

# PARENTS AND COMMUNICATION

**G**ood parent education and communication does not just happen. It requires special skills and business practices. Telling your story is of utmost importance. Getting information to parents is a challenge alone, but getting them to read the information is an additional challenge. Your communication and the image you present create the first impression, often the lasting impression. How you present yourself is the first step in building the relationship with your parents. Here are some tools we can use to communicate and educate our parents.

## 1. TV MONITOR AND VIDEO DISPLAYS IN THE LOBBY AND VIEWING AREAS.

Highlight upcoming events and the benefits and value of those events. Use pictures expressing the fun and education the events provide.

## 2. NEWSLETTERS.

Hard copy newsletters handed out to students at their class with information about the program, upcoming events and educational articles are great ways to communicate and educate parents. Consider a monthly or every other month time frame for distribution. The average email open rate per Constant Contact for Education Services and Sports and Recreation companies is 20%. Because of our diligence with our email marketing, Barron Gymnastics is at 39%. That still leaves 61% of our clients not reading our emails. Consequently, it is necessary to



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continue handing out hard copies to the students in class.

## 3. EMAIL NEWSLETTERS.

In addition to the hard copy newsletters, send out a weekly or two times per month email newsletter. Use the newsletter to promote your program and highlight what improvements and activities with which your staff and company are involved. Educate yourself on what is the best day and time to send out emails and how often. In addition to the open rate discussed in #2, it is important to track the click through rate. A call to action in the body of the email will improve your click through rate. The average click through rate per Constant Contact for Education and Services and Sports and Recreation companies is 8%. Barron Gymnastics is at 10%.

## 4. EMAIL BUZZES

We save email buzzes for an event or activity we want to highlight. Since we want them to create a buzz, we limit our use of the email buzzes to the most important messages. In addition to using engaging content and images, give thought to the subject title. What types of subject titles cause you to open an email? Use those same types of titles. If the parents are not opening the email, your time and energy in creating the email is lost.

## 5. FACEBOOK.

In addition to communicating events and activities, use Facebook to educate the parents. Lead them to other sites like USA Gymnastics. Capitalize on the experts who write articles and provide interesting content for USA Gymnastics.

## 6. INSTAGRAM.

Be creative with your pictures and captions.

## 7. WEBSITE.

Offer a user friendly website for your families to navigate. Keep it updated and current.

## 8. SIGNAGE.

Strategically place signs in your facility. The signage does not need to include all the necessary information. Keep it simple and professional. Use it as a call to action and direct them to the proper source for more information.

## 9. STAFF PICTURES AND BIOS.

Include in the staff bios what strengths and qualifications the staff possess that will benefit the parents and students. Parents do not care if a teacher is willing to sub and help other teachers. Parents want to know what qualities the teacher and front office staff has that will directly benefit them.





## 10. LESSON PLANS.

Post your lesson plans and provide an explanation of lesson plan logic.

## 11. ON LINE REGISTRATION.

With online registration, it is more difficult to have the initial communication with parents that we use to have when registration was in person. Consider a welcome phone call or a welcome face to face greeting prior to their first class. The policies, procedures and what to expect can be discussed at this time. A clear understanding up front will help eliminate potential miscommunication in the future.

Let's discuss some of the less obvious ways we communicate and educate our parents without the use of words.

## 1. BODY LANGUAGE.

The old saying "Actions speak louder than words" is so true. We cannot communicate ideas and thoughts without words. However, the way people interpret those words is greatly influenced by our nonverbal communication and body language. Our facial expressions, eye movements, gestures, and posture play a key role in people's interpretation of the words we speak, strongly influencing how we are viewed. Avoid signals with body language that can destroy the image you want to project.

## 2. IMAGE.

Your image is the loudest way you initially communicate and educate your parents. The look of your gym tells people who you are and what you do. If you have awards banners and trophies as your focal point, then you are communicating that you are a

competitive program. At Barron Gymnastics, we have about 100 competitive gymnasts, but that represents only 8% of our total enrollment. In fact, 40% of our enrollment is under the age of 5. So if we want to communicate that we serve the noncompetitive young child, then our gym's image needs to express that.

## 3. FACILITY.

Look at other gyms in the country and get ideas from the gyms you respect. Adopting some of their ideas is the highest form of flattery and can help you improve the look of your gym. Another idea is to look at other children's businesses. Check out dance schools, swim schools and educational preschools as an example. Reaching outside of our industry can give you fresh ideas.

Request an advertising/promotional company to evaluate your facility. What can you be doing better? How can you strengthen your brand? How can you add a fresh new look? Are your mission, culture and values evident? Their initial walk through consultation will be at no cost. Set a budget that works for your business and consider adding some new promotional products that will add some bang for your buck. Of course these sales people are trying to sell you on their services but you can learn a great deal from their walk through. They are there only to evaluate your facility. They are not distracted with signing their child up for your program so they will be zeroing in on what your facility communicates to the public.

## 4. EQUIPMENT.

Keep your equipment updated. It is the safest way to do business, enhances the look of your facility and



adds value to your curriculum and lesson plans. We added 3 stall bars to one of our walls and it changed the entire look of that area of the gym in addition to adding stations and skills to our lesson plans.

## 5. CULTURE.

The actions and attitude of your staff express your philosophy and teaching style. Building a culture that is aligned with your mission and values is so important. Creating a curriculum, lesson plans and business practices that your staff follows is vital to your culture and image.

We are so fortunate to have the opportunity to communicate and educate our students, parents and community. Gymnastics is so much more than cartwheels. We can develop a program that teaches physics, biomechanical principles, kinesthetic sense, spatial awareness, balance, strength, flexibility and social skills. Briefly put, gymnastics builds skills for life. Evaluate your current forms of communication. Develop new business practices that offer communication and education to the parents. Brand your business. Create an image that tells who you are and what you do. Tell your story. Create a story worth sharing.

