

Positive Parent/Teacher Communication

A Productive Child-Centered Relationship



Without question, a positive, productive parent/teacher relationship is a vital part to every child's success in school. Renewing or initiating multiple relationships every school year can be challenging for parents and teachers alike. At the core of the positive relationship is ongoing, mutually respectful communication.

What if a parent is worried that contact with a teacher will backfire and make conditions worse for their child? My response to this perception is that if a concern exists that is interfering with your child's ability to be happy and successful at school, you must seek additional information.

This communication is intended to provide background information and suggestions on how to develop a productive child-centered relationship with teachers.

Brad Latzke
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THE FEAR EQUATION

by Michael Thompson

Thompson reveals the challenges of being a parent or teacher by sharing the fears that each have of each other. A summary of the fears is provided below.

PARENTS: SOURCES OF FEAR

- Parenting is difficult. There are no experts.
- Parents child-rearing mistakes are on display at school.
- Parents are vulnerable because of their love, hope, and anxieties for their children.
- Teachers sometimes know more about your child than you do.

“What it takes is a child in behavioral trouble, a child failing, a child who does not like him or herself, to ignite these fears.”

TEACHERS: SOURCES OF FEAR

- Teaching, like parenting is inherently difficult.
- Teachers are seen through the distorting eyes of students.
- If you teach well and effectively, you do not always get credit.
- Every teacher has been scarred by at least one threatening out-of-control parent.
- Teachers fear that parent influence with school administration means their jobs are at risk.

“the culture of perfectionism in independent schools makes it difficult for both teachers and parents to admit error.”

“The Fear Equation”
Michael Thompson
National Association of
Independent Schools

Q&A

How To Talk To Your Child's Teachers

Where Should I Start?

- Start with the teacher. Remember they are human and make mistakes.
- Keep your child's learning and productive teacher relationship as the focus. Remember, your child is human and makes mistakes.
- Is this an academic or relationship concern? Think about this in advance.
- Make sure your child is part of the process. Encourage them to independently and proactively talk with teacher first. This is a life-long skill that they need practice doing.

What If I Can't Start With The Teacher?

- Start with the counselor or principal.
- Share concern.
- Strategize communication approaches.
- Make meeting appointment with teacher.

Why Is It Important To Be In The Emotional Right PLACE?

- Never send emails or make phone calls when upset or angry.
- Do not come to meetings in an emotional state or to "teach the teacher a lesson."
- Do not go outside the family until you have more information.
- Remember: Goal is a productive, child-centered relationship with teacher.
- No contact will be productive when we are emotional or angry.

How Should I Gather More Information?

- First contact should be informing teacher of concern.
- Don't jump to conclusions.
- Let's face it. Kids do not always bring home bad news.
- Adolescents do not always understand situations clearly especially details of an emotional event.
- Recognize venting (just listen) versus need for involvement (seek more information).
- Contact counselor if needed.

How Can A Parent Contribute To A Successful Teacher Meeting?

- Keep emotions in check. Practice what you want to say beforehand.
- Review previously shared information with teacher.
- Have questions ready. Hold to 30 minute time limit.
- Allow teacher opportunity to understand a mistake or misunderstanding has occurred.
- Be prepared to accept reality that your child has made a mistake.
- WORK TOGETHER to create an action step(s).
- Agree when next to communicate.

What If The Meeting Is Unsuccessful?

- Maintain poise, give and receive respectful behavior.
- Meet with counselor or principal. Have summary ready.
- Additional meeting will be facilitated, if necessary.
- Be prepared to move forward with teacher, even if current concern cannot be solved. Don't burn bridges.

Choice of Words is So Important

Your Child Receives a Bad Grade

Harmful Approach	Helpful Approach
"My child always gets A's. There must be a mistake."	"Can we talk about my child's grade. This is out of the ordinary for her."
"You should have contacted us when she failed the test so we knew she was flunking the course."	" In the future , if my child gets a poor grade on a test, would you please notify us so we can help."

Child/Teacher Relationship Issue

Harmful Approach	Helpful Approach
"My child came home crying today and says you yelled at him. This is unacceptable and I am contacting the principal."	"My child was upset after school today about something you may have said to him. It is important I get more information about this situation."
" I have a problem with the way you handled a disagreement between my son and another boy."	" Please help me better understand the situation that occurred between my son and another boy. When can we talk about this."

Adapted from Sam Horn, author of *Tongue Fu at School*

"If parents and teachers are on the same page with respect to children, it is much easier for the children to feel whole and understood, and to succeed."

-Michael Thompson

EXAMPLE OF PRODUCTIVE SOLUTIONS ORIENTED EMAIL FROM PARENT TO TEACHER

Dear Lou,

 **Showing Appreciation**

First, I want to thank you for all you have done to build up the CISSA program over the years. CISSA was a big part of the middle school experience for my daughters [names provided], and now my son [name provided] is benefitting from it as well.

Objective Statement of Facts

I would like to suggest that we reconsider the sign-up process. I believe that currently signups are done on a first come first served basis. Some sports are so popular that students are arranging to get to school with their forms by 7:15 in the morning. While I applaud this enthusiasm, I wonder whether this practice isn't biased towards kids who can easily walk or bike to school, or who have drivers available to take them to school so early. My son takes the bus from downtown. He arrived at school at 7:50 on the day of floor hockey sign-ups, but was already number 20 on the wait list.

Proposal for Consideration

I propose the following adjustment to the sign-up process. Have forms due by start of school on the sign up day. If the sport is over-subscribed, have a lottery system to determine who will participate. Students who aren't selected by lottery have priority for the next sport they sign up for. I believe this system will be fair to everyone, and will reduce the pressure on students to arrive at school inordinately early on sign-up days.

Again I thank you for your dedication and enthusiasm.

Best regards,

 **Showing Appreciation**

[parent name provided]

TEACHER RESPONSE?

"Sure. Let's try your suggestion for our next season." Lou

Notes like this to a teacher mean more than you can imagine. Why? Teachers receive so few of them.

Recent Note From Parent-

"The ... grade team my daughter has had have been some of the best teachers I've ever experienced. [Teacher Name] is superb at taking the "scary" out of math. [Teacher Name] "lives" the subject matter. [Teacher Name] is an outstanding science teacher, and [Teacher Name] is a tremendous music teacher who is available to children who want/need extra time outside the classroom. We consider ourselves very fortunate that both our [children] have had wonderful teachers this year."

In Summary

1. KEEP YOUR EMOTIONS UNDER CONTROL.
2. SEEK CLARIFYING INFORMATION FROM TEACHER.
3. SUSPEND JUDGMENT.
4. SEEK ONE ACTION STEP THAT WILL IMPROVE SITUATION.
5. KEEP FOCUS ON CHILD'S LEARNING.