

Helping Your Child Succeed in School

Part I

Many teachers say that they don't often receive information from parents about problems at home. Many parents say that they don't know what the school expects from their children—or from them. Sharing information is essential and both teachers and parents are responsible for making it happen.

The following questions and answers can help you to get the most out of talking to your child's teacher or with other school staff members.

Q: What do I do first?

Learn everything that you can about your child's school. The more you know, the easier your job as a parent will be. Ask for a school handbook. This will answer many questions that will arise over the year. If your school doesn't have a handbook, ask questions. Ask the principal and teachers, for example: What classes does the school offer? Which classes are required? What are your expectations for my child? How does the school measure student progress? Does it meet state standards? What are the school's rules and regulations?

Ask if the school has a Web site and, if so, get the address. School Web sites can provide you with read access to all kinds of information—schedules of events, names of people to contact, rules and regulations and so forth.

Keep informed throughout the school year. If your schedule permits, attend PTA or PTO meetings. If you are unable to attend, ask that the minutes of the meetings be sent to you. Or, find out if the school makes these minutes available on its Web site.

Q: When should I talk with my child's teacher?

Early and often. Contact your child's teacher or teachers at the beginning of the year or as soon as you can. Get acquainted and show your interest.

Tell teachers what they need to know about your child. If she has special needs, make these known from the beginning.

If you notice a big change in your child's behavior, school performance or attitude during the school year, contact the teacher immediately.

Report cards are one indication of how well your child is doing in school. But you also need to know how things are going between report cards. For example, if your son/daughter is having trouble in math, contact the teacher to find out when he has his next math test and when it will be returned to him. This allows you to address a problem before it mushrooms into something bigger. Call the teacher if your son doesn't understand an assignment or if he needs extra help to complete an assignment. You may

also want to find out if your child's teachers use e-mail to communicate with parents. Using e-mail will allow you to send and receive messages at times that are most convenience for you.

Q: What if my child has a problem, such as with homework or not understanding what's happening in class?

Contact the teacher as soon as you suspect that your child has problem with his schoolwork. Schools have a responsibility to keep you informed about your child's performance and behavior and you have a right to be upset if you don't find out until report-card time that your child is having difficulties. On the other hand, you may figure out that a problem exists before the teacher does. By alerting the teacher, you can work together to solve a problem in its early stages.

Request a meeting with the teacher to discuss problems. Tell her/him briefly why you want to meet. You might say, "Tim is having trouble with his social studies homework. I'm worried about why he can't finish the assignments and what we might do to help him." If English is your second language, you may need to make special arrangements, such as including in the meeting someone who is bilingual.

Approach the teacher with a cooperative spirit. Believe that the teacher wants to help you and your child, even if you disagree about something. Don't go to the principal without first giving the teacher a chance to work out the problem with you and your child.
