



Tips for Resolving a Question or Concern at Your Child's School



“Teachers and parents both want the same thing: to help their kids succeed. Let’s work together to make sure that our kids achieve that success.”⁷

1. Let Your Child Take the Lead

Ask them about the issue, how they tried to resolve it and if they’d like your help. This gives them a chance to problem solve and learn to self-advocate. You may not need to get involved.

2. Reach Out to Their Teacher

- Take a deep breath and organize your thoughts. Understand what you know and might not know about the issue and what you hope to get out of the meeting. Kids rarely share the whole story. It may be that no one is “in the wrong”, but rather just that there was a miscommunication.
- Send an email to schedule time (in person or Zoom) with the teacher (don’t just drop in) and explain the issue you would like to discuss from the point of view of wanting to understand
- Prepare a list of questions to ensure you address all the issues/concerns.
- When you meet, thank them for their time.
- Ask for their perspective and for specific information/examples. (Be Curious!)
- Give them a chance to make suggestions.
- Discuss next steps for you, the teacher and the student and agree on a time frame
- Follow-up

3. If All Else Fails, Send it Up the Ladder

If, after meeting with the teacher, you’re still not satisfied, reach out to the Principal or AP, using the same steps you used when reaching out to the teacher. Be sure to let the teacher know you don’t feel the issue is resolved and plan to raise it with the Principal.



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DO

- Address the issue as early as possible
- Assume the best intentions
- Give them time to respond
- Get to know your child's teacher at the start of the school year so you already have a cooperative rapport and share information about your child that might help the teacher
- Try to stay up on classroom activity, schedules and lesson plans
- Volunteer in the classroom if you can
- Promote learning at home by getting involved in your child's studies, goal-setting, etc.
- Let your teacher know when things are going well too!

See below for:

- Things to Remember
- Suggested Conversation Starters
- Suggestions for Specific Situations



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THINGS TO REMEMBER³

1. **Teachers are professionals, so they should be treated as such.** Addressing teachers as "Mr. Alvarez" or "Mrs. Pitsilos" is imperative. Teachers should not be addressed by their first names, especially when children are nearby. It sets an example of respect for students when they hear parents address teachers by their surnames.
2. **Teachers follow schedules.** It's imperative that parents schedule a time to talk or meet with the teacher rather than just showing up at the door expecting to talk.
3. **Teachers are busy.** Teachers are so busy. They attend school-wide meetings, department meetings, and team meetings. They participate in IEP meetings, parent conferences, and professional development courses. They research, plan, and prepare each and every unit, lesson, and activity. They assess every student and evaluate that child's strengths, weaknesses, and needs and are constantly doing what they can to see that each student meets certain social and academic benchmarks. So if a teacher doesn't respond immediately to your call or email, it's probably for a good reason. Be patient.
4. **Teachers care.** If they didn't care about children, they wouldn't be in the business. Keep this truth at the front of your mind during all interactions and know that most every teacher proceeds with the best of intentions. They want your child to succeed, to exceed his or her potential, and to enjoy school.
5. **Teachers are human.** Most of them have a home and a life and a family away from school, which is what every human being needs. Teachers occasionally make mistakes, just like normal human beings do. So if a paper comes back graded with a mistake on it or a handout has a typo, or if he or she calls you by the wrong name at some point, relax. And give the teacher the second chance he or she deserves.



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Suggested Conversation Starters⁵

Asking to meet or talk: "Hi. I'm Jordan's grandmother, Claudia. Jordan lives with me, and I'm worried he's having trouble with focus. I'd like to set up a time to talk about it."

Thank them for something specific or just their time: "Thank you for meeting with me."

Starting the conversation: "I'm concerned about Jordan's focus. It can take him hours to finish his homework because he sits there doodling or just staring off into space. He doesn't seem unhappy, though. Is this something I should be worried about? Are you seeing similar things at school?"

"I am concerned that Matt is falling behind in math," sounds better than, "Matt isn't doing well in math," or "You should be doing more to help Matt with his math."

Sharing information: "I'm not sure if this is part of it, but Jordan often drops what he's doing and switches to something else. He'll put the leash on the dog to take her out, and then suddenly disappear. I'll find him texting while the dog is waiting at the door. I used to think he was being lazy. But maybe he just has a hard time focusing on chores, too."

"I've noticed that my child responds to..." Share your perspective with teachers and give them information that could be helpful. Wording this as your point of view allows you to give input without being accusatory or making the teacher feel defensive.

Getting information: "I haven't heard from teachers that Jordan doesn't pay attention, but I'm wondering how he is in class. Does he usually focus when you're teaching? Does he ever drift off the way he does at home?"

"Do you have any suggestions about..." You know your child best; however, the teacher might have some ideas on how you can help your son or daughter in class. Asking for suggestions lets the teacher know that you respect her opinion.



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"What do you see as my child's strengths?" Conversations with teachers sometimes devolve into negative talks, especially if your child is struggling or misbehaving in school. Focus on your child's positive aspects to release tension and allow both of you to look at the situation from a different perspective.

"His IEP provides for _____. How do you implement that in the classroom?" By using this wording, you are saying that you assume the teacher is following the IEP, instead of accusing her of not following it.

Following up on answers: "Can you give me an example of what distracts Jordan in class? What does he do?"

Asking about help: "What can help Jordan with focus? Are there things you do in class when he stops focusing? Can you suggest strategies we can try at home?"

Finishing the conversation: "What can I do to help?" Whether you are asking how you can support your child's learning at home or how you can volunteer at school, the teacher will appreciate your wanting to be involved in your child's education.

"Thanks so much for your help. I have a better idea of what's happening with Jordan and what to look for. Can we check in after I've had time to think about this to talk about what happens next?" Let them know when you'd like to be notified about something happening with your child. Setting specific communication needs will foster a transparent environment.



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Suggestions for Specific Situations¹

The teacher says: "Your child is having trouble with his schoolwork."

School struggles can be a symptom of a wide variety of issues. "Your child could be distracted by a family problem, or maybe they're not getting enough sleep and can't pay attention," says Marian C. Fish, PhD, professor in the school-psychology program at Queens College, in Flushing, New York. "Or they've missed learning something the previous year—they were out sick when the teacher introduced subtraction—and they've never gotten the hang of it."

The right response: Ask the teacher for specifics so you can judge what kind of help your child needs: Are they having trouble in every subject or just one? Did they score poorly on a couple of tests or many? Are they not doing the work, or are they frustrated and unable to handle it?

Creating a plan: Always get your child's take on the problem. Say, "Your teacher is concerned that you're having a hard time with subtraction. What do you think?" Ask them how you can help, and brainstorm solutions with the teacher, too. They may be able to recommend flash cards or worksheets your child can do at home, or maybe they can fit in extra-help sessions with them during lunch or free classroom time. You should check over their homework to discuss mistakes too and work closely with the teacher to make sure they're improving.

Following up: Meet with the teacher for a progress report after your child has gotten a few weeks of extra help. If there's been little or no improvement, consider getting extra tutoring or consulting with a counselor or the school's psychologist to make sure that they don't have a learning disability.

The teacher says: "Your child is acting out in class."

The right response: Find out what your child is doing: Are they interrupting? Running around? Making noises? Young kids can't always articulate their feelings, so bad behavior can be a sign that your child is anxious. Ask the teacher whether they're disruptive at the same time every day, which can help you identify the trigger. For example, if your [child misbehaves](#) just before gym class, they could be scared



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kids will make fun of them because they're bad at sports. It's also possible your child isn't getting enough attention from the teacher or the other students. Being loud is their way of grabbing the spotlight. Or you may have a high-energy kid, one who can't control themselves during circle time or other quiet moments.

One worry to cross off the list: ADHD, even though it's tempting to panic and jump to that conclusion. "If your child hasn't had behavior issues in the past, chances are that ADHD isn't the problem," says Michael Reiff, MD, a developmental behavioral pediatrician at the University of Minnesota, in Minneapolis. However, your child's pediatrician can administer a test to screen for this. If your child is diagnosed with ADHD, you can ask the school to evaluate if he/she needs a 504 plan.

Creating a plan: If you suspect performance anxiety is the culprit, say, "Your teacher mentioned that they gave you a time-out before gym again. Would it help if you and I practiced jumping rope together?" Reassure your child that everyone thinks they're bad at some things, and talk up their best skills.

If your child is just peppy, ask the teacher whether there are ways they could release some energy before quiet times. Maybe they could erase the board or do some other activity before they have to settle down. To handle an attention seeker, remind them that the best way to get noticed is to follow the rules and do well on their work. (You might also ask the teacher for a list of class rules so you can go over them with your child.) Suggest other ways they can get attention, like doing something nice for a classmate.

Following up: Meet with the teacher to make sure your child has settled down. If they're still acting up, see your pediatrician. "If your child's teachers have said every year that [they're disruptive in class](#) and now they're more restless than ever, they should be tested for ADHD," says Dr. Reiff.

The teacher says: "Your child seems anxious and stressed."

The right response: Make sure you understand the teacher's definition of anxiety. Ask about the symptoms: Is your child crying at certain times of the day? Are they complaining of stomach aches and asking to go to the nurse? "If your child has started [biting their nails](#), it may just be a bad habit. But if they always liked school



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and now you learn that they're crying in class every afternoon, there may be a bigger problem," says Dr. Reiff. Perhaps your child is being bullied by another child at recess or they're intimidated by a particular teacher.

Creating a plan: Be empathetic. Say something like "I bet it's scary when the music teacher asks you to sing a line in front of the class" and then ask how you can make them feel more comfortable. You can also practice mindfulness with them and taking deep breaths.

[If your child is afraid of a bully](#), first reassure them that the teasing isn't their fault. "Tell him that bullying is never okay, and by talking to you and the teacher about the bullying, they're helping to solve the problem," says Dr. Fish. This encourages him to open up so you can get more details: Was the kid threatening him physically? Calling him names? The teacher and the administration should step in (most schools have a zero-tolerance policy for bullying); they often recommend getting the other child's parents involved.

Following up: Keep in touch with the teacher and the school to make sure your child is more at ease. If he still seems worried, ask the teacher what else you can do to help and/or consider contacting a mental health professional.

The teacher says: "Your child is bullying another kid."

The right response: Find out how severe the harassment is. Did it happen once—maybe a classmate pressured your child to hit another and now they feel bad about it? Or have they been repeatedly taunting another classmate by calling them names or hurting them physically?

Creating a plan: If it was one incident and your child feels bad about it, talk about what caused them to behave so badly and then have them apologize to the other child. If a friend told her to do it, discuss the dangers of peer pressure. "Role-playing is helpful here because kids think it's fun," says Dr. Fish. "Let your child say, 'I dare you to hit that girl on the head.' Then you can model a good response, such as 'I don't like getting hit, and I don't hit other people. It's not funny.' Then switch roles and have them give a response."

However, if the bullying has been part of a pattern of aggressive behavior, speak to the school psychologist or an outside counselor to see what's triggering it.



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Following up: Check in regularly with the teacher. If your child's still struggling, continue counseling or ask whether the school offers services that help kids improve their social skills.

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This article is a summary compiled from articles published on the subject listed below.

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