

Parent/Teacher Allies: Being Your Child's Advocate  
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Starting a new school year in a new grade with new kids can be stressful on you and your child! It can also be a great opportunity to learn and grow. However, if you notice that your child is not thriving in the classroom, it is time to take on the role of being your child's advocate.

There are several things you can do to improve your child's classroom experience. Talking positively about school to your child and making sure your child is organized and confident can be very helpful. Sometimes, however, there are bigger issues that you have to resolve with the teacher. Dr. Brent Atkinson developed a system for couples to use to improve their relationships. These same skills can be applied when working with your child's teacher. It is in your best interest (and your child's) to learn to use these skills to help you to resolve school/teacher issues in an understanding and cooperative way.

Give the Teacher the Benefit of the Doubt

Teachers are human and can have bad days just like the rest of us! Avoid jumping to conclusions about his/her behavior. It is important to remember that teachers want your child to do well, too.

What's Driving Your Upset?

You may be upset by something that reminds you of a bad school experience. I know one mom who based her whole decision-making about her daughter's schooling on one bad experience in kindergarten. Identifying your upset will put it in perspective and help focus your discussion with the teacher.

Offer Assurance

Let your child's teacher know that you are not attacking them. A simple comment to let them know that you don't have all the answers or that you're not telling them how to teach, can take the pressure off!

Work Together

Show the teacher that you are willing to work with them to help improve your child's classroom experience. Ask them to specifically identify what you can do to help the situation. This will show that you are a team player.

Stand Up for Yourself/Your Child

If the problem still seems unresolved or the teacher seems unwilling to help the situation, it is time to take a different tack. Stay calm and let them know that while you want to work with them, it may be best to set a meeting with the principal. Make sure to include them on the meeting so that it is a balanced view of the situation.

If you have taken all of these steps with kindness, patience, truth and respect, then hopefully your issue has been resolved! Learning to be your child's advocate is an important skill. Children need to know you support them, but that you also support their teacher. It is important for your son or daughter to see you resolve issues in a kind manner and not in an attacking "I'm right/you're wrong" manner. Be aware of what you say. Your child will learn by listening to what you say about the teacher and how you talk to her. Hope you have a great school year!

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