

Communicating with Your Child's Teacher

Much of the literature written today refers to parents as their child's first and most important teacher. Parents are the ones who teach their child to reach developmental milestones from learning to talk and learning to walk, to how to kick a soccer ball and use manners. Parents provide their child with opportunities to learn and grow, to feel safe and gain confidence as they explore their world. Once a child reaches pre-school and kindergarten, he is introduced to a new teacher who will guide his development in a classroom setting. At this point a parent and his child's teacher can enter into a partnership where they will work together to give the child the best start in school. As partners, ongoing communication in various forms is very important to help children reach their potential.

Parents of school aged children may have many demands on their time. Many parents today are employed full time outside the home and are not able to have a presence in the school. For other parents, with more than one child at home it is not always feasible to secure childcare in order to be involved at school. Many children use the school bus as their means of transportation and stay at school for lunch so that some parents rarely step foot inside the school. Many families find it difficult to learn details of their child's school day.

Whether you are a parent who is able to be at the school often or the parent who is not able to do so, the following tips for communication can enhance your child's success in school:

When you can't be at school

- use your child's agenda (as applicable) or send written notes to the teacher
- Read the School Newsletter and notes sent home from the teacher
- Familiarize yourself with your child's curriculum so that you have a general idea what your child is learning
- Contact your child's teacher by telephone if you want to share information about your child or if you have a question or concern

When you can be at school

- Attend school functions such as assemblies and pancake breakfasts
- Consider attending monthly school council meeting or volunteer on a school committee
- Volunteer to supervise field trips, hot lunch days and special events
- Stop in for lunch with your child and catch the teacher at noon
- Make an appointment to see the teacher when it fits your schedule to check in on your child's progress
- Attend Meet the Teacher Night and parent-teacher interviews

Your child's teacher will want to share with you, your child's strengths and work with you and your child on areas where more development is needed. She will want to celebrate academic successes and show you samples of the work your child has done. The teacher will also discuss with you your child's social and emotional development, how your child is at making friends, sharing and so on. If discipline concerns arise, working together makes for consistency both at school and at home.

As parents it is also essential for you to communicate information with your child's teacher. It is important for the teacher to know if anything has changed at home that might impact your child's ability to learn. This may include a death of a family member or pet, the arrival of a new sibling, or a divorce. If the teacher is aware of these changes she can take extra time and care while nurturing your child's growth. If your child has any special needs or requirements the teacher will want to know what she can do to best support your child. Parents are truly the expert on their child and any information that can be communicated is very helpful for teachers. Teachers can greatly influence a child's overall growth and development and with parents as their partner, children are set up for success.

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