Home Notes

Definition

A home note is an informational note that provides communication between an instructor and parent and is an effective method for improving a student's academic and social behaviors. Home notes can be a powerful tool for improving a student's behavior because they regularly inform parents of their child's progress and allow the use of consequences that are rarely available to the teacher.

Things to Do

✓ Develop a home note form.

✓ Meet with parents.

✓ Explain the home note to the student.

✓ Start the home note program.

✓ Review the home note with student.

☑ Develop a home note form.

A Good Home Note Should Include This Information

✍ Name of student and date.

✍ Specific academic and/or classroom behaviors.

✍ Feedback regarding the target behavior(s).

✍ Information regarding what, if anything, needs to be done, by whom, and when it should occur.

✍ Comments from teachers and parents.

✍ Signatures of teachers and parents.

☑ Meet with parents.

Meet with the student's parents to confirm their cooperation. Telephone calls or notes informing parents about the home note program can work but are generally less effective than a meeting.

The following goals should be accomplished during the parent meeting:

Goal 1 Have the parents help select academic or social behavior(s) for the home note.

Select Observable and Measurable Behaviors to be Included on the Note
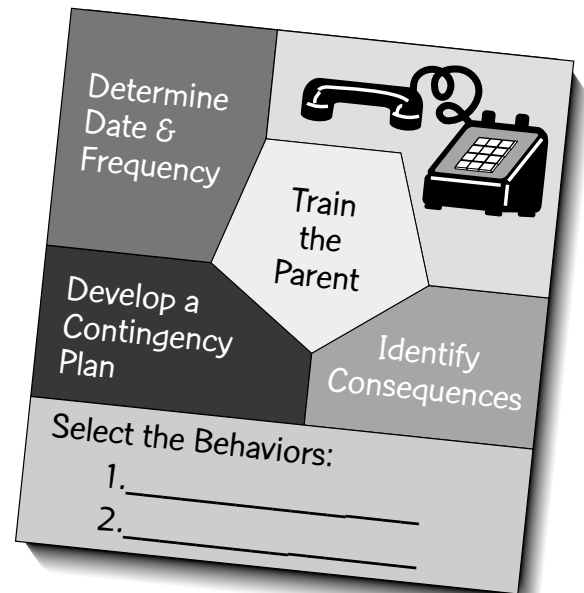
It is best to use both academic and classroom behaviors on the note. Rarely will a student have problems only in one area. Examples of good behaviors to include are:

✍ Follows teacher directions immediately.

✍ Comes to class prepared.

✍ Hands in homework.

✍ Completes math assignments.

✍ Talks in appropriate tone of voice.

To avoid confusion and frustration, never require a student to track more than five behaviors. When designing a home note for younger students, it's important to work on only 1-2 behaviors at a time.

Goal 2 Help the parents decide what positive or mildly adversive consequences (e.g., home privileges such as bed times, TV times and programs, access to friends, etc.) they can deliver in the home.

Goal 3   Set up a system for monitoring problems such as lost notes, fabricated home note ratings, and substitute teachers. Also discuss the child's responsibility for getting the note to and from school and consequences if she/he loses the note.

Goal 4   Train the parents to review and initial the note.

Goal 5   Decide when the home note will start and how frequently the note will be given. When beginning home notes, it is generally better to give the note daily, and as the student's performance improves, gradually fade to giving the home notes once a week, and finally no note.

Goal 6   Give the parents a copy of your telephone number and encourage them to call if they have questions or problems.

Determine Date & Frequency

Train the Parent

Develop a Contingency Plan

Identify Consequences

Select the Behaviors:
1._____
2._____

✓ Explain the home note to the student.

Describe the behaviors on the note and what is expected. Also explain to the student the procedures if a home note is lost, forged, or if there is a substitute teacher in the classroom.

It is important to use consequences for home note performance. There should be positive consequences for appropriate classroom behavior and mildly adversive consequences for poor classroom performance. *The degree of the consequence should be based on the extent of the student's effort or the severity of the problem.* Be sure to discuss these consequences with the student.

Examples of consequences might include:

✍   If the student had a perfect day, she or he might be allowed to stay up an extra 30 minutes at night or watch an additional 30 minutes of television.

✍   If the student had problems, the student might lose 10 minutes of TV time or go to bed 10 minutes early.

✓ Start the home note program.

Start the home note at the ***beginning*** of the week, initialing the day or the rated behaviors. At the end of the day, hold a short debriefing meeting with the student to explain his/her performance ratings. The following are suggestions for rating systems:

✍   Use a ☺ and ☹ face for younger students to facilitate understanding.

✍   For older students, a rating system of "+, 0, –" or "Excellent, Satisfactory, Unsatisfactory" has been used effectively.

When using any rating system, it is critical to clearly define the criteria for each level so that students, teachers, and parents understand performance expectations and consequences.

Inform the Parents That Home Notes are Starting

Call the parents to inform them that the note is coming home. It is also helpful to contact the parents a couple of days later to review the program and discuss any problems.

☑ **Review home note with student.**

When the note is returned, ask if he/she earned extra privileges and check for the parent's signature. Praise the student for remembering to bring the note back to school.

Review the Home Note Program with the Parents and Student

After 3-4 weeks, arrange for another parent conference, telephone or face-to-face meeting, to review the student's progress. It is important to emphasize the student's gains and praise the parents for their support of the program. Use the meeting to discuss any problems or concerns and determine future plans.

Continue to Monitor the Home Note Program

Monitor the student's progress over time to provide support for changes in student's behavior and facilitate communication with the parents.

Example

Cody is having difficulty following teacher directions, staying on-task, talking out, and completing his assignments. As a result, he is falling further behind and disrupting the class. After a meeting with Cody's parents, his teacher designed a home note that included the following behaviors:

- ✍ Immediately follow teacher's directions.
- ✍ Watching the teacher when she is talking.
- ✍ Raising hand to talk.
- ✍ Completing assignments.

It was decided that the teacher would rate each behavior with either a "+" for satisfactory or a "0" for unsatisfactory performance. These ratings were placed on the note with the teacher's initials and sent home. If Cody had all "+'s," he could stay up 30 minutes past his bed time and pick a special TV program.

For each "0" on the note, Cody would go to bed 10 minutes earlier than his regular bed time of 8:30 p.m. If Cody lost the note, forgot it, or changed a rating, he would go to bed 10 minutes earlier and lose TV privileges for the night.

The parents reviewed and signed the note each night. In the morning, Cody returned the note to the teacher and received regular recess time. If he forgot or lost the note, he lost part of his recess. Both the parents and teacher talked frequently to prevent problems and review Cody's progress.

It has worked well. Based on the data, it is clear that Cody's classroom performance is improving. While Cody has not been perfect, his parents feel that home notes are working and providing an information link with the classroom teacher.

Variations of the Technique

✍ Fade from daily to weekly notes after the student receives a certain number of positive daily ratings. For example, when a student has had 4 good weeks of daily home note ratings, then weekly notes given on Fridays can be used.

✍ In cases where parents cannot implement a home reward program, home notes can be tied into a classroom reinforcement system. The student earns an individual or group reward or activity for the class based on his/her home note performance.

Potential Problems and Solutions

Student Consistently Loses the Home Note

At home or in the classroom (or both), a privilege may be lost such as loss of TV, early bed time, or loss of recess.

Student Refuses to Take the Note

The student loses a privilege—the same as a lost note.

Student Forges the Note

The parent should be informed, and student loses a privilege—the same as a lost note.

Parents are Overly Punitive with the Student

Ask parents to meet and agree upon consequences. If the problem persists, discontinue the program.

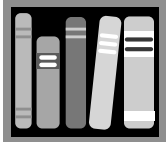**Parents are Unable to Reward the Student or Refuse to Participate in the Program**

Set up an in-class reward system if the parents are willing to review and initial the note but are unable to reward the child. If the parent will not review the note, discuss performance at the end of the day and reward the student in class.

Getting Ready

✍ Determine if there is a need for a home note program. A student must be having academic and/or classroom problems, and the parents must be interested in participating if a home note is to be successful.

✍ Have the telephone number of the parents available.

✍ Have several rewards available for those students who return home notes and follow home note instructions.

Materials and Supplies

✍ A supply of home note forms.

✍ A supply of rewards.

References

Kelly, M. L. (1990). *School home note: Promoting children's classroom success.* New York: Guilford Publishers.

Reavis, K., Jenson, W. R., Kukic, S., & Morgan, D. (1992). *Home notes to improve motivation: Technical assistance papers.* Salt Lake City: Utah State Office of Education.