



Crafting Effective Presentations

School psychologists are often called upon to give presentations to staff, parents, or other stakeholders such as school board members or local politicians. The purpose can range from providing simple strategies on a specific issue to advocating for support (policy and funding) for a particular program. Being purposeful in creating your presentation by knowing your audience and focusing your messages will help you put together the most effective presentation to meet your communication needs.

VENUES

There are numerous situations that would require a school psychologist to make a presentation.

- School-based professional development.
- PTA or other parent meetings.
- School board meetings.
- Parent education classes.
- Community meetings.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

As in any form of communications planning, it is key to know your audience and to speak to their priorities.

- Tailor your language to reflect the prior knowledge base of the group to which you are speaking. Avoid overusing professional jargon or abbreviations.
- Spend time at the outset of your presentation to gather information about prior knowledge about the issue and expectations for the presentation.
- Consider the aspects of your presentation that might be challenging or potentially controversial to your audience. It is often helpful to present both sides of a controversy while avoiding taking a side, unless it is relevant to your key message.
- Decide ahead of time how you will handle confrontational comments or questions.
- Consider your audience's willingness to engage in interactive activities such as roleplays, collaborative problem identification or solving, or brainstorming.

BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE PRESENTATION

Presentations generally are divided into four segments:

- Introduction: Serves to draw the listener into the presentation. Some speakers use humor to do this. Another approach is to describe the urgency of the message (“Cuts in school psychology positions will critically affect those students most at risk for social isolation, school failure, or drop-out”) or focus on a timely issue that interests your audience (“Tomorrow school starts, and

we all have an important role in helping students succeed”). Justify the importance of this topic to this specific audience.

- **Body of the Presentation:** Deliver your important messages with supporting facts and representative stories. Engage the audience in hands-on activities such as role-playing, think–pair–share, or brainstorming. Get the audience up out of their chairs and moving if possible. Use multiple types of media to deliver your message including slides, videos, audio recordings, and reading materials.
- **Conclusion:** Encourage listeners to take action (this may mean support school psychology implement the intervention you presented, set up consistent routines at home, etc.). Include an activity to help your participants consider how they will implement the information that they have learned. As part of your conclusion, have participants complete an evaluation of your presentation. Results of this evaluation will help you determine if you met your objectives in the presentation as well as help you make changes for future presentations.
- **Question and Answer:** Try to anticipate the questions that might be asked and determine what points you’ll make in your answers. Decide ahead of time if you will answer questions that are specific to an individual or school. If you feel that responses require extended conversation, set up a time to continue your discussion with the audience member.

KEY TIPS TO ENGAGE YOUR AUDIENCE

To help engage all participants in your presentation:

- Use local examples to support your key points. This will help members of your audience relate to the information that you are sharing and consider how it can be applied to their daily functioning.
- Share personal or professional stories to help elaborate your points. In conducting research to create your presentation, speak with colleagues to get examples for topics on which you might not have your own experiences.
- Eliminate jargon and professional abbreviations. Keep your language simple. Use sound bites that audience members will remember days after the presentation has ended.
- Use humor when appropriate to entertain audience members.
- Invite friends or colleagues to attend your presentation. While it is always comfortable to have a friendly face in the audience, it is also helpful to suggest questions or comments that they might make to help encourage audience participation when there is silence.
- Review your presentation and eliminate anything that does not add to it. Shorter and simpler is always better. Be sure to leave time for questions and comments.
- Consider that many people will approach you after your presentation is over to ask specific or more personal questions. Leave time to build those personal relationships.
- Practice your presentation to determine expected time as well as any potential rough spots. Determine ahead of time what are the most important points and what you might skip if time runs short.
- Keep slides simple and font sizes large enough so it is easy for people to read all the text. Avoid trying to squeeze too much information or text onto one slide.
- Consider cultural issues within the content of your presentation as well as between yourself and the audience.
- Have a handout of your slides or important talking points for all audience members. These will be key if you experience any technological challenges. Having something in front of them on

which to take notes will help maintain the interest of your audience. It also helps your message linger after you have finished your presentation.

KNOW THE POTENTIAL CHALLENGES OF YOUR LOCATION

The location of your presentation can have a major impact on the success of your presentation.

- Consider the seating of the room: Would you like participants to be seated in rows so that they can all see you and a screen well, or would it be more beneficial to have them seated at tables so that they can easily engage in group activities?
- Consider from where you would like to present. Will you stand at a podium or head table and speak through a microphone or would you like the ability to walk throughout the room to interact with the audience?
- Check to make sure that you have everything that you need and that it is working properly. Test microphones, computers, projectors, remotes or clickers, and even lights.

Adapted in part from *The Power of Presentations*, available online at http://www.nasponline.org/communications/spawareness/present_ps.pdf. Additional communications planning and implementation resources, including adaptable PowerPoint presentations, handouts, and articles, are available to NASP members at <http://www.nasponline.org/communications/index.aspx>.

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