

PARENT VIDEO DISCUSSION GUIDE

Revised July 15, 2014

Time: 45-60 minutes

This is a guide to help school employees, community leaders, social workers, health care providers, family resource center staff, parent leaders, and everybody else who works with families to facilitate a conversation with parents about the importance of attendance and how to partner with schools to improve students' attendance. The conversation is built around Attendance Works' parent video.

We recommend setting aside about 45-60 minutes for this activity, which includes:

- » SETTING THE STAGE (including ground rules and an icebreaker) (8-13 minutes)
- » SHOWING THE VIDEO (7 minutes)
- » FACILITATED CONVERSATION (30-40 minutes)

SETTING THE STAGE

- » Assign one person to facilitate the conversation for the group.
- » Take a moment to establish some basic ground rules for a conversation such as:
 - Create opportunities for everyone to participate.
 - Respect different perspectives and experiences.
 - Share only what you feel comfortable sharing. You may pass.
- » Start out with an Icebreaker to get everyone thinking about attendance.
- » Ask the group to split into pairs and reflect on what it takes to get children to school every day.

Discuss two things with your partner:

- » What makes it hard for you as a parent to get your child or children to school every day? (If a participant is not the parent of a school-age child, ask them to share what they have observed to be challenges for their neighbors, or allow them to pass.)
- » What motivates and helps you to get your child to school despite these challenges?

With the full group, ask people to share what they heard about what makes it hard to get children to school and about what helps.

SHOWING THE VIDEO

Please use this link to the <http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/for-parents/bringing-attendance-home-video/>. If you are concerned about Internet access, you can download the video to your computer or flash drive in advance of your event.



FACILITATED CONVERSATION

The purpose of this facilitated conversation is to help parents digest what they have just learned, make it relevant to themselves, and discuss what they can do to improve their children's own attendance.

With the full group, pose discussion questions on the following topics. Feel free to use the prompts provided. If possible, chart people's responses.

The Consequences Of Chronic Absence

The video stated that:

“...By the end of the school year students can have missed so much instruction that they experience difficulty learning to read, mastering important math concepts, passing courses and ultimately graduating from high school.”

What is your reaction to the video's statement about the consequences of chronic absence — missing 18 days of school over the course of a year, or just 2-3 days each month?

Optional Follow-Up:

- » Ask the group to reflect on Olga's story about how she did not anticipate the consequences for her son of missing too many days of school in kindergarten. What does this story bring up for them?
- » Supplement the discussion with excerpts from additional resources, such as this short [research summary](#) (or this [infographic](#) summarizing the impact of chronic absence on learning.) You may even want to make copies for the parents to take home. It may be eye-opening for families to see the data and research about the effects of chronic absence.

How To Improve Absenteeism

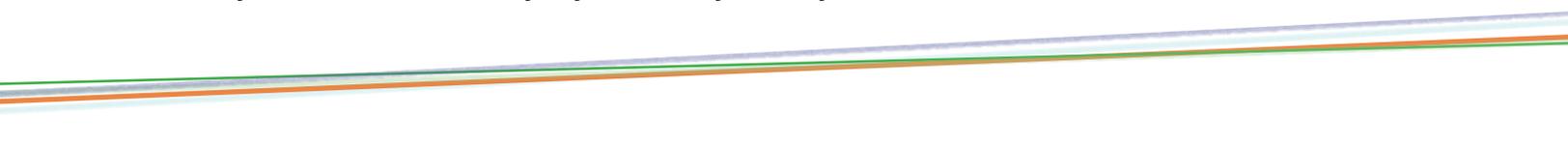
The video emphasizes that reducing absenteeism requires that “we... work together — at home, in our schools and our communities,” to get children to school every day. This concept can also be summarized in the framework below.

- » Give parents the chance to explore how each of these areas impacts their ability to get their child to school every day, and what they can do to improve their children's attendance. Write up the four areas on chart paper or a white board at the front of the room so that the group can walk through them together, and keep a record of people's ideas so that the group can see what they've come up with.

Review Family Practices

The video listed several things that families can do at home to help their children get to school every day. What are some things you already do? What are some additional reasons (e.g. extended family vacations, religious or cultural observances, or extracurricular activities) children might miss school and steps you can take to support your child's attendance?

If the group needs prompts, here are some of the ideas presented in the video:

- » Set a regular bedtime and morning routine to make sure children get enough sleep and wake up ready for school.
 - » Make medical appointments when school is not in session.
 - » Avoid taking vacation when school is in session.
 - » Send your child to school every day unless they are truly sick.
- 

- » Develop back-up plans for getting your child to school if something comes up.

Increase Social Capital

The video proposed some suggestions for things families can do to help one another; for example, one family can help another family by getting their children to school or sharing child care.

- » Are there people in your extended family or social networks who would be willing to help if you ask?
- » What are some additional ways you can think of to help one another?

Identify How Your School Can Help

- » What are some ways our school can help families with attendance?
- » How can we hold our school accountable for attendance? (Note to facilitators: for more information on this topic, visit this online resource: <http://www.attendanceworks.org/tools/for-parents/parent-handouts/> You can also consider printing out copies to distribute to parents.)
- » Who are the people in our school who can help? (Note to facilitators: if parents are new to the school or unfamiliar with the staff, you can suggest some possible helpers, saying, “Did you know that the counselor, the school nurse, and our family liaison can help?”)

Community Services — Who Else Needs to Help?

- » Lack of reliable transportation or housing and health concerns are barriers that families cannot easily tackle alone. Do families in your school face these barriers to good attendance?
- » What are some other barriers that families in our school face?
- » What organizations offer services that can help address these barriers?

Key Takeaways

- » Help parents solidify what they learned so that the conversation can make a lasting impact and they can share it with other peers or family members.
- » What is one key idea you will take away with you from this video that you will share with another parent?



Thank you for sharing our parent video and being one of first users of this discussion guide. Do you have any suggestions for how might we improve the materials for other parents or for other facilitators? You can send your comments to Cecelia@attendanceworks.org or fill out this online evaluation form: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/AWParentVideo>. Thank you!

Attendance Works thanks the W.K. Kellogg Foundation for supporting the production of this video and our work to improve student attendance. We also express gratitude to the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading and the Annie E. Casey Foundation for their on-going support.