

Tips on Talking to School Staff



PARENTS PLUS

Parents Plus

Parent Information and Resource Center of Wisconsin
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What parents want teachers to know.

I care about my child.

Even though I may not attend parent conferences and other school activities, I do value the time that teachers spend with my child. Work schedule, taking care of A siblings and other activities simply take a lot of the free time that I'd like to spend with my child.

I have a great deal of trust in what teachers do.

I may not know the latest reading theory or understand the new math, but I can, however, interact with my child and determine if he/she is learning or not.

I want my child to succeed.

Like other parents, I want

my child to see the benefits of attending school. To have a meaningful life is our goal for our children.

In structuring school/parent involvement activities, please consider the life I live.

This means that meeting times and places need to be arranged for the convenience of the parent not the school. This may require changing existing school routines and looking at school services from a parent perspective.

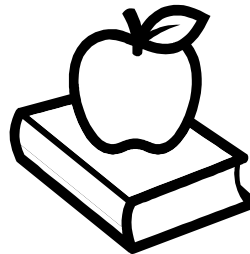
I like to hear from you when things go well, not only when my child has done something wrong.

I realize that my child is not an angel all the time, but he/she is still an angel

in a parent's eye. We can build trust and lessen the problems by communicating often, in both good and bad times.

My child is an individual.

I spend many hours with my child, and what I know can help with his/her education, so it is important that we talk often and in an open manner.



Parents should be able to get answers to their important questions.

How do I know that my child is safe?

What is my child expected to know and accomplish in reading, writing, and math and other subjects?

How is learning measured?

What will the school do to help if my child is behind?

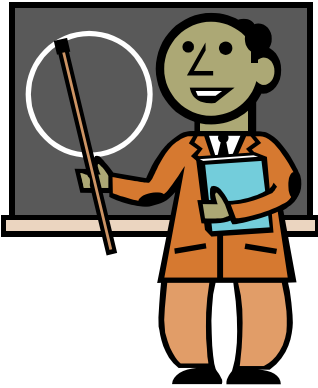
Engagement

“When school staff engage in caring and trustful relationships with families, the families are more apt to participate in their children’s educational development.” (Karen Mapp, 2002 “A New Wave of Evidence”)

Parent-friendly schools should be willing to share answers to these and other questions to parents of school age children.



How to create a relationship with your child's teacher.



One of the best ways to help your child is by knowing his/her teacher. In an ideal world, teachers would visit your home and get to know your family and community. In reality, teachers lead very busy lives, and unless schools allow time for this activity, it is unlikely to occur. There are mountains of studies that indicate when a teacher knows more about a child's home life, the child can learn better. When home visits are not possible, why not bring the home to the school? There are several ways you can do this: one is to have your child write a short letter introducing the family and community to the teacher. Another is to create a short video explaining your interests outside of school and brief family history. One other is to invite the teacher to your home or community festival. Finally, you can send a note to the teacher expressing positive thoughts about your child's schooling. Teachers, like their students, like to know when they are doing well, not only when you are unhappy with their teaching. The point is that you as parent want to establish a trusting and open relationship with your child's teacher. This will help your child be successful in school.

Why communicating with your child's teacher is so important.

Teachers have as many myths about families as families have about teachers. These beliefs are often obstacles to establishing meaningful dialogue with each other, one that benefits the child. Teachers do not know what your home life is like: they do not know if you work, what your schedule is like, or what other responsibilities you may have at home or in the community. Similarly, parents often know very little about teachers: their training, home lives, aspirations, dreams, and doubts. To establish communication, you as a parent can make the first step. One of the easiest ways to establish credibility and rapport is to arrange a meeting with the head of the school and the teacher. To arrange this meeting, you will need to do some minor preparation. First, you will need to forget about your own schooling and disregard the old notions you may have had about other teachers. The principal and the teacher are just like you, adults with professional responsibilities. Prepare a list of questions and gather information about yourself and your family that would help the school to understand you and teach your child. Share this information with these professionals, and indicate to them the best times to contact you if anything should arise.



How to become involved in your child's school.



Parents can be involved as **teachers**, by establishing a learning environment at home for the whole family. Parents can be **supporters** of education by volunteering at school and taking part in school activities that promote education. Parents can be **advocates** for their own child and for all children by pressing state and local leaders to support better programs and higher achievement. Parents can be **decision makers** by taking part in decisions about programs and staffing at the school.

You are more likely to get what you want for your child if you work with other parents.

What do you need to organize an effective parent group? This is a question many parents think about. Parents need to believe that they have value and that the life of their child is just as valuable, if not more so. This sense of self is a priority, because other parents will not see you as a leader if you don't have that optimistic, can-do attitude. Deep within ourselves we all have this attitude. Some of us have lost it, but we have the potential to find it again by interacting with others and sharing ideas and problems. When we do this, we recognize the commonality we have with other human beings. We also realize that we are not alone. There is strength and power in numbers, just ask any politician. Gathering and sharing information with individuals with similar interests and motivations is a great way to bring about change in schools. Once you have developed a group of like-thinking individuals, then you have to decide on what is it that you wish to have impact. With this new power comes responsibility, because you must now focus not on your individual needs, but on what is in the best interest of the group. Understanding the needs and wants of your group, as well as creating shared understandings within the group, will be assets as you engage the school to bring about change that will help the schools to raise the academic achievement of your child.



THE KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

EPSTEIN'S SIX TYPES OF INVOLVEMENT

- Type 1** **PARENTING**: Assist families with parenting and child-rearing skills, understanding child and adolescent development, and setting home conditions that support children as students at each age and grade level. Assist schools in understanding families.
- Type 2** **COMMUNICATING**: Communicate with families about school programs and student progress through effective school-to-home and home-to-school communications.
- Type 3** **VOLUNTEERING**: Improve recruitment, training, work and schedules to involve families as volunteers and audiences at the school or in other locations to support students and school programs.
- Type 4** **LEARNING AT HOME**: Involve families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-related activities and decisions.
- Type 5** **DECISION MAKING**: Include families as participants in school decisions, governance and advocacy through PTA/PTO, school councils, committees, action teams, and other parent organizations.
- Type 6** **COLLABORATING WITH THE COMMUNITY**: Coordinate community resources and services for students, families, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, and provide services to the community.

The **mission** of Parents Plus is to educate, train, and support parents, educators, service providers and community members throughout Wisconsin to strengthen families, promote student success, and achieve optimal childhood outcomes.

The **vision** of Parents Plus is strong and healthy children, families, schools and communities in Wisconsin.



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