



COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER

Questions you may have for your child's teacher:

- WHAT SCHOOL SUPPLIES DO I NEED TO BUY?
- WHICH BUS WILL MY CHILD RIDE?
- HOW MANY STUDENTS ARE IN MY CHILD'S CLASS(ES)?

When your child first begins school, you likely have a thousand questions running through your mind. Many of these questions will be answered by your child's teacher. The teachers either will have the information you need or can point you to the right resource. The teacher is your touch-point for day-to-day details.

It's impossible to overstate how important it is to build a good relationship with your child's teacher. Not only are teachers professionals entrusted with educating our children, but they spend as many waking hours (or more) with our kids than we as parents can. Keeping a close relationship with the teacher will allow you direct access to teacher observations and concerns about your child. Parents can't monitor their children all the time—but they can stay in frequent touch with the teachers who are with their children much of the time.

Build a partnership with your child's teacher and you will have more than letters and numbers on a report card to gauge your child's progress in school. You will get observations, advice, and anecdotes about your child, as well as insight into problems your child may be having academically, socially, and emotionally.

Tips for getting to know the teacher

Learning how and when to talk with your child's teacher can help you develop a good relationship with him or her. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- **Introduce yourself to your child's teacher(s) early in the year.** Let the teachers know who you are and how they can contact you. Putting a name to a friendly face can facilitate a more open relationship between you and the teacher.
- **Find out how the teacher prefers to communicate with you.** Some teachers prefer e-mail correspondence and respond very well to this type of communication; many have a conferring period when they send and answer e-mails. Some teachers, however, feel more comfortable talking on the phone about their students. Open Houses, Back-to-School-Night, or Meet the Teacher Day are good times to ask about the teacher's communication preferences. Many teachers

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also maintain a classroom blog, where you can find answers to questions about assignments, field trips, and day-to-day activities. Some teachers expect parents to check their blog regularly for the most current classroom information, while others send home notes or post messages on a bulletin board outside the classroom. Find out which method of communication your teacher prefers for news updates.

- **Ask for a daily schedule and/or syllabus for your child's class.** Many parents like to plan home activities that complement their child's schoolwork. Children are notorious about answering the question "What did you do at school today?" with "Nothing," which can be frustrating to a parent. Teachers often must plan the lessons they'll be teaching in advance, so you can easily ask the teacher for a syllabus or calendar of upcoming units of study. And for elementary students, it helps to have a calendar of daily events to spur conversation with your child about the day. Your child may have a rotating schedule for special classes like music, physical education, or fine art. Being on top of that schedule will ensure that your child always has proper footwear and is prepared for the day's lessons.
- **Ask the teacher for volunteer activities within the classroom and school.** Being at your child's school puts you in touch with "the pulse of the day" and gives you an opportunity to talk directly with the teacher. Even if you just exchange greetings while at school, being there gives the teacher an opportunity to talk directly with you when the need arises. Many schools have at least one "classroom parent" that is the teacher's first point of contact when volunteers are needed. If you are not filling that role, be sure you know that parent and have his or her contact information.
- **Attend all in-person conferences.** Most teachers welcome conferences at the beginning and middle of the school year to share student progress and to provide tips to improve learning at home. During these conferences, take notes! The teacher often has just a short amount of time to cover a lot of information, and you may find yourself asking "What did she say about his reading skills?" later in the school year. Having notes from the conference gives you something to refer to.
- **Be positive and polite with the teacher.** Requesting information in a polite and straightforward way lets teachers know you value their time and appreciate their willingness to help. Avoid being critical with the teacher. Start the conversation with "I'd like to know your thoughts about..." or "Can you tell me a little more about..." instead of "The instructions didn't make sense." These strategies help create a collaborative relationship instead of putting the teacher on the defensive.
- **Accept differences.** Sometimes students and teachers have different personalities and may not "click" right away. That's OK! It's an opportunity to teach your child an important lesson: We can find a common ground with everyone and focus on how we're more alike than different.

