

PARENT PHONE CALL LAB

October 20, 2026

Paul Dreyer

Our Schedule

- Foundational concepts
- Practice scenarios with coaching
- Debrief
- Next Steps



Defining Success

- Seek partnership
- Represent your organization well
- Communicate clearly
- Minimize emotional impact on you/your staff
- Gain some resolution or closure
- Do Good. Well.



Understanding the Players

Parents…

- Care deeply
- Have a lot of emotion

You…

- Have ownership & passion
- May also have a lot of emotion
- Are invested in your students' success

Understanding the Players

Parents…

- Are "on-sighting" parenthood
- ~~May~~ Will not hear everything you are saying
- Perspective may be distorted by more pressing concerns

You…

- May be new to all or part of the situation
- ~~May~~ Will be tired from long hours of work
- Perspective may be distorted by other things happening in your program



Before the Call

- Write a script
- Be aware of your timing
- Promptness matters
- Have a plan for voicemail
- Get a coach



During the Call

Do	Avoid
If true, tell them their child is not physically injured	Lying
State the problem and the decision	Promises you can't deliver
Know your policies regarding expulsions and refunds	Giving your personal phone number
Maintain a consistent point of contact	Field staff talking to parents



During the Call

L	Listen
E	Empathize
A	Ask Questions
F	Follow Up (make a plan)



During the Call

Potential helpful phrases

- "She may not have accomplished all she was hoping, but she did accomplish…"
- "They were respected by their peers for…"
- "We know that sometimes the best learning comes from the consequences of unpleasant experiences."
- "I understand that it is hard to…"
- "What I need from you right now is to…"



During the Call

If things become challenging…

- L.E.A.F.
- Avoid baited hooks
- Allow for silence (breathing is good)
- Be thoughtful about saying, "I'm sorry."



Ending Calls

- Review important information and check for understanding
- End with structure…
  - Clarify the outcome and next steps
  - Schedule and try to be responsible for the next call



After the Call

- In the case of divorced or split parents, consider calling both parties
- Document promptly
- Anticipate a follow-up call
- Debrief with your coach



Emotional Coping Strategies

- Debrief calls and incidents
- Practice regularly
- Pass the call up if you are not succeeding or are losing your mind



Emotional Coping Strategies

- Remind yourself…
  - Do good. Well.
  - They are just doing their job as a parent
  - This will end soon and these people are (likely) a small part of your life



Legal Considerations

- Confidentiality
- Parents of minors are entitled to information
- Avoid any appearance of coerced statements
- You are not charged with making an iron-clad legal case



Parent Styles

The BLAMER

- "It's your fault."
- Response: Stick to the facts.



Parent Styles

The VICTIM

- "This is so hard for us. You must be able to help. Can you…"
- Response: Empathy, but clarity and directiveness.



Parent Styles

The DENIER

- "That couldn't have happened."
- Response: Stick to the facts - stay clear of an arguing trap.



Parent Styles

The DISENGAGED

- Emotionally not present, or not willing to engage with the situation
- Response: Clarify next steps; ask the parent to repeat the situation and plan back to you.



Time to PRACTICE!

(after a break and you get instructions)

Practice Scenarios, part 1

- Groups of 3
- We hope to do 6 scenarios/stations:
    - 3 scenarios/stations
    - Break & form new groups of 3
    - 3 scenarios/stations
- For each scenario - one admin/staff, one parent, and one observer

Practice Scenarios, part 2

- Each station:
  - 3-5 mins - Take a few minutes before each call to read the scenario cards (only read your role; observer can read both staff/admin and parent roles).
  - 6-8 mins - Call should last no more than 10 mins - observer stops call at an appropriate time.
  - 8-10 mins - Feedback/debrief. Led by observer; start with SELF feedback, then move to peer feedback & discussion.

Practice Scenarios, part 3

- Scenarios always have glitches stemming from theoretical information.
- Roll with the punches for the sake of the learning!
- Be thinking how these scenarios are transferable to your work, program, students.

Practice Scenarios - summary

- Each station will be about 22 mins - you will hear a bell with 5 mins left, and a bell when it's time to switch.
- Observer will stop the scenario (6-8 mins in), and lead debrief.
- Rotate clockwise to the next station.
- 3 stations/scenarios, then a break, then 3 more.
- Scenarios always have glitches stemming from theoretical information.
- Roll with the punches for the sake of the learning!

Next Steps

- Identify two characteristics or behaviors of potential parents (or clients) that are likely to hook you into angry or defensive communication. Write down one strategy for responding constructively to each of those behaviors.

- Identify five pieces of information you want to have written down before making your next parent phone call about a behavioral incident. Then do the same for a medical incident. Incorporate those lists into your next staff training.

- Identify two people in your program or a similar program who can serve as resources for you in preparing for or debriefing a challenging parent phone call. Contact those people in the next six months about serving as resources for you in the future.

WHERE THERE BE  DRAGONS

THANK YOU

Paul Dreyer
Director of Strategic Relations
paul@wheretherebedragons.com