

Advocating for your Child: Parent/Teacher Communication

Participant's Handouts



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British Columbia Teachers' Federation
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Meetings

A good meeting with the appropriate people can solve problems and avoid many emails/phone calls. It can be easier than phone calls or emails.

Child

- Will it be a positive experience for your child?
- Should adults meet first?
- Will your child understand and be able to take part?
- Will your child feel okay about attending?

Setting up a meeting

- Let them know what you want to discuss.
- Let them know if someone will come with you.
- Let them know if your child is coming.
- Ask if anyone should attend and why.

If the school calls you to attend a meeting, ask:

- What will be discussed?
- Who will be there and in what role?
- Is there any information you need to provide?
- What information do you need in order to be prepared?
- Who can provide that information?
- Will any decisions be made in this meeting?
- How will your views be reflected in any decisions made?

In the meeting

- Recognize what is working. Start with the positive.
- Focus on the issues and what will work for your child.
- Speak only for yourself and your child.
- If getting off topic... "I am willing to talk about your concerns later. I've asked for this meeting to talk about the problems my child is having, and I'd like to cover those first."

After the meeting

- Review the outcome with your child in an age-appropriate way.
- Arrange for follow-up before you leave the meeting.

Positive Parent-Teacher Communications Help Everyone

Author: Beth McCullough, National PTA Website, <http://pta.org/3804.htm>

One of the challenges every parent faces is how to talk to teachers and school administrators about a concern and come away with a positive resolution. By following a few basic communication rules, you can play a positive role in your child's education experience.

Establish a good relationship early in the school year. Getting to know your child's teacher, other school staff, and administrators early on makes difficult conversations easier later. Today's wide range of communication methods makes it easier than ever to keep open lines of communication between you and your child's school.

Be proactive. Voicing a concern means you care. Consider speaking up to be touching base or checking in versus complaining or questioning the school. Make contact early before a situation escalates.

Follow the chain of command. You automatically create a barrier between yourself and a teacher by going to the principal before you talk with the teacher. The same goes for calling the central office before you speak with school staff or administrators. Those "next levels" are available if the situation cannot be resolved at the source.

Abide by The Golden Rule. One of the five rules of my classroom was "Give others the respect you expect." The same rule applies to us all. If you expect a teacher to keep you informed, communicate with the teacher regularly about matters large and small that affect your child. If you believe teachers should refrain from telling you how to parent, then resist the temptation to tell them how to teach.

Calm down. Wait until you are calm and rational before firing off an e-mail, calling the school, or going in person to confront staff. What is the real goal—to vent or to help solve a problem? Sometimes it helps to talk it over with another parent who can give you an honest, objective point of view before you make contact with the school.

Little things make a big difference. Body language, tone of voice, and choice of words are crucial pieces of the communication puzzle. Again, follow The Golden Rule in communicating in a manner you would want others to communicate with you. Voice your concern calmly and reasonably.

Stay focused. It can be tempting to bring everything that has troubled you all year long into a conversation or parent conference. But you'll get better results if you concentrate on the issue at hand and finding a shared resolution.

Consider the big picture. There are at least two sides to every story. Ask questions before jumping to conclusions. In addition to voicing your concerns, take time to listen carefully.

Be part of the solution. Ask the simple question, "What can I do to help?" You will be amazed at how quickly a difficult conversation becomes a productive interaction. There is a difference between siding with your child and being an advocate for your child. Your role is to advocate for your child.

Believe it or not, your input is wanted. Ask any educator; one of the greatest challenges they face is lack of parental involvement. A good relationship with your child's teacher is like any other relationship; it takes some work. However, it is well worth the investment of time and effort. Make it a priority to form a partnership with the school in paving the way for your child to have the best possible experience at school.

Beth McCullough enjoyed 11 years as a teacher and is currently the public information officer for Chatham County Schools in North Carolina.

Questions prepare parents for a parent-teacher conference

To better prepare parents for parent-teacher conferences, consider sending home a list of questions they might ask during a conference.

1. What is my child's class schedule?
2. What do you expect my child to learn this year in reading? Math? Science? Social studies?
3. Are children grouped for reading, math, or other subjects? What group is my child in and how are children selected for that group?
4. Is my child working up to his or her ability?
5. In what areas is he or she doing well?
6. In what subjects does he or she need to improve?
7. What are the most important things for the children in your classroom to learn this year? What can I do at home to encourage that?
8. How is my child's work evaluated?
9. Can you show me examples of my child's work — classroom projects, tests, special assignments?
10. How much time should my child spend on homework each night? How can I help with homework?
11. What can you tell me about how my child seems to learn best? Is he or she a hands-on learner? Does he or she need to move around? Does he enjoy learning in a cooperative group or prefer working alone in a quiet place?
12. How do your classroom strategies complement my child's preferred learning style?
13. Does the school have a code of conduct? How do you discipline students in your classroom?
14. Does my child get along with other children? With you?
15. How can I reinforce classroom learning at home or learn more about my child's progress in school? Are there opportunities for parents to be involved in classroom activities?



Source: Adapted from *Learning Together*, a publication of the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 800-441-4563.

 **Listen** (http://app.readspeaker.com/cgi-bin/rsent?customerid=6350&lang=en_us&readid=rs_read_this2&audiofilename=8_Sentence_Starters_to_Use_When_Talking_to_Teachers__National_Center_for_Learning_Disabilities__NCLD_org__url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ncl.org%2Fstudents-disabilities%2Frti-parent-school-relationship%2Fconversation-starters-talking-to-teachers)

8 Sentence Starters to Use When Talking to Teachers

Written by Geri Coleman Tucker

0 Comments (http://www.ncl.org/students-disabilities/rti-parent-school-relationship/conversation-starters-talking-to-teachers#disqus_thread)



Sometimes it's not what you say but how you say it. If you want to effectively communicate with your child's

teacher, try these sentence starters.

1. **“I’m concerned about my child’s...”**

Saying “I’m concerned about my child’s progress in math” is a lot less confrontational than saying, “You need to do more to help my son with math.” Using “I” statements instead of “you” statements can let the teacher know that you want to work together as partners and that you’re not playing the blame game.

2. **“Help me understand...”**

Even in moments when you disagree with a teacher, saying “Help me understand” is a constructive way to move a conversation forward. It also makes it clear that you’re listening and engaged.

3. **“What was the goal of this assignment?”**

It’s important to make sure you and the teacher are working toward the same goals. Clarifying those goals is key. It’s also important to emphasize that you share those goals. A good follow-up to this question would be to ask, “Do you have any suggestions for other activities my child could do to work on those skills?”

4. **“Have you considered...”**

This is a polite way to share information the teacher might not know. It’s also a good way to ask questions without making the teacher feel defensive.

5. **“I’ve noticed...”**

This phrase allows you to share information and respectfully acknowledge that parents and teachers often see children from different perspectives. For example, you could say, “I’ve noticed my child can retell a story with more detail after she reads it aloud. Are there opportunities for reading aloud during classroom reading instruction?”

Understood

This article was created for Understood.org.
Learn more (<http://www.nclld.org/ld-insights/blogs/free-new-online-resources-for-parents>) about this new resource.

6. **“It seems as if my child has a harder time doing _____ when _____.”**

Seems and *appears* are useful words when trying to reach a shared understanding about a child’s strengths and needs. These words allow you to present your take on the situation without making a harmful or incorrect assumption. For example, you could say, “It seems as if my child has a harder time showing what he knows when the worksheets mix operations” or “He appears to not complete homework when the assignments involve multi-part directions.”

7. **“Her IEP provides her with _____ accommodations. How does that look in the classroom?”**

This is a good way to ask about accommodations (/students-disabilities/accommodations-education) without accusing the teacher of failing to provide them. Remember the goal is to work together. Try to avoid making assumptions that could damage your relationship.

8. **“What can I do to help?”**

Teachers have a classroom full of students. These five words let the teacher know you’re willing to play a role in your child’s education rather than just leaving it up to her.

Geri Coleman Tucker is a freelance writer and editor and a former deputy managing editor for USA Today. She also writes the Asperger Ascent blog. Tucker is based in the Washington, DC, area.

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Print



SELF-HELP GUIDE

Meeting Survival

Be wiser than other people, if you can, but do not tell them so.

Lord Chesterfield

Note details such as:

- Who is setting the agenda?
- How do I add topics?
- What is the meeting to accomplish?
- How much time do we have?
- Who is attending?
 - What is their role in the meeting?
 - How are they involved with my child?
 - What are their rights and responsibilities?
- Will a decision be made at this meeting?
 - Who are the decision-makers?
 - Will I have a say in the decision?
- What is my role in the meeting?
- Do I need more information on my child's:
 - Education goals?
 - Education activities?
 - Specific behaviours?
- What information do I have to support a good decision?
 - What questions do I want to ask?
 - What works well for my child?
 - What doesn't work well for my child?
 - What other concerns do I have to share?
- Are others looking to me for specific information on my child's:
 - Learning needs?
 - Emotional needs?
 - Health?
 - Safety?



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The topic of the meeting is:

Note who will be attending the meeting:

I want to accomplish:

The information I need to participate effectively:

What resources might help me prepare for the meeting?

- “BCCPAC Speaking Up! A parent guide to advocating for students in public schools”
- BC College of Teachers Standards
- “Supporting Student Success: Working Together in BC Public Schools”
- School District policies
- School policies
- Fair Schools Report, Office of the Ombudsman
- Parent’s Guide to Individual Education Planning

Should I take a support person?

- Would it help me to have someone taking notes?
- Will I feel outnumbered or overwhelmed?
- Will I be able to stay on track?

It is important to include your child whenever possible.

Should my child attend?

- Is this a positive place for my child?
- Would it be best for the adults to meet first?
- Is my child able to understand and participate?
- Is my child OK with coming?

What does my child want taken into account?

During the meeting:

Have confidence in yourself!

You know your child and have important things to share!

Try to control your emotions.

If you start to go off track:

- Review the purpose of the meeting.
- Focus on what will work for your child.
- Openly share information that will lead to better decisions.
- If you do not understand – ask!

If you need more time, ask for it.

- You may want to consider options, reflect on the needs of your child, or gather more information. It may be better to delay the final decision rather than make a decision while under pressure.
- If you agree to something during a meeting and later realize that it won’t work for you or your child, ask that the decision be reviewed.
- As the meeting draws to a close, summarize the meeting from your perspective to ensure a common understanding.

Put a plan in place in case things don’t work. Discuss:

- What you would do – contact the school?
- What the school would do – contact you – speak with your child?
- What your child would do – phone home – speak with someone at school?

Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you will ever regret.

Ambrose Bierce



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Actions taken:

It is important to keep all of your information together for easy reference, including records of whom you have spoken to, what correspondence you have sent and received, etc.

Note details such as:

- Who you contacted.
- When you contacted them.
- How? letter, telephone, fax, email, etc.
- What was said?
- What they said they would do for your child.
- When and how they will let you know what action has been taken.
- What you said you would do.
- Do you need to contact them again?

Person you contacted: _____ Date: _____

Action: _____

Outcome: _____

Person you contacted: _____ Date: _____

Action: _____

Outcome _____

Person you contacted: _____ Date: _____

Action: _____

Outcome _____

Person you contacted: _____ Date: _____

Action: _____

Outcome _____

Solving the problem

- What will best meet my child's needs?
- How will I know agreements are upheld?
- Who will be responsible?
- When will the action plan start?
- Who should I talk to if I have further concerns?

List some of your ideas for solving the problem(s).

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Other concerns/ideas:



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