

**6. Be positive and courteous.** Many teachers are overworked and underappreciated. Speaking in positive ways opens up the lines of communication so you can work together to help your child succeed in school.

- Open up communication with phrases such as "Can we talk about...?" Avoid criticizing and blaming the teacher with comments such as "You should have..." or "You must be mistaken."
- Make respectful requests, such "Could you send home the information about..." Avoid giving orders to the teacher by saying, "You have to..." or "You need to..." Use kind words rather than fighting phrases. For example, "Please, could you..." and "Thank you for all you did," go a long way in building a good relationship.

**7. Accept differences.** Sometimes you may really "click" with a teacher and other times it may seem a struggle to keep the lines of communication open.

- Listen to the teacher to get a sense of who she or he is.
- Hear what the teacher has to say about his or her expectations, classroom, and your student.
- Don't argue with or criticize the teacher in front of your child.
- Don't send email messages written in anger.
- Try to work things out with the teacher before going to the principal. If you have conflicts with the teacher, remain calm. Listen, be positive, and talk things out.

**8. Be a partner with the teacher to support your child's learning.** Children do better in school when their parents are involved. Some of the most important things you can do are to:

- Help with homework .
- Help your child learn the skills needed to manage time and stay on task.
- Ask teachers for clarification on instructions and assignments as needed.
- Talk about school matters with your student at home.
- Ask teachers what you can do to help your child at home.

**9. Ask what you can do to help. If there is something you can do to help your child's teacher, offer to volunteer. Hand the teacher your business card or a note with brief information about what you can do and how to reach you.**

**10. Keep the lines of communication open all year.**

- Send a note of appreciation to the teacher when something goes well in her/his class, and mention this to the principal.
  - Give the teacher your phone number and email.
  - Ask what you can do to help with classroom activities, presentations or fairs, field trips, or anything you can do at home.
- Check the school and teacher websites (if available) to keep up with what is going on, in and out of the classroom.

## 10 Tips on How to Communicate with Your Child's Teacher

Check out these suggestions to make the most out of working with your child's teacher.





## Communicating with Your Child's Teacher

**1. Meet the teacher.** Go to your child's school open house or curriculum night. Even though time may be short, a few simple steps can show your interest and support:

- Introduce yourself and your child.
- Collect any information the teacher provides.
- Offer to help by signing up to donate items to the class or to volunteer for other jobs.

**2. Go to parent-teacher conferences.** Often schools schedule these sometime during the year. More information about how to get ready and what to ask can found at the following Web sites:

<http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/succeed/part8.html> and <http://www.nea.org/parents/ptconf.html>.

Credit: [Suzanna Smith](#), Ph.D., M.S.W., CFLE, Associate Professor, Human Development, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL

## Make sure that you schedule a conference if:

- Your child has special needs and your teacher needs to know this early in the year.
- Your child's grades drop suddenly.
- You suspect that your child is having difficulty understanding her or his schoolwork.
- Your child is upset about something that happened in school - with peers or with the teacher.
- Your child does not seem to have any homework.
- Something changes at home that may affect the student's learning (e.g., new baby, parental illness, divorce, or upcoming move).

**3. Find the right time to talk to the teacher.** If you are at school, you may run into teachers and be tempted to ask about how your child is doing.

- At school, ask the teacher if it is a good time to talk or when is most convenient for him or her. Just before or after school may not be the best times.
- If you run into a teacher around town, simply exchange pleasantries. This is not the time for a parent-teacher conference.

**4. Write short notes and follow up.** If you want a quick response to a question:

- Send a brief written note or an email message (if allowed) to the teacher with your question clearly stated.
- Include your phone number and/or email address.

**If you don't hear back in a few days, follow up with a phone message to the school.**

**5. Follow email etiquette.** Email is often a convenient and helpful way to communicate with your child's teacher, but it should follow the same guidelines for any professional communication.

- Be aware that teachers get many email messages - and have many other responsibilities during their day--and may not be able to respond immediately to yours.
- Identify your child and sign your name. Include a phone number where you can be reached if needed.
- Be diplomatic. You can't take back an email message and email can be easily forwarded. Be calm, choose your words carefully and avoid criticizing the teacher.
- Don't write and send an email when you are angry.
- Be brief and stick to the point. Don't include animations, pictures, and graphics.
- Use upper and lower case, not all caps (that's considered shouting).
- Stick to school-related matters. Don't forward chain mail, jokes, or frivolous information.
- Don't forward someone else's email, including a teacher's, unless you have their permission. Watch out for viruses and spam - don't spread these around.