

SPECIAL REPORT

The **E**ducation Company

*Solving school discipline problems
one intervention at a time*



Classroom Management: Working With Parents

Introduction

For some educators, working with parents is either the most helpful, or one of the hardest, parts of teaching. While this topic does not affect the educator of adult students, it is a serious issue for teachers of children of all ages. Even college educators have occurrences where they have to deal with difficult parents, even though their students are usually adults. The best-case scenario

is parents who are involved, interested, and willing to “partner” with the educator in the best interests of their child’s education. The worst-case is parents who are completely disinterested, or even detrimental, to their child’s learning -- or parents who are so overly involved, that they micro-manage their child’s education and become a burden, rather than a help, to the teacher.

Difficulties and Problems

While the majority of parents will fall into the helpful category, it is important for new teachers to realize that not all parents will be helpful or involved. The extremes are borderline abusive, disinterested, and absent parents; on the other end of the spectrum, overly protective, micro-managing parents make teaching a difficult task and would wear out the patience of any educator. Many new teachers become disappointed and disillusioned to discover that some parents simply have little or no interest in their child’s education. However, this is a reality the teacher must deal with.

Some problems that teachers will face in dealing with parents include:

Absent parents: Some parents are simply not available and have little contact with the school or their children’s teachers. This may be due to the work obligations of a single parent household, addictions, mental illness, physical illness, or simple disinterest.

Possible solutions to dealing with absent parents: The educator should find out what it is exactly that is causing the parent to be absent. Sitting down with the student and asking them directly is the best method of getting this information. If the problem is lack of ability to attend meetings and conferences due to whatever circumstance, the teacher should offer to use another form of communication, such as telephone conference and email, or, if the reason is illness or physical disability, possibly a visit from the teacher at the home. When dealing with borderline abusive parents (those whom child services would not take action against, but neglectful to the point of concern), the teacher can offer counseling to the family, or, if the parents are unwilling, offer counseling to the student directly in the form of speaking with a qualified school counselor.

Micro-managing parents: Some parents get so involved in their child's education that their attention becomes overbearing for the student and the teacher. A parent who calls, emails, or shows up at the school daily or every few days, is a micro-manager. A parent who challenges every poor grade or disciplinary measure the teacher gives their child is a micro-manager. A parent who wants to know details about the home life, grades, and behavior of all of his or her child's classmates is a micro-manager.

Possible solutions to dealing with micro-managing parents: Kindly, but firmly, make the parent aware that frequent, unscheduled conferences are not possible. Have your school administrators back you up on this point. Suggest that she or he email questions and concerns with the stipulation that overly abundant correspondence cannot be answered promptly, or at the detriment of your classroom duties and responsibilities. Make the parent aware that you have a classroom of children to divide your time among, and that you cannot not discuss the personal information of other students. As long as you have a policy of giving grades that are deserved and earned and you are willing to stand by your decisions, do not change grades unless you mistakenly marked answers incorrect.



Partnering With Parents for Great Outcomes

While the above situations are extreme and usually exceptions, the majority are parents who are willing to get involved to some extent in their child's education. These are the parents who attend parent/teacher conferences, respond to teacher requests and notes, help their children with projects and homework, and will support you in disciplinary actions. The best student outcomes are usually achieved when you can enlist the support of your students' parents. Some may have more time to contribute than others. Stay-at-home mothers or fathers can often help in the classroom by preparing for parties and events, supplying special treats or helping with paperwork. Others may work and can only contribute by offering special treats or monetary contributions for activities they cannot attend due to work obligations. In all cases, parents who have an interest in helping you meet their child's educational goals will be a boon in the classroom.

Try to meet parents face-to-face as soon as possible in the school year. Be sure to have parent/teacher conferences during the first month of the school year so that you can convey your expectations for their child's achievement and behavior. Allow parents to ask questions and if you cannot answer at the conference, get back to them via telephone or email. Give parents your email address, so they can get in touch with you for questions and concerns. Have another conference at mid-year to discuss progress and performance. Let parents know if their child is having problems in any area, and let them know how they can help the child overcome the issue.

Look to Parents for the following:

- Ask them to show support for learning at home.
- Have them communicate positive feedback about your performance.
- Ask them if they may be able to volunteer to help in the classroom.
- Ask them if you can count on their support with fair discipline measures that you impose upon their child by imposing the same restrictions at home for misbehavior.
- Ask them to ensure that their children do their homework, projects, and reports.
- Ask them to speak to the class about their profession or job.
- Ask them to talk to you directly or via email about a problems and solutions.

Conclusion

Parents are your best ally in the classroom. They can help support you by teaching at home, backing up your fair discipline measures, making sure homework and projects are done, and by helping in the classroom. Stay in contact with those who show an interest, and attempt to make contact with those who seem disinterested. Be sure to find out what is going on with parents before you assume the worst; an illness or other situation may be keeping parents from attending conferences, or from making contact. Think of parents as your partners in their child's best educational interests. Solicit their help and support whenever possible for the best educational outcomes.

Educators learn how to create a safe, positive learning environment where students behave responsibly and take accountability for their conduct. They explore strategies to organize and manage the classroom with increased confidence and a calm sense of control. Through professional development, educators discover how to create a learning environment in which their students can excel, and in which they can go home feeling a sense of accomplishment.

This professional development is designed for K-12 teachers, special-subject teachers, administrators, counselors, resource teachers, and substitutes. Contact the Education Company for a Free Discipline Discussion.

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