

Good Housekeeping

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Parent-Teacher Talk

Five strategies to help smooth communication at school — and ensure that your child has a successful year. Be sure to check out *Good Housekeeping's* [report](#) on establishing effective parent-teacher communication.



"Mrs. Quinn? This is Mr. Smith, Adam's math teacher." Just hearing the message on my voice mail launches my heart rate into overdrive; yes, I'm going to have one of *those* conversations. After all, how often does the teacher call to congratulate me on Adam's stellar behavior or fabulous grades? Then again, I'm sure Mr. Smith gets the same anxious feeling when he hears my name on his voice mail; I'm usually not calling to praise him for how well he taught an algebraic unit, or to compliment his exceptional patience with my spirited son.

I'm hardly alone in sensing this tension between well-intentioned parents and teachers. In fact, a 2005 MetLife survey found that 73 percent of new teachers agree that too many parents today treat their children's teachers as adversaries. Granted, their interaction has always had a "he said, she said" aspect to it: "Unless you've actually observed your child at school, you're going to have a completely different perspective from the teacher

about how your child behaves," says Sam Wineburg, professor of education at Stanford University. Beyond that, "competition to get into college is tough, so parents are demanding more from schools to give their children an edge," says Suzanne Tingley, a former school superintendent in New York State and author of *How to Handle Difficult Parents*. "And due to the economy, some schools have had layoffs, making it more difficult for the remaining teachers to provide individual attention," setting the scene for misunderstandings and flaring tempers.

To help you handle this tricky terrain, here are five surprising tactics for partnering with your child's teachers — and helping your kid do her very best in the year ahead.

[Next: Start talking early](#)

Old Think: I'll just sit tight till the first report card arrives

New Think: I'll meet the teacher before the month of October ends

Once a child moves up to middle school, parent-teacher conferences usually fall by the wayside, but that doesn't mean you should just wait for that first progress report to hit your mailbox. "While parents are really invested in their kids in elementary school, teachers feel that interest drop off in the later years," says Tingley, but your child still needs your involvement to make sure she meets the increased demands.

So set up a brief get-together with your child's teacher (or team of teachers) early in the academic year. While Open House or Back-to-School Night provides a good opportunity to put a face with a name, don't try to slip in impromptu discussions there. Not only will a couple of hundred other parents have the same plan, but "teachers are like any other professional; in order to have a private conversation with us, you need to make an appointment," notes Lauren Ade Kreifus, a language arts teacher at William Davies Middle School in Hamilton Township, NJ. When you have that get-together, fill in the teacher on any issues that will impact performance — perhaps there's financial stress in the family, your child has a history of class-clown behavior, or you're concerned about the number of honors-level classes she's taking. If the school or a teacher discourages you from setting up a meeting — say, due to time constraints — try this script: "I have information to share about my child that I think will lead to her having a successful year. I believe a quick meeting will be very valuable."

Touching base is especially important if your child has learning or organizational issues, though many parents conceal this info so teachers don't think less of their kids. In fact, many educators can start deploying