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Parents' Top Tips for Partnering with Your Child's Teacher

At the beginning of the school year, every parent wonders about the new-to-you teacher. Will she understand your child's individual learning or attention needs? Will she recognize your child's special talents? Will this year be a successful collaboration between you and the teacher—or a struggle?

Unfortunately, there is no operating manual for your child that you can consult for easy answers to your questions. But you can learn from other parents who are experiencing the same situations. To collect helpful advice, we consulted members of our MVP (Most Valuable Parent) Research Club. These are parents who have signed up to participate in projects that help us better understand the needs of the people who visit our website.

We asked, "What tried-and-true steps or strategies have you used to foster a positive, supportive relationship with your child's teachers?" Here are their top ten tips:

Top Tips for Partnering with Your Child's Teacher:

1. Help the teacher get to know your child.
2. Be collaborative.
3. Communicate, communicate, communicate!
4. Be even-tempered.
5. Put it in writing.
6. Join forces to help your child get organized.
7. Participate in the classroom.
8. Sweeten the relationship.
9. Stretch the teacher's awareness of learning and attention problems.
10. Know your rights and responsibilities.

1. Help the teacher get to know your child.

Mark Condon says, "During the first week of school, tell the teacher about your child as a person—her likes and dislikes, strengths and weakness, general personality traits, and your vision for your child in the future. The more the teacher knows your child as a person, the better she can address your child's specific situation."

Debbie Penny meets with all her child's teachers about two weeks after school starts. "I always have one or two goals for my son that I stress, like how to take notes or what to study for exams. It makes the teachers realize I am supporting my son and that together, we are partners in his learning."

Likewise, Michelle Hall gives the teacher a list of study habits and routines she and her child follow at home, "so she knows where my daughter is coming from."

Rhonda Jacobson also shares strategies with the teacher. "Keep the teacher informed about your child, including recent assessments, medical information, family situations—in other words, anything that will have an impact on your child's performance."

"Above all else," says DeEtte Wiberg, "I let them know how appreciative I am of them looking after my daughter's

feelings.”

For more tips on the first parent-teacher conference, read [Making the Most of Your Parent-Teacher Conference](#).

2. Be collaborative.

Patti Maddox tells us, “I have always stated at every school meeting that we are not the enemy. We look at this as a partnership, with the goal being to have our son succeed at education. We ask the teachers to tell us what we can do to assist them.”

Margaret Franco concurs. “Treat your child's teacher as part of your team. Ask him for help and strategies you can use at home with your child—then do it! Teachers appreciate it when parents do their part.”

Deborah Brownson says, “If the teacher wants to try a new strategy, I make a date in two to three weeks to see how the approach is working out. After trying their way, teachers may be more open to trying another approach.”

When the teacher alerts you to an academic or behavioral problem, Mark Condon advises, “Let the teacher know what actions you have taken with your child at home to correct these problems. It also sends a message to your child that all of you are a team that supports each other.”

Martha Randolph Carr says, “I'm very careful to pick my battles and be firm when necessary but without ever making it personal. No one wants to do a bad job, and very few teachers are truly mean-hearted. If a teacher appears overworked, I ask how we can do it together.”

But don't concentrate solely on problems. Annette McMillian suggests, “When I see something positive happening to better my child's learning, I let the teacher know that she is doing a good job.”

For a special education teacher's tips on collaboration, read [A Fresh Start: Partnering with the Teacher](#).

3. Communicate, communicate, communicate!

Whether it's by email, phone, notes, or in person, our parent advisors make an ongoing effort to stay in touch with their children's teachers.

Sandy Barr says, “We communicate by email to ensure that important information, homework assignments, and project assignments are known.”

Kathy Foy also emails her son's teacher at least once a week. “With email we keep in constant contact at times that are good for both of us, with time to ask and answer questions.”

Michelle Hall says, “I make sure the teacher knows that I am open to any discussions and to contact me before a little issue becomes a big one.”

Mary Drabik adds, “Not only do I email questions and give information, I also occasionally send appropriate articles and even funny jokes.”

Carol Hudson believes that “having an open communication by way of notes and conferences with the teacher is a positive way of finding out how your child is doing in class. For example, find out what they are studying in science or history. Then talk over the homework with your child each night.”

Emilie Serratelli and her husband email, phone, and stop by for chats with the teacher periodically throughout the year. She says, “In all the communications, we reassure the teacher that she is a key player in the child's care team because she spends the most time with our child.”

4. Be even-tempered.

Mary Peitso advises, “Don't try to lay blame on anyone. Attempt to deal with the issues at hand in a non-adversarial manner.”

Amy Moore says, “Use ‘I’ sentences, not ‘You’ sentences—for example, ‘I am concerned that my child is stressing about too much homework,’ instead of ‘You give too much homework!’”

Nancy Ficaro always tries to be “as positive as I possibly can when working with my daughter's teachers. I also let them

know that I fully understand that working with a child who requires extra attention is not always easy, especially when they are trying to juggle the needs of the rest of their students."

Pam Swayne reminds us that being "even-tempered" applies to your child, too. "When my child wants me to intervene at school, I don't react emotionally. Instead, I have him write out a list of what he wants to talk to a teacher about. Then we both go in. He does the talking, and I support."

5. Put it in writing.

Susan Morgan and her husband have found that the best way to partner with their daughter's teachers is "to put everything in writing and to document requests, questions, and notes. We are always well-prepared for the trimester conferences based on documentation to and from each teacher."

Kim Klupenger also puts it in writing. "Every month, I write a brief summary of how my child is doing at home—what areas I am seeing improvement in, what we have been doing to further our mutual goals, and what struggles we have been experiencing at home."

6. Join forces to help your child get organized.

Together, you and your child's teachers can help your child get organized. As Robin Joslin relates, "At the beginning of the year my son's teacher established a folder method: every child has a folder in his or her backpack, so if anything needs to come home, she puts it in there and the kids don't lose things. She also checks each folder every morning for anything that has been returned. With the folder system, I know she gets my notes."

Jana Boswell has a similar approach. "The teacher and my child keep a daily assignment book. At the end of each class my child stops by the teacher's desk, has the teacher check what assignment she has written down, and has the teacher initial that day. It takes 15 seconds out of the teacher's day, and it gives us something to follow at home."

7. Participate in the classroom.

S. Barend advises, "Taking interest beyond your child helps foster a good relationship with the teacher. Nothing is a substitute for being in the classroom."

Karen Peterson volunteers not only in her daughter's classroom, but also for her daughter's resource teacher. "My goal is to relieve the teacher of some routine tasks, so that she has more time and energy to invest in creating ways to help my child succeed in school. I benefit greatly by being more connected to what is happening at school—especially since my daughter is so non-communicative about her day."

Lana Baeten volunteers not only in her daughter's room, but for any teacher who needs help. "This helps me establish a relationship with the other teachers, which helps when my daughter advances to the next grade."

One computer-savvy mother, Debbie Johnson, volunteers by using clipart to create calendars and signs they need in the classroom.

Jackie Brennan assists the teacher by making computer-generated forms, such as assignment sheets. "These efforts," Jackie points out, "benefit all of the students."

For one mother's experiences, read [Collaborating With Teachers](#).

8. Sweeten the relationship.

Susan Weans suggests, "Show teachers that you are grateful. Buy them presents and cards. Ask them—sincerely—how they are. Give them things to pamper themselves."

"Don't be afraid to be creative," says Danelle Ivey, "On two occasions I recruited a few friends, and we cooked lunch for the faculty. Even if you work outside the home, you can still feel involved at school by donating serviceable outgrown school clothes or uniforms to the school for emergencies."

9. Stretch the teacher's awareness of learning and attention problems.

Teachers have a lot on their plates each day, especially general education teachers, who have to cover a curriculum with all kinds of learners. You can help them stretch their awareness about learning difficulties by providing them with well-researched information.

For example, Jil Lewis provides her son's teachers with "fact sheets about dyslexia and about how dyslexia impacts him specifically."

Similarly, Danelle Ivey prepares supplemental material. "Most of the time a teacher is handed a stack of IEP papers with no background or knowledge of the child. Instead of assuming someone from the school would discuss and explain my child's IEP to the teachers, I did it myself. I explained the rationale behind certain modifications or what was meant by some of the more unusual items on the IEP."

Adrienne Lopez says, "When you disagree with a teacher over your child's education, it best to support your argument with facts. Many times I have emailed or printed out copies of articles from websites like SchwabLearning.org, with expert advice on helping children with learning disabilities or special needs. Many of the strategies I have suggested have helped other children in the classroom as well."

10. Know your rights and responsibilities.

"The very best thing any parent of a child with special needs can do," says Patti Maddox, "is learn the rules and laws that govern the schools. Find out what are the school's responsibilities—and then make sure you understand your own responsibilities."

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About the Contributors

Robbie Fanning has a Master's in Instructional Technology, with an emphasis on online and distance learning. Her goal is to help parents (and grandparents) help their kids write better.