

Questions Parents Ask About ...

Working With Your School





Join the Family-School Team

Research consistently shows that when families are involved with their children's education, their children show a significant improvement in academic achievement and cognitive development.

Your child's school recognizes that you are a valuable partner when it comes to nurturing your child's success. You'll find that teachers and school staff are eager to:

- » **Answer your questions.**
- » **Work with you to solve problems.**
- » **Have you visit the school and your child's classroom.**
- » **Respond to your child's specific needs.**
- » **Discuss your child's progress.**

This booklet answers questions families frequently ask about working with their children's school. The answers will help you build the all-important family-school connection.



We are so busy with our jobs, family events and after-school activities. I lose track of what's happening at the school. How can I stay connected?

The challenges you're facing with your busy schedule are similar to problems faced by many families today. Fortunately, schools are working hard to give parents multiple ways to stay connected. Check to see if your child's school keeps in touch through:

- » **A newsletter.** The school may send newsletters home in your child's backpack, post them on the school website or email them to you. Reading them can help you support your child.
- » **A website.** Just about every school has a website. Many teachers have them, too. Check for updates regularly.
- » **Email.** You can get questions answered quickly and easily through an email message.
- » **Automated phone messages.** Some schools use an automated system that calls or texts parents with important information. Be sure the school has your correct phone number. Listen to or read the entire message.
- » **Weekly folders.** Many teachers send home weekly folders with student papers, forms and other important information. Be sure to check your child's folder each week—and send back signed papers and forms as soon as possible.
- » **A parent-teacher organization.** Getting involved with the parent-teacher organization at your child's school is a great way to know what's going on at the school and to have a voice in important decisions that can affect your child.



My third-grader isn't doing well in school. I can tell my child is struggling. How can I work with the school to help my child?

Your child is probably feeling overwhelmed and frustrated. You may be, too! Fortunately, you have already identified the first step you can take toward helping your student get on track—working with the school. Here are some things you can do:

Talk with teachers

Teachers spend hours with your child every day. They know how your child is progressing and if your child is mastering the required skills. Let your child's teachers know what you notice at home. Working together, you can help your student.

Identify the problem

It could be that your child:

- » **Has not mastered basic skills.** Learning builds day by day. If your child missed learning or doesn't understand a key concept, progress could be affected.
- » **Is distracted in class.** Your child may have difficulty focusing during lessons, following the teacher's directions or staying on task while doing classwork.
- » **Struggles with self-control.** If your child is disruptive in class or has trouble following school rules, your child will need guidance in managing behavior.
- » **Has problems with other students.** Your child might be the target of bullying or could just need help making friends.
- » **Has special needs.** Your child may have a physical, emotional or learning disorder.

Find out about school specialists

After you and the teacher have discussed why your child may be struggling in school, you can come up with a plan. You may receive assistance from one or more of the following highly-trained education professionals:

- » **A school counselor** is an advocate for students. All conversations your child has with a counselor are confidential.
- » **A reading specialist** teaches students strategies not only to read a text, but also to comprehend and use what they read.
- » **A school psychologist** has training in mental health, child development and behavior support.
- » **A speech therapist** helps students overcome speaking and language disorders that affect academic performance.
- » **An English for Speakers of Other Languages teacher (ESOL)** works with students whose native language is not English.
- » **A special education teacher** creates an effective learning environment for students with physical or mental disabilities.
- » **A school social worker** works with students and their families to solve problems. They can connect families to agencies in the community that can provide assistance.
- » **A gifted and talented, or advanced academics, teacher** organizes enrichment activities for students identified for their program.



My child works hard in school, but our family also has a lot going on at home. Should I tell the teacher about what's happening when my child is out of school?

Yes! Teachers care about your child's out-of-school life. And when the teacher understands all the factors that affect your child's success in school, then you can work together to help your child achieve. Teachers want to know about:

- » **Your child's health.** If your child isn't feeling well, that can affect performance in school. Be sure to let the teacher know about any health considerations that need to be addressed.
- » **A change in your family situation.** Did you lose a job or start a new one? Are you going through a separation or divorce? Did a loved one die? Did you lose a pet? Will you be moving to a new home? Is a new sibling on the way? Any change at home can affect your child's ability to concentrate in the classroom. Be sure to keep your child's teacher informed.
- » **After-school routines.** Being in too many activities can put pressure on your child and affect school performance. An unstructured routine—where no one checks to see that your child has completed assignments—can also negatively affect school success.
- » **Family problems.** If your family is facing a problem, from alcohol or drug abuse to financial hardship, the school counselor or school social worker may be able to connect you with community agencies that can provide help.





I know I am supposed to volunteer to help my child's school. But will my volunteering really make a difference?

Volunteering to help your child's school is an important way to become part of the family-school team. Here are five good reasons to give it a try:

1. Your child will benefit.

Whether you volunteer in the school building or from home, you will show your child that you think learning is important.

2. You'll feel connected to the school.

As you spend time helping your child's school, you will have a great opportunity to develop relationships with the school staff and other parents.

3. The school will benefit.

Whether you organize papers, decorate bulletin boards or read with students, you will free school staff to spend more time with children. And that leads to increased learning.

4. Volunteering is easy.

Many schools offer training for volunteers. And there are volunteer jobs that can be done at home, at night or on weekends.

5. Volunteering is fun.

Volunteering is a great way to meet people at the school. You may learn new skills. And you get a good feeling from knowing you've done something important.

Interested? Ask your child's teacher how you can help.



I really care about my child's success in school. I respect my child's teachers and want to work with them. What do teachers want families to do?

You're wise to ask what teachers want. They know that what you do at home promotes your child's success in school. Here are 20 things you can do:

1. **Be involved in your child's education.** Your engagement promotes learning.
2. **Promote regular school attendance.** Missing a day of class means missing valuable learning opportunities.
3. **Read with your child** every day.
4. **Set a positive example.** Let your child see you reading—books, magazines and news articles.
5. **Encourage your child's best effort in school.** Show you believe that education is important and that you want your child to succeed.
6. **Emphasize academics.** Make sure your child's schedule allows plenty of time to do schoolwork and study. Explain to your child that school takes priority over sports and other activities.
7. **Support school rules.** Read the school handbook with your child.
8. **Set high but realistic expectations** for your child. Don't apply too much pressure by setting unattainable goals or by involving your child in too many activities.
9. **Contact the teacher early if you see a problem.** Show that you are willing to work together to help your child.
10. **Encourage self-control and positive behavior at home.** You'll help your child display these traits at school, too.

11. **Monitor recreational screen use.** Screen time should not interfere with schoolwork, family life, in-person socializing or other real-life activities.
12. **Teach your child to accept responsibility.** When your child breaks a school rule, doesn't do schoolwork or causes trouble, it's important to take responsibility and accept the consequences.
13. **Establish an evening routine.** A regular bedtime can be key to a good start in the morning. Your child will be alert and ready to learn.
14. **Provide a nutritious breakfast.** A healthy breakfast at home or in school will help your child concentrate in class.
15. **Speak positively about school.** Discuss any concerns directly with the teacher or the principal, not your child.
16. **Return papers and forms.** If your child's teacher asks you to return a signed paper or form, send it in promptly.
17. **Remember that your child's teacher** has a lot to do—and a classroom full of other students. If you contact the teacher by phone or email, allow time for a response.
18. **Monitor schoolwork.** Ask about assignments when your child comes home from school. Then ask to see them when they're finished. Ask, "What did you learn?" If your child struggles with an assignment, avoid giving answers and encourage your child to ask the teacher for help.
19. **Attend parent-teacher conferences** and other family meetings at school. If you have time, get involved and serve on a committee.
20. **Offer positive feedback.** Teachers love to hear from families when things are going well, not just when there's a problem.





I was never a great student when I was in school. You might think I would be over it, but I'm still nervous about talking with my child's teacher. What can I do?

It's not unusual for parents to lack confidence when talking to teachers—especially if they struggled in school themselves. But it's important to maintain contact with your child's teacher. The good news is that with regular communication, your confidence will grow.

Remember, no one knows your child better than you do. No one cares more about your child's success in school than you do, and no one can be a better advocate for your child than you. Your child's teacher wants to work with you. The teacher sees you as a partner.

For successful conversations:

- » **Start on a positive note.** Tell the teacher what has pleased you about your child's experience in class. Say you look forward to working together to help your child.
- » **Listen carefully.** Then restate what the teacher has said in your own words to make sure you have understood correctly.
- » **Don't be afraid to say you don't understand.** Teachers sometimes use educational terms that are unfamiliar to parents. Ask the teacher to explain.
- » **Look to the future.** Even if the teacher made a mistake, ask how you can work together to fix the problem now. Don't focus on the past. Instead ask, "What can we do to help my child get back on track?"



My child doesn't like the teacher. I want to be supportive of the teacher, but I also want my child to be happy. What should I do?

There are many reasons why a child may feel this way. Common complaints include “The teacher gives too much work” or “There are too many rules.” You can get to the root of the issue—and set your child up for success—with these tips:

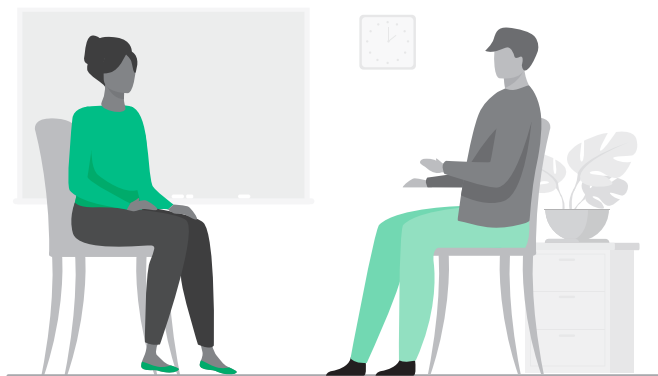
- » **Don't panic.** Teachers and principals are familiar with this problem and will be eager to work with you.
- » **Talk with your child.** Find out as much as you can about why your child doesn't like the teacher. Don't assume everything your child tells you is right—or wrong. Listen and take notes.
- » **Ask for a meeting** with your child's teacher. This will give you a chance to discuss your concerns.
- » **Be open and honest at the meeting.** Often, you can solve the problem just by opening the lines of communication.
- » **Be supportive of your child,** while also understanding the teacher's responsibility for helping all students learn.
- » **Ask for a follow-up meeting** with the teacher and principal together if you are still concerned.



The key is to build understanding and communication with your child's teacher and others on the school staff.



*I have a parent-teacher conference coming up.
What should I do to prepare?*



A parent-teacher conference will give you an opportunity to learn more about how your child is progressing in school. You'll have a chance to ask questions and share your concerns.

The key to a successful parent-teacher conference is two-way communication. By exchanging information, parents and teachers can set the stage for a great school year. To prepare for your parent-teacher conference:

Talk with your child

Explain to your child that you and the teacher are partners. Explain that you will be having a talk about how you can work together to help your child succeed in school. Ask your child:

- » What would you like me to ask your teacher?
- » What do you like about your class this year?
- » What do you wish was different at school?

Let your child know that after the conference you will share what you and the teacher discussed.

List questions to ask the teacher

You'll get more from your conference if you prepare some questions in advance. Write them down and take them with you. Here are some suggestions:

- » **What will be covered** in this grade or subject this year?
- » **What are your expectations for homework?** Has my child missed any assignments?
- » **How are my child's work habits?** Does my student use time effectively?
- » **Does my child read** at the level you would expect for this grade?
- » **Is my child able to do the math** you would expect for a student at this grade?
- » **Is my child in different groups** for different subjects? Why?
- » **Has my child been absent**, other than the times I contacted the school?
- » **Does my child qualify for any special programs**—for example, programs for students who are advanced academically, play a musical instrument, are English Language Learners or have a learning disorder?
- » **Does my child get along well** with others?
- » **What can I do at home** to help my child be more successful at school?

In addition to taking your written questions, if you have concerns about any assignments, tests or other papers, take them with you, too.



The principal called to tell me that my child shoved another student in the hall. My child said the other student started it by name-calling. How should I handle the situation?

Start by explaining to your child that violence is never an acceptable solution to a problem. Explain what the consequences will be for that behavior.

Next, ask if the other student frequently calls your child names. If the answer is no, ask your child to tell you if it happens again. But if the answer is yes, your child may be the target of bullying. Talk to the school about how you can work together to figure out what is going on. Whether your child is bullying the other child or is being targeted, you can work with the school to help put a stop to negative behavior.

In the meantime, help your child think of ways to respond when someone is mean. Your child could:

- » **Ignore the student.** When bullies don't get a reaction, they may stop.
- » **Tell a teacher.** If the name-calling is frequent and distressful, your child should report it. Explain that reporting bullying is not the same as tattling.



*When schools, families
and community groups
work together to support
learning, children tend
to do better in school,
stay in school longer,
and like school more.*



*—Anne Henderson
A New Wave of Evidence*

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