



## **Communicating with Parents**

*By: Ally Paauwe*

*Ally Paauwe has been a staff member, head instructor and choreographer for Universal Dance Association for the past four years. She is a senior at Indiana State University majoring in public relations and minoring in dance. Ally is in her third year of coaching and choreographing for the Terre Haute South Spirettes Dance Team. She is also a member of and choreographer for the Indiana State University Fusion Dance Company.*

The key to any successful relationship is communication. Communication is especially important in the relationships that coaches have with parents. It is so important to have an open line of communication with your parents from the very beginning of the season. Before you hold dance team tryouts, consider having a parent meeting to lay out your expectations for the year. Be sure to go over what you expect of your team and what you expect from the parents and yourself. Let the parents know the best way to contact you, whether it is by phone, email or in person. If you have multiple coaches, it may be in your teams best interest to set up a team email account so all of the questions will go to one location and you can avoid multiple responses being sent out to parents.

After the team is selected, it is imperative to have an initial meeting to kick off the season. Again, lay out your expectations and let the parents know that they can contact you at any time. Also let them know that throughout the year they can contact you with suggestions, ideas and opinions regarding the team and the progress of the season. Depending on what you think is necessary, set up monthly or bi-monthly parent meetings just to make sure everyone is on the same page. At these parent meetings it is important to discuss upcoming performances, fundraisers, community service events or any changes to the normal practice schedule. This is also the time to open the floor to questions and comments from the parents. This is their opportunity to give you feedback on how they feel the season is going. In between meetings, it is important to send at least a weekly email update to let the parents know what to expect that week. By doing this, there won't be any confusion regarding scheduling or upcoming events and everyone can be on the same page. It is also very important to reply to parent emails and calls as quickly as possible. In order to make sure that everyone is staying in the loop, respond to emails and phone calls no more than two days after the email or phone call is received.

Not everyone is going to understand things the same way or agree with decisions you make as a coach. Because of this, a conflict may arise between you and a parent. If you ever find yourself in a situation with an unhappy parent, make sure to first ask the parent what exactly their concern is. By asking the parent directly, you are opening the lines of communication and you will be able to better understand the source of the problem. After talking with the parent, you should ask them how they think you can address and solve the problem. Allowing parents to give you suggestions shows your willingness to correct any issue in a timely manner.

If the problem is a larger issue that cannot be solved through a few emails or a phone call, arrange a meeting with the parent in person. If you have a meeting with a parent, make sure that all coaches and at least one administrator from your school are present. Before the meeting, debrief your administrator on the issue so they are not going into the meeting blindly. At the meeting have the

parent explain their concern and collectively, with your coaching staff and administrator, come up with a solution that will appease everyone involved.

In extreme cases, there could be multiple parents with the same problem or problems that are related. If this is the case, it is best to have a meeting with all of the parents. Without going into too much detail, explain the situation and how you intend to solve it. By doing this, you will be showing the parents that you are able to handle confrontation and solve a problem in a way that is in the best interest of the team. Hopefully by the end of the meeting the issue will have been solved and you can go on with your season.

Again, communication is crucial to having a successful season. By letting the team and the parents know your expectations from the beginning, they will feel comfortable with letting you know their feelings on how the season is going. Any issues that arise can be solved by simply keeping the lines of communication between you and the parents open. By doing this, coaches and parents can work together toward a successful season.

