

What Parents and Teachers Wish Each Other Knew

October 2013

Editor's Note:

We all know that children are not always the best sources of information about what goes on at school or at home. So the best way to get accurate, reliable information is to go to the source.

I will never forget a Back-to-School Night over 20 years ago when my daughter was in 3rd grade. I introduced myself to her teacher and she said: "You are much younger than I expected." When I asked her why, she said: "Lindsay told me you went to high school with Amelia Earhart; you look very young for your age."

What I had actually told my daughter was that I had gone to high school with Judy Resnick, the Challenger astronaut. My daughter had been researching a report on female aviators and gotten the two mixed up.

I had to chuckle when the teacher finished the evening by saying to the parents: "I'll believe half of what your child says happens at home if you believe half of what your child says happens at school." I knew she was talking to me.



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The *Involvement Matters* monthly newsletter series focuses on practical applications of current family engagement research and strategies to support student

The following information extracted from an *Education World* article may help parents and educators remember that we are all human beings with insecurities, fears, pride, hopes, and dreams for ourselves and the children we care for. Being able to see both sides of the "educational coin" helps us better communicate and advocate for these children whose lives and education depend on us.

Dear Teacher . . .

- Even though he may just be one of many to you, my child is very special to me. Look for what is unique about him.
- Get to know my child -- and share what you learn with me. Children can act very differently at school, and I count on you for insight into understanding my child.



- I worry about how my child gets along. Is she a leader? Does she seem happy? Does she participate in class voluntarily, or do you have to call on her? Telling me she's doing fine isn't enough; give me some positive examples of why I don't have to worry about her.
- Please don't talk negatively about my child to other parents or teachers. In fact, don't talk about my child at all if there's any chance he or other

children might overhear. He cares very much about what you think of him.

- Let me know what your expectations are early on. We parents can be your biggest supporters if we know your rules and expectations in advance and can reinforce them at home.
- Acknowledge me warmly when you see me at school or in the community, even if you don't remember my name. When I feel that I matter, I am much more likely to support you and what you are doing.
- I worry that my child will not fit in. Please do not allow anyone in the classroom to make fun of her, including you.
- Communicate. When there is a problem, please contact me before it becomes a major issue. Let me know about positive things my child does as well. We all need to hear good news once in a while.
- I am not a perfect parent, and you are not a perfect teacher, but we need to make sure we work together to do what is best for this child.
- I am trusting you with someone who is precious to me. Please cherish him.

What Parents Want Teachers to Know About Conferences

- I am trying hard to be the best parent I can be. Give me encouragement, not a list of things my child needs to do.
- I am afraid you are going to tell me the worst about my child -- surprise me. Tell me something great about my child.
- I want to feel that you have time for me and are not just rushing me through the process.
- Try to be as clear and as simple as possible in your explanations. Don't overwhelm me with educational jargon.
- Show me that you know and understand my child. Don't talk in clichés or make generic comments.
- I have the same goals and aspirations for my child as you do, even if I don't look or sound like you.

Dear Parent, next page...

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Dear Parent . . .

- I truly care about your child and will do my very best for him. Please remember that I have to be concerned with all the children in the classroom.
- Let her be a child; let her skills and talents emerge naturally. Don't put so much pressure on your child that she learns to hate learning. Encourage a love of learning, not a need for perfection.
- Limit TV viewing for your child and encourage physical activity, reading, imaginative thinking, and interacting with the world around him.
- I am here to ensure that your child succeeds; your support and encouragement are necessary for me to be successful.
- Reinforce good manners at home. As much as I treat all students equally, the child who remembers to say, "Thank you," "Please," "Excuse me," and "May I help you?" is thought of more fondly.
- Please make sure you read and follow up on all communications I send home during the year. That lets your child know that you are paying attention and we are working together.
- You are your child's first teacher. You have more of an impact on his values, behavior, expectations, work ethic, and actions than anyone else. If you feel that education is important, your child will feel that doing his best and getting an education are important as well. You matter. You make the difference!
- Education does not end at school. Your child needs you to provide enrichment and fun activities at home to keep the education going. Read to, with, and in front of your child as often as possible.
- Teach your child respect for others by treating him and other family members with respect. Expose him to people who are different. Be a contributing member of your community.
- If I am doing something right, please let me know. We all need to know that what we do matters.
- Make sure your child wears comfortable clothing. Restrictive, fancy, or uncomfortable clothes hinder her ability to concentrate and do her best—and can be distracting to others. Fashions that are popular in stores do not necessarily belong in school. FYI: The clothes she leaves home in are not necessarily the clothes she shows up in.
- Children are not perfect. I don't expect your child to be perfect in my class and you shouldn't expect him to be perfect at home.
- Trust our judgment. We do this for a living and the vast majority of us know what we're doing.

What Teachers Want Parents to Know About Conferences

- We want to meet you, whether you're the parent of a successful student or the parent of a student who is struggling.
- Please don't arrive on the defensive. We want to work with you, not against you.
- If you have questions you need answered, write them down so we can make sure to address all your concerns.
- If your child has allergies or other health issues, if there is something special about your family situation, if you would like to help out in the classroom, please let me know.
- Tell me something special about your child—something that will help me understand him.

Links to Related Resources for Parents

English

[Communicating With School When English Is Not the First Language](#)

[Making the Most of Middle and High School-Mini Conferences](#)

[Preparing for a Parent-Teacher Conference](#)

Other Languages

[Arabic](#) | [Chinese](#) | [Farsi](#) | [Korean](#) | [Spanish](#) | [Urdu](#) | [Vietnamese](#)

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