

10 Things Teachers Want Parents to Know

The relationship between teachers and parents is an extremely powerful component in student success. Yet so many parents go through the school year without communicating with the teacher or understanding what to do (or avoid) to make the most of the year.

So we went straight to the source and spoke with a teacher willing to reveal it all. Third-grade teacher Stacey Nelson is a devoted and successful educator in Tennessee, and on behalf of teachers across the country, she shared several things teachers wish parents knew before sending their children to school.

It boils down to three general guidelines: respect the teacher, be involved and be organized.

1. Remember that the teacher is on your side. Teachers truly care about your children and want them to be successful. "The child's success is our success," explains Nelson. If your child's teacher contacts you about a problem or something that happened at school, understand that the teacher is trying to work with you to resolve any conflicts that may be getting in the way of your child's success. You're all on the same team.
2. Trust in the teacher's feedback. Just because a child doesn't exhibit a particular behavior at home doesn't mean he doesn't exhibit that behavior in the classroom. So if a teacher reports a particular behavior that you haven't seen before, don't rush to say, "Well, I've never seen him do that." The classroom and home environments are quite different, and oftentimes children behave differently when forced to follow rules and work with peers. Listen to what the teacher has to say and work with him/her to find a solution.
3. Don't show up for a meeting unannounced. It's great if you want to meet with a teacher to discuss an issue or chat about your child, but don't show up at school without any warning. Instead, schedule a time to meet -- not only does this show that you respect the teacher's time, but it also gives him/her time to prepare for the meeting and provide you with everything you want to know.
4. Don't go over the teacher's head. If you're having an issue with the teacher, your child, the subject matter or the classroom in general, talk directly with the teacher before going to the principal or other administrators. "Ninety-five percent of the time, a problem can be resolved between the teacher and parent with a simple phone call," Nelson says.

5. Check children's agendas and take-home folders every night. According to the National PTA, talking with your children is one of the most critical steps of healthy parenting. "Communication is key," Nelson agrees. Not only does this help you stay on top of updates and what's going on in the classroom, but it also shows your child that you are checking in.

6. Check on homework regularly -- but don't do it for the child! It's important to review your child's homework, but if she gets an answer wrong, take the time to help her understand why. "Please don't just tell her the right answer," Nelson says. "That defeats the purpose of homework!"

7. Address behavior issues at home. "Children don't enjoy getting in trouble," Nelson says. "So when they come home and tell you about how mean the teacher is, keep in mind they may be telling the story in a way that they won't get punished." If this happens, try to get to the heart of the issue and uncover the facts so you can address it.

8. Go to Open House Night. A good parent-teacher relationship leads to a good student-teacher relationship, so don't skip the open house! "In the past, I've had parents that I have honestly never met in an entire school year," Nelson says. "It's a sad fact." Use the open house as a time to get to know the teacher, ask questions, uncover expectations, address problems and find out what's going on in the classroom. Education.com tip: Ask the important questions first, in case time runs out.

9. Establish a regular routine each night. This includes having children pack their backpacks the night before, to make sure they have everything they need for school the next day. "The number one thing my students tell me is, 'My homework is done, but I left it sitting on the table,'" Nelson says. A simple evening routine can prevent this and prevent children from feeling rushed or disorganized in the morning.

10. Cut down on chaos and clutter at home. If your home life is disorganized, this can carry over into the classroom and make learning more difficult for the child. "When a child walks into my classroom, I can tell by the look on his face what kind of morning he had and what kind of day it will be," Nelson says. Simple things like keeping a tidy home, an organized homework desk and a clean bedroom can help the child feel prepared and focused on the day ahead.

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