

Establishing a Positive Parent-Teacher Relationship

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I recently received an email of a cartoon depicting parent-teacher conferences. The cartoon was divided into two scenes, one labeled "then" and the other labeled "now." In the box labeled "then" it showed a wide-eyed boy being confronted by his parents and teacher saying "These grades are unacceptable!" The "now" box showed the same scene except instead of the child being confronted, it was the teacher with her head in her hands. Is that really an accurate depiction of what makes a modern day parent-teacher relationship?

If that is the case, maybe we need to review what a healthy relationship with anyone takes - open communication and a mutual respect for one another. Developing this positive relationship is beneficial to everyone, while the only one who really loses when it becomes about egos is the child.

Know the expectations: There is nothing more frustrating for a teacher than dealing with a parent who is questioning the content of classroom curriculum based upon what he or she "feels" is right for their child. Classroom lessons are made based upon state-standards and district curriculum. Many of these decisions are based upon research, grant-finding, and a million other factors. Also, be aware of what is developmentally appropriate for your child. Before, you call a parent-teacher conference, do your research. You may answer your own question without missing time from work.

Respect the Teacher as a Professional: Treat your child's teacher with respect, just as you would any professional. Remember that your child's teacher has dedicated her life to educating children. A teacher has been to college and spent hours researching and studying how children develop, learning theories and teaching strategies. Even if you disagree, do so respectfully.

Communicate Openly: Your office or work place has a chain of command, as does a school. This is a great example of the golden rule. How would you feel if a fellow coworker went straight to your boss with a grievance instead of approaching you first? While you may get the short term satisfaction of venting to the principal, you will definitely lose the teacher's trust, thus damaging a very important relationship.

Accepting Consequences: Almost every parent encounters a point when their child has made a poor decision in the school setting. While the natural reaction of any parent is to protect their child from consequences, if the teacher approaches you about a problem, listen and work with the teacher to find a solution. They are not attacking you as a parent! Many times parents defend their child that if the child is not successful or is struggling with something, the problem is the system, not their child. One of the purposes of a school is to provide a place for children to learn how to behave within a community and follow rules. I think it can be hurting the child when you

do not hold them to a standard and make excuses or exceptions for poor choices. They will struggle when they need to function in work and living communities if they are not used to having to follow the "rules."

Building a good relationship with your child's teacher is not about egos or power-plays. If you are truly passionate about your child's education, then make forming a positive relationship with your child's teacher a priority.