

5 Topics to Go Over With Teachers Early in the School Year

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Parents often don't want to bother teachers in September and October. But talking early in the school year can set the stage for strong communication throughout the year. Here are topics that can get the dialogue going.



Ask about priorities.

Teachers all have different priorities for their students. For some, it's participating in class. For others, it's getting work done. Some emphasize performance in a particular subject like reading. It's important to get a sense of the teacher's priorities early on. Consider asking the teacher, "What are your top three priorities for my child this year?"



Talk about academic expectations.

You may not have specific concerns the first few weeks of school. But it's still a good time to talk to the teacher about academic expectations. Does the teacher think your child will be able to handle the work? The answer may give you an idea of what you can work on at home with your child. It's also important to give your input about your child's strengths and challenges. That information can help the teacher set priorities. Shared expectations help ensure that your child doesn't get mixed messages.



Discuss social strengths and weaknesses.

Social interaction will likely have a big impact on your child's success and happiness in school. It's also the most difficult area for teachers to assess quickly at the beginning of the year. Simply asking, "How is she doing with the other kids?" is a good way to start this conversation. It may be too early for the teacher to know. But it gives you a chance to share your observations and concerns. Be specific about the interactions your child has had—good and bad.



Discuss issues with organization.

Trouble with organization and time management is usually the first thing that gets in a child's way at school. Teachers also notice it quickly. It's important to get a shared impression early on of why these things are challenging. Are your child's academic skills not strong enough to move to the next activity? Is she missing cues the teacher is giving about transitions? By discussing it, you and the teacher can agree on what you each can do to help your child.



Share what you're seeing at home.

The start of the school year can put pressure on kids and families. Speaking with the teacher about school-related challenges you're having at home lets you get a jump on finding solutions. Start off saying something positive: "My child is really excited about your class." Then bring up the issues: "Unfortunately, homework isn't really going smoothly for us, and I'm hoping you can help." You'll get a better response if you ask for support than if you blame school for the difficulties.