

5 tips to help parent-teacher communication

Communication between parents and teachers is vital to a child's performance at school, especially when it comes to life altering events. Helene Vermaak, director at The Human Edge says that many teachers find parents fail to communicate major changes at home, that could impact the child's performance and behaviour at school, to teachers.



The five major life altering events that teachers cite as affecting children the most are: a death in the family, major illness, divorce or other family disruption, mood changes and possible drug use. "As a parent you know your child best, so if something happens that is a 'big-deal' in their lives, and may not feature on the above list, be sure to let the teacher know. They will appreciate it and will then have the knowledge should they need to offer that extra reassurance, leniency or understanding," says Vermaak.

Before we know it, a new school year will be upon us, and Vermaak proposes that parents take it upon themselves to bridge any communication gap between themselves and teachers. "Meet with your child's teacher as early in the year as possible. This meeting should be an opportunity to update the teacher on any elements in your child's life that may impact their school year. You can also share a few insights about your child, from an emotional and academic perspective."

Parents often delay informing the school of these kind of events, as they may be waiting for the matter to be resolved, for the child to adapt, or just don't believe that it is necessary for the teacher to know. In the same vein, the teacher may not communicate a change in the child's behaviour at school. By the time the parents and teachers eventually do come together to discuss the child, damage may already have been done and the child's success affected.

Vermaak provides parents with five tips to help communicate successfully with their child's teacher:

1. Start the year off by communicating with their teacher – find an opportunity to introduce yourself to your child's registered teacher. If the school doesn't schedule a parent / teacher session in the first month of the year, schedule one. Take this opportunity to tell the teacher about your child and any life changing events, concerns and insights you would like to share.

2. Be sure to give the teacher your contact details and if they'll share their details with you, even better, just remember to not abuse this benefit.
3. Don't wait to ask questions or clarify any remarks or incidents. Rather communicate with the teacher soonest.
4. We all appreciate praise and recognition – don't forget to acknowledge any support.
5. If you do need to have a difficult discussion with a teacher, apply a few of the Crucial Conversation skills:
 - a. Start with heart – consider what you really want from this conversation, for yourself, the teacher and most importantly your child.
 - b. Remember to stick to the facts.
 - c. Establish a safe environment – do not make accusations that can lead to the teacher becoming defensive. Rather establish safety by explaining your real intent.

Vermaak concludes, "Teachers ultimately want their students to succeed. As parents, we can assist by sharing information about our children and their lives on a regular basis, so that teachers are more knowledgeable and equipped to help the child, should it be required."

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