

# Communication Strategies for Family Engagement

## UCS Family Engagement Toolkit

### Designed For

Program leads, Special Olympics liaisons, coaches, other staff who engage in UCS outreach and engagement.



### Time Estimate

Varied.

Enhance Communication  
with Families from  
Diverse Communities

### Why would I use this tool?

**Equitable family engagement** strategies are essential for the UCS program to increase and maintain its presence in racially diverse, immigrant and refugee, or economically diverse communities.

This resource provides proven communication strategies that you can use to successfully communicate with diverse families, including families who speak a language at home other than English and those with different levels of literacy.

**Equitable family engagement** means building reciprocal partnerships with families, learning from their perspectives, and collaborating with them to ensure your programs are inclusive.

### When should I use this tool?

You can use this tool when communicating with families from various family contexts and communities. Alternatively, when you are not receiving the response you expect, refer to this resource to identify new types of effective communication strategies to support your family engagement efforts.

### How should I use this tool?

You can use this resource as a guide to create new communication strategies and materials to engage former, current, or potential UCS families. You can also use this resource to modify or update existing materials or communication strategies that reach current, former, and potential UCS families.



# Communication Strategies for Family Engagement in Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools




When communicating with families from various family contexts and communities, it is important that you meet families where they are to ensure UCS information is available and accessible to them. This is particularly important when sharing foundational program materials to inform families about the purpose and benefits of Unified Champion Schools.





To ensure written and spoken communications are culturally and linguistically accessible to diverse families, adopt the following strategies for effective communication:



## Accessibility and Inclusion Self-Reflection: Equitable Family Engagement

- How well do you know your audience?
- Do you use communication that is more convenient for you than it is for families?
- Does your communication meet the literacy and language needs of families?

PAUSE  
AND  
PONDER

STRATEGY	DON'T DO THIS	DO THIS
 Create written and spoken communication that is simple without using jargon and idioms.	Coach was throwing up all night, but is on the mend after his bout with food poisoning. Friday's practice is back on!	Coach is feeling better after being sick last night. Basketball practice is still scheduled for Friday, May 16, 2020 at 3:00pm.
 Define key ideas and terms.	Your child has a partner who works with him.	Students with and without intellectual disabilities are teammates who train and compete together. We refer to students without intellectual disabilities as Unified partners and students with intellectual disabilities as athletes.
 Speak slowly and clearly and avoid using slang.	"You wanna go to the courts to see em' play?"	"Do you want to watch your child play basketball?"

STRATEGY	DON'T DO THIS	DO THIS
 <p>Be concise.</p>	<p>The school's playing field will be off limits some time next semester. Apparently the plumbing that runs under the field is old and made of lead pipes. We have to coordinate with the city to replace the pipe since they connect to the pipes that run along the street. We will have a parent meeting to discuss the situation in two weeks. The superintendent wants to be present so we need to coordinate schedules...</p>	<p>The school is working with the city and district to coordinate lead pipe replacement under our playing field from Elm to Davis Roads. This is scheduled to happen next semester. The playing field and surrounding areas will be unavailable during this time. We will share additional information as it becomes available.</p>
 <p>Practice active listening.</p>	<p>"Sorry, I was answering a work email. What did you say?"</p>	<p>"Let me put my phone down so I can give you my full attention. What would you like to talk about?"</p>
 <p>Be curious and ask open, non-judgmental questions.</p>	<p>"Can you believe (insert group)? I don't understand where they are coming from."</p>	<p>"I asked a (insert group) teacher to help me understand the distance I feel from Ray's family. She told me that disability is shameful in their culture and the family is struggling with how to engage their extended family in a way that is best for their child."</p>
 <p>Use two different kinds of communication, including a combination of text, audio, and visual tools, and media.</p>	<p>The only form of communication with families is text-based – email, text, flyers, etc.</p>	<p>With your regular updates to families, include photos and video clips; experiment with audio files. These different modes are especially important for those families who are unable to attend events in person.</p>

STRATEGY	DON'T DO THIS	DO THIS
 <p>Provide information in a timely manner.</p>	<p>Notify families of events a day or two before they happen.</p>	<p>Share a calendar of events at the start of the school year and send regular reminders before individual events. If creating a calendar of events is not possible, send information at least 1-2 weeks ahead of time. This gives families time to respond, invite other family members, and/or arrange their schedules.</p>
 <p>Inform families of how UCS activities are accessible and safe for their child with disabilities.</p> <p>You can inform families of access and safety issues by sharing The STEP Framework: Participation and Inclusion in Unified Sports. Click <a href="#">here</a> for the English version and <a href="#">here</a> for the Spanish version.</p>	<p>Be reactive. Wait for families to reach out with basic questions about their child's safety.</p>	<p>Be proactive. Let families know that coaches are trained to assess and work with students of differing abilities and to modify activities accordingly. Each sport follows rules regulated by a national governing body for that sport.</p>

### TIP for Outreach to Families

Consider one-on-one calls or conversations with parents about the program, either to introduce the program to them or as a check-in at the start of each new school year. This may be time consuming, but it establishes connections and begins to build trusted relationships.



## Communication Channels

Use multiple modes of communication with families based on the purpose of the communication (see **Table 1**).

**Table 1. Examples of Communication Methods for Engaging Families**

COMMUNICATION ITEM	METHODS	TIMING
<p>Initial outreach or introduction to UCS</p> <p>Here are two family and partner-centered videos you can use to introduce families to UCS:</p> <p><a href="#">Catherine and Claude's Moment</a> [7:45min] Catherine and Claude, emigrants from Cameroon, have a son who got involved in Special Olympics Unified Sports® in middle school. They now have a different view of their son's future.</p> <p><a href="#">Rashaan's Moment</a> [6:51min] Rashaan found his community as a partner in his Unified Sports team at university.</p>	<p>Method 1: phone / email</p> <p>Method 2: email / phone</p>	<p>At start of school year or a few weeks prior, call parents to introduce them to UCS; if they are alum, reintroduce the program to maintain relationship and talk about any changes or concerns they may have</p>
Schedule of games or events	<p>Method 1: email</p> <p>Method 2: paper</p>	At start of school year or a few weeks prior to season; with every update, send revised schedule as soon as possible
Forms or program information other than schedules	<p>Method 1: email</p> <p>Method 2: paper</p>	At least two weeks in advance, followed by reminders if input is needed
Invitations	<p>Method 1: email / text</p> <p>Method 2: paper / flier</p>	At least a week in advance, followed by reminders
Reminders or check-ins	<p>Method 1: text</p> <p>Method 2: phone / email</p>	Day before event and/or day of event; as needed
Event follow up or weekly updates or highlights	<p>Method 1: text</p> <p>Method 2: email</p>	At end of week or a day or two after event
Emergency	<p>Method 1: phone</p> <p>Method 2: text</p>	ASAP



### Family Engagement Toolkit Resources

You may access the **Contact and Outreach Information** spreadsheet [here](#). It can help you track parent outreach and student information.

You may access **Technology Tools for Communicating with Linguistically Diverse Families** [here](#). It can help you identify a translation app for communicating with families who may be more comfortable communicating in a language other than English.



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For questions or comments about the Toolkit, please contact:

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