



Ways to Establish a Parent-Teacher Relationship

Back-to-school is one of the busiest times for both parents and teachers. But know that as busy as you and your child's teacher are, you share a common goal — your child's academic achievement. As an involved parent, you can facilitate a relationship with a teacher based upon this shared goal and mutual respect.

- **How and when to communicate with the teachers** — During the first few weeks of school, teachers have a lot on their plates getting to know students and dealing with shifting schedules and rosters. Schools usually schedule "back-to-school" nights to signal when teachers are ready to start the dialogue with parents. Plan to attend the meeting; it is a great time to find out what will be expected of your child as well as what communication tools the teacher has and wants to use during the school year. This is also a chance to get clarity on what teachers want to know and how they want to work with you. Do some homework prior to the open house to determine if your child's assignments or progress reports are available online. Getting clarity on these options is a good objective for this first meeting.

Most teachers will use a variety of tools to communicate regularly with parents, including phone calls, weekly newsletters, annual school calendars, open houses, school websites, handouts and different curriculum nights at the school. If so, check these sites regularly and use the information as a discussion starter with the teacher. Doing a little research and your own homework will go a long way with teachers. They will really appreciate your taking the time to track your child's progress in school.

- **Be prepared and open** — For meetings with your child's teacher, be prepared to ask questions to learn more about your child's experience and behavior in the classroom. Also be open to sharing personal information about your child or home life that may have an effect on your child and his performance in the classroom. Teachers realize and appreciate that each child is different, but you know your child best, so at times it's important to share personal information.
- **Find the right balance** — It's important not to step on the toes of your child's teacher, while at the same time being involved in a helpful and productive manner that is appreciated by the teacher. Find a good balance between being involved and giving the teacher and your child their own space. Don't be afraid to ask the teacher what his or her expectations are, or share yours, to work toward the right balance.



- **Communicate regularly; encourage** — Check in early and on a regular basis, not just at the scheduled parent-teacher conferences. It's important to let teachers know what your child likes about school or what he or she is learning. Putting an emphasis on the positive can make for a friendlier dynamic, making it easier to communicate about what might not be working for your child. Regular communication can also resolve small issues before they turn into major problems.

You may be able to identify or solve a problem by checking your children's homework and reviewing it with them. If they do not do well on a quiz or test or fail to turn assignments in, don't hesitate to have a discussion with the teacher. You and the teacher may find that there is a pattern that you want either to support or correct early on. When discussing your child with the teacher, it's best to not blame the teacher but instead pursue the conversation as a problem-solving exercise, always keeping the child's well-being first.

- **Teacher first** — Once you've established a relationship with the teacher, you will start to feel more comfortable and trusting. So when problems or issues do arise, make sure you always go to the teacher first. Communicating with the teacher first, before a higher authority such as the principal, shows your trust and respect for the teacher — all contributing to a better learning environment and situation for your child.