



Communication between students and parents

Code Reference: Section 15.11

Requirement: *Education providers must have processes in place that provide for regular communication between students and parents*

Telephone Communication

It is suggested that education providers have procedures in place that enable international students to have weekly telephone contact with their parents.

These procedures should also include options for more regular contact if a child is ill, when a child has first arrived, or if something is happening at home.

Students may have telephone contact with their parents through the education provider, or through their accommodation.

A log can be kept of weekly calls between students and parents, to ensure that calls are taking place and to allow the student's welfare and settling in to be monitored.

This section outlines suggested processes for allowing weekly telephone contact between students and parents, and includes a telephone call log that could be used to record calls between students and parents.

If a child becomes distressed after calls, do not stop them calling to avoid distress, as forcing them to suppress their emotions will lead to further distress, trauma, and unresolved feelings/insecurities.

Telephone contact from accommodation

A suggested process for enabling the child to have a weekly telephone call to their parents is to have the child phone home (or the parent to phone the child) at a certain time each (say) Tuesday.

The child should be provided with a private room to make/take this phone call.

If the student is reluctant to phone the parents the homestay carer/designated caregiver could prepare the child for the call by talking to the child beforehand about what they might talk to their parents about.

The homestay carer/designated caregiver should note the duration of call. The homestay carer/designated caregiver may need to be available if the child becomes distressed.

Children should also have options for telephone contact outside of these set times.

Telephone contact from the education provider

A suggested process for enabling the child to have a weekly telephone call to their parents is to allow the telephone call to be made from/to the education provider. The call should be made/taken at a particular time on a particular day. The child should be provided with a private room to make the call, and not be interrupted. A teacher or student support person may need to be available if the child becomes distressed.

Children should also have options for telephone contact outside of these set times.

Tips for helping phone calls go smoothly

If a pattern begins to emerge in the phone log of a child becoming upset, distressed, withdrawn, or displaying difficult behaviour after a phone call to their parents, the following strategies may help:

- Try moving the call to a different time of day. Make sure it is a time of day when the child is not tired or feeling rushed, and when there will be others available for support afterwards
- Try arranging a positive and engaging activity for the child after the phone call is completed, e.g. a game or a snack and a chat. The child could be asked to select an activity of their choice
- Try ensuring that there is a first language support person available to talk with the child after their phone call
- Remember that it is important not to restrict these phone calls. They are vital contact with home for the child
- Make sure that there is a suitable quiet and private space for the child to make the phone call where he/she will not be interrupted
- Make sure that there is sufficient time for the child to make the call in a relaxed manner. A child should not be pressured to finish a call.
- Should phoning home be an obvious problem for the child the provider should discuss this with the child, and if appropriate ask a first language speaker to phone the parents and discuss the problem.

Recovering the cost of calls

Provision should be made to recover the cost of phone calls from the parents of international students. Suggested ways of doing this are:

- Requiring parents to supply their children with calling cards
- Arranging with parents to make reverse-charge calls
- Having a set time every week when the child's parents must phone
- Including phone charges in the international student fees and recovering them from parents on a reimbursement basis.

Other Methods of Communication

E-mail and online chatting

Email communication and online chatting is an effective way for international students to keep in touch with their families.

The computer use needs to be at a reasonable time of day. If the child is using a computer at their place of residence it must not interfere with their regular bedtime.

There may need to be a designated block of time for computer use with a specific start and finish time (this may be negotiated with the child) so that the child has a clear idea of what is expected and what is acceptable.

Education providers need to monitor the frequency of these communications with parents to ensure that it is taking place.

An education provider may do this by providing a time during school hours for this type of communication or by checking with the child's residential caregiver that the child has a designated block of time for this purpose.

Where the child usually accesses email and online chatting from their place of residence, the school should ensure that there is also an opportunity for the child to use email facilities at school. This might be necessary if the child is unhappy in their place of residence and/or their residential caregiver prevents them from communicating freely with their parents.

Letters and pictures

Writing letters and drawing pictures for parents can add another dimension to communication. A quiet writing time could be built into the classroom routine, e.g. writing a letter once a week or writing a diary-style entry every day and then posting it to parents at the end of the week.

Stamps and envelopes need to be on hand and the classroom teacher needs to be responsible for seeing that the letters are posted.

Children could be encouraged to observe any special occasions (e.g. family birthdays) and mark this by sending a card if appropriate.

Children may wish to produce illustrated letters or draw pictures about their life in New Zealand.

Teachers could help children to select a special sample of their work to send to their parents to tell them about what they have been learning.

This kind of quiet, contemplative communication could be a helpful activity to encourage when a child is feeling homesick or it may be a way of responding to an especially exciting day when there is lots to tell.

Multimedia

Videos:

Video communication can be fun and educational. It can be a good way to encourage children to expand their language skills.

Here is a list of ideas for topics/titles for videos for children to make and send to parents:

- Where I live/ The people I live with
- My School (could include a tour of the school featuring key places and people)
- My Classmates (could include introductions and interviews)
- New people I have met
- My school day (could include footage taken throughout the day from breakfast until dinner time)
- A special day (perhaps a record of a school trip or visit or a special event)
- Food (e.g. what is eaten at meal times, how food is prepared, or snack foods)
- My favourite things to do in New Zealand
- Five things that are different in New Zealand from home
- The city/town I live in (could include places of interest, methods of transport).

Audiotapes:

Audiotapes can be used to send messages and information home to parents and family.

1. Students could work in pairs to interview each other in their first language and tape the conversation to send to their parents.

Here are some suggested questions for students to ask each other on audiotape:

- What does the place where you live look like?
- What is your room like?
- Who are the people that you live with?
- What are the people that you live with like?
- How do you get to school?

- Where is your favourite place at school? Why do you like it?
 - What have you done at school today?
 - What is your teacher like?
2. Children could make their own “spoken letter’ individually, recording their own news and thoughts.
 3. Children could read a piece of their written work aloud onto the tape.

Photographs:

Photographs are an excellent way to record and share everyday and special events with parents. Students could use disposable cameras, or if the education provider had access to a digital camera they could take their pictures and send them to their parents via the Internet.

Written explanations could accompany the photographs.

Here is a list of suggested photograph subjects:

- The education provider
- My classmates and teachers
- Inside the classroom (photographs of students working and various activities etc)
- A classroom display, or projects
- Lunchtime (how students spend their break)
- Sport
- Class trips and visits.

Parental Visits

Education providers may actively encourage visits from parents by:

- Advising parents that they are invited to visit, on information provided to parents at enrolment (see the **information for parents** sheet in **Chapter One: General**)
- Advising parents that they are invited to visit via the education provider’s prospectus or promotional material
- Advising agents in writing to advise parents that they are encouraged to visit
- Hosting parents well when they visit.

Record keeping

A record should be kept by the education provider of the forms of communication that are made available to international students, and which ones each student has chosen to use. A modification of the telephone log could be used for this purpose.

Residential caregivers may be asked to demonstrate that weekly calls to the parents are being made and to note the child’s reactions to these calls. Concerns should be referred to the Designated Pastoral Care person.

The student could be encouraged to keep their own “Keeping in Touch” log/diary. This would include all forms of communication.