

For Families:

Tips for Communicating With Teachers Effectively



Parental involvement enhances student success. A first step toward involvement is communicating with your child's teacher. Effective communication consists of meeting with the teacher, 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 the teacher get to know your child as an individual. Include relevant information such as allergies, behavior or learning concerns, or changes in family life.
- Ask the teacher about expectations regarding homework and what to do if there are problems with homework.
- Find out the best way to contact the teacher. Ask for times when it is convenient to talk. Don't expect them 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 or text, as appropriate) 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 in your communication. Choose words carefully, avoid criticizing the teacher and focus on solutions.
- In e-mail communication, be brief, stick to the point, Stick to student and school related information in e-mails and texts.
- 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 child's learning. Assist with homework, help your child learn time management skills, talk about school matters at home.

- Send a note of appreciation to the 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 child. Try to focus on solutions and work with the teacher to come up with a healthy plan to help your child learn.
- <http://www.pta.org/programs/content.cfm?ItemNumber=1758>

