

The Dos and Don'ts of communicating by email

Teamwork is a powerful tool that enhances your success as a PTA. By understanding, nurturing and adapting the habits of effective teams and effective team members, your PTA can work smarter and accomplish even more in your community.

Email is a popular way to communicate. It is a quick and efficient way to disseminate information to several people at once. It offers recipients the opportunity to read and respond thoughtfully when they have time to process the information, whereas a phone call can catch them off guard. Email also creates a paper trail that can come in handy when decisions, assignments or plans need to be made.

While email is certainly an efficient means of communicating, it often is a source of confusion, frustration, and hurt feelings. Without the benefit of seeing body language and hearing voice tone, recipients can misinterpret your words and that can lead to conflict.

When you use email, make sure you follow these rules:

DO ...

Use a specific subject line so that readers know exactly what your email is about.

Use the “priority” settings if a message is urgent or insert a “call to action” in the subject line, such as “Please respond by August 1.”

Use care when utilizing the “bcc” function. Remember the recipient can reply. If it is appropriate to share an email without other recipients knowing, sending it separately with an introductory message is a better option.

Include the original email in your response so that the recipient knows the context of your response.

Respond in a timely fashion. Reply to all urgent messages immediately. For others, follow up within 24 hours, even if you are simply telling the recipient that you will send a more detailed message later.

Send one-or-two-word confirmations or responses in the subject line, such as “Yes” or “Date confirmed,” followed by EOM for “end of message.” So that recipients don’t have to open the email to learn your response.

DON'T ...

Insert the recipients’ names into the “To” field until after you have carefully proofed your email.

“Reply all” to an entire group if your message is not relevant to everyone.

Address conflict, poor behavior or other sensitive topics in email. Pick up the phone or meet face to face instead.

Write anything in an email you would not say to someone’s face.

Bold, underline, italicize or capitalize entire words or phrases. Not only does it make a message hard to read, but it can come across as rude.

Experiment with humor or creative writing styles that could leave the recipient offended or confused.

Share intimate or offensive comments in email.

Send a large attachment without first confirming that the recipient’s server can open it.

Jazz up emails with fancy fonts, colors, emoticons or other graphics. They can be distracting and look unprofessional.