
I N S I G H T S

FOR FAMILIES



Tips for Communicating with Teachers Effectively



❖ INSIGHTS FOR FAMILIES is provided by your child's school in recognition of your role as a partner in education. Written by Judy McDaniel, communications consultant.

Parent involvement enhances student success. A good first step for getting involved is communicating with your children's teachers. Effective communication includes meeting with the teachers, being a positive partner in the learning experience, and keeping lines of communication open, according to Suzanna Smith, an associate professor at the University of Florida. As part of the university's Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, she offers these tips for communicating effectively with teachers.

- ❖ Offer to help by signing up to donate items or volunteer your time.
- ❖ Provide information that will help teachers get to know your children as individuals. Include relevant information such as allergies, behavior issues (e.g. tendency to be distracted), learning issues, or changes in family life.
- ❖ Ask teachers about expectations regarding homework and what to do if there are problems with homework.
- ❖ Find out the best way to contact each teacher. Ask for times when it is convenient to talk. Don't expect teachers to be able to talk if you happen to be at the school and run into them.
- ❖ Write short notes (written or as an e-mail, if allowed) and follow up with a phone message to the school if you don't get a response in a few days. Be sure to include your phone number and/or e-mail address.
- ❖ Be diplomatic, especially in e-mail. Choose words carefully and avoid criticizing the teacher.
- ❖ In e-mail communication, be brief, stick to the point, and don't use animation, pictures or graphics. Stick to school-related information in e-mail.
- ❖ Be positive and curious. Open with phrases such as "Can we talk about...?" Use "I" statements such as "I'm confused about..." so you don't put the teacher on the defensive.
- ❖ Don't be afraid to talk to other school personnel if needed. A school counselor might be able to intervene if you are unable to communicate with a teacher.
- ❖ Be a partner in your children's learning. Assist with homework. Help your children learn time management skills. Talk about school matters at home.
- ❖ Send a note of appreciation to a teacher when things go well in class (and mention this to the principal).
- ❖ It may be difficult to hear what teachers have to say if they deliver bad news about your children. Try to focus on solutions and work with the teachers to come up with a healthy plan to help your children learn.