have a hard time striking up a conversation with her. Sure you have something in common — your care for your child! You don't need to be *friends*, although it's certainly helpful to feel friendly. Polite interest, such as asking about somebody's weekend, is always appreciated.

I believe my caregiver gets in too many power struggles with my child. I want her to back off. Look at the Active Learning Brochure for your child's age. Do her expectations exceed the norms for his age group? Sometimes children are capable of more than we give them credit for. It's a parent's prerogative to

be lenient or permissive at home, but a caregiver needs to help a child be part of a group. If her expectations are not in line with Gretchen's House standards, by all means, please speak up!

My teacher does everything else so well, I hate bringing up this one small issue because I don't want to make her feel bad. Tell her that. But do remember that this is her job. She's a professional, and if you have concerns, it's possible other parents do, too. Making her aware of areas for improvement will help your teacher grow as a caregiver as well as improve the care your child receives.