

Effective Parent Teacher Communication

“There should never be a vast divide between school life and home life. Every kid is partly home-schooled and every kid is partly school-homed!” -- Dr. Mel Levine, in A Mind at a Time

Communication is the key to the Parent-Teacher relationship. As a parent you want the best for your children. In education, certain activities are the main job of the home and other activities are the main job of the school. However there are some important activities for which the home and school share jobs. Communication is one of these activities. It is a well known fact and has been proven over and over again that parental involvement within their child's school life dramatically increases their academic success. It is with this in mind that I share some ideas and tips about effective parent-teacher communication.

TIP #1: BE A PARTNER WITH THE TEACHER

Your child will benefit most if you and the teacher work together as partners in your child's education. It is best to believe that the school and the teacher care about your child. Begin your communication with a positive attitude and a willingness to be a partner with your child's teacher. Let your child's teacher know that you welcome and appreciate their input. Teachers spend many hours every day with your child and may be able to offer a unique perspective on your child's behaviour and development, both socially and academically. You will acquire a very useful tool in guiding your child through school if your child clearly sees the partnership you have with his teacher.

TIP #2: GET COMFORTABLE WITHIN THE SCHOOL AND WITH THE TEACHER

Chat with the teacher. It only takes a minute when you are dropping off or picking up your child to say a quick hello and introduce yourself. Often in a smaller community like Wainwright you will already have a connection with your child's teacher. These short, informal meetings will allow you and the teacher to get to know each other better and make communication easier when it is time to have a more formal parent-teacher conference.

Join an activity or program for parents at the school. A good way to get to know more about the school is to participate in activities planned at the school. For example, attend Open House or other parent meetings. These evening and weekend functions provide a relaxed environment that naturally fosters easy conversations. Volunteering to help in the classroom or in the school is also a good way of getting to know more about what goes on at your child's school.

Talk to other people who spend time in the school. If you feel uncomfortable at your child's school, talk with other parents or neighbours who know the school and can provide the information that is important to you.

TIP #3: FEEL FREE TO MAKE THE FIRST CONTACT WITH THE TEACHER

Good communication is the responsibility of both parents and teachers. As a parent, you should not feel that the teacher should always be the one to make the first contact. You should feel comfortable with starting off the communication with your child's teacher and that you have the right to do so. Your communication with your child's teacher does not have to commence with a negative discussion. Offer your support and show your appreciation for the job that your teacher

does. Communicating the positives about your child's education can be very motivating for you and your child's teacher.

TIP #4: COMMUNICATE WITH THE TEACHER EARLY

You should contact the teacher immediately if you notice your child is having social, behavioural, or academic difficulties in school. Often, as a parent you can anticipate a problem, know of complications from the past or your child has told you about a problem. Do not wait! Also, do not think that just because the teacher has not contacted you that this means that there is no important information to communicate to you about your child's education. At the latest, you should contact your child's teacher at the mid-way point of the report card period. For a nine week reporting system, this would be at about 4 ½ weeks into the reporting period. This will give you enough time to help your child deal with any problems in time to make a difference in that reporting period.

TIP # 5: COMMUNICATE OFTEN

Regular and ongoing feedback from the teacher will allow you to better provide the specific help your child needs. There is a variety of ways to communicate regularly with the teacher, including face-to-face meetings, phone calls, e-mails, or through written notes. You will need to work together with the teacher to decide on which method of communication would be the easiest and most helpful. Feel free to request a special conference with your child's teacher even if it is between the times when you would normally meet. It is important for the parent and teacher to discuss and agree on what concerns or problems need to be monitored. Some examples include: specific information about homework assignments or tests dates, the child's level of participation, how well the child minded the teacher, or the percentage of work completed in class. How often you need to communicate with the teacher will depend on the severity of the problem. For more serious problems, you may need to have daily contact with the teacher. For less severe problems, weekly feedback would be enough. The important thing is to communicate regularly.

TIP #6: FOLLOW THROUGH WITH WHAT YOU SAID YOU WOULD DO

If you told your child's teacher you would communicate in a certain way or do a specific school or homework related task, do your best to follow through with what you said you would do. For example, if you agreed that you would check your child's homework and sign off on the assignment, be sure to do this consistently. This consistency is sure to make an impression on your child, showing him how valuable an education really is. Be sure to let the teacher know if you are unable to do what was agreed upon.



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