



*Tips for*

**Effective**

*Parent-Teacher Communication*  
**this school year**



# Parent Partnerships 101

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It is estimated that about 500,000 teachers , or one out of every six teachers leave the profession every year. Of those teachers who leave the profession within the first 5 years, about half cite, “parent management” as a top reason, according to the Consortium for Policy Research in Education. New teachers not only see parent-teacher communication as one of their biggest challenges, but also feel it is the area in which they are least prepared.

Teacher-parent interaction is a growing topic of interest for teachers, administrators and parents alike. As immediate access to information increases via technology and social media, many parents have increased opportunities to be more informed about their child’s education. As such, it is important that teachers work to ensure communication is constructive, clear and is designed to promote a partnership established on mutual respect and trust.

**Here are 10 tips that can help you build positive parent partnerships.**

## Parent Partnerships 101

### 1.) Lead with Your Ears

Take time to process messages, both spoken and unspoken. Use active listening to reduce misunderstandings and send the message that you “hear” what is being said. Restate, paraphrase and ask probing questions. Parents can get emotionally charged; remember, they have a lot at stake-the education of their child. Sometimes, parents need to vent and feel validated just like us. You are on the same side and share common goals for educating the student. Find that common ground.

Learners Edge offers **Course 859: Parent Trap: Achieving Success with Difficult Parents in Difficult Situations** to help you explore ways to build constructive relationship with parents of your students.



Find out more here: [www.LearnersEdgeInc.com/courses/dl/859](http://www.LearnersEdgeInc.com/courses/dl/859)



## 2.) Ask

Ask questions, such as;

- “Is there anything else you want me to know?”
- “Do you have anything else that you are concerned about?”
- “What is bothering you the most?”

Those questions help a parent feel you care and are concerned, and that their feelings and viewpoint are valued. Parents may need validation, or to know this is “normal,” or to know they are not the first parent to deal with a particular situation. They may need someone who can remind them of progress and little things to celebrate, or they may just want to share with someone who understands what they are going through and how they feel. Ask probing questions to get to the heart of what the parent needs so you can respond in a way that meets the need. Remember, parents are your customers.

WHEN PARENTS  
ARE INVOLVED,  
KIDS THRIVE

## 3.) Problem Solve

When working through those challenging conversations, be sure to end with ideas for solutions and a plan for action. Some great questions to end with are, “What are some next steps for us that would make sense?” “Would it help if I (insert action item here)” and be sure to layout a plan for follow up including how you will follow up and by when. It is best to offer suggestions vs. leaving it open ended as if you aren’t sure what to do. Remember to write down the action items so that you don’t forget.

## 4.) Bring Parents into the School. Get Them Involved!

During the year, provide several opportunities where you invite the parents in to celebrate their child. Have a potluck where the parents are invited to bring in a traditional dish from their heritage and invite them to stay for lunch. Have a Mother’s Day celebration, or offer parents opportunities to get involved even if they aren’t available during the school day.





### 5) Refrain from using Educational Jargon

When you sit down with your parents, make sure you aren't using words/phrases/terms that, while commonplace to you as a teacher, are unfamiliar to people outside the world of education.

"We use Everyday Math..." might explain a lot to someone who understands what that means, but to most people the words, "Everyday Math," indicate the adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing done while figuring out the bill at the restaurant or grocery store, not a mathematics curriculum. If we are not careful, we can intimidate the very people we are trying to work together with...so make sure when you meet with parents you are using terms that make sense to everyone.

### 6.) Focus on the Positive, Not Just the Negative

Be consistently in touch-not just when things are bad. Call or email parents whenever a student does a particularly nice job or has been exceptionally helpful in class. Or, put together a newsletter to help keep in touch with your parents on a consistent basis. Parents love to know what's going on in their child's classroom. The extra effort only takes a few minutes and does wonders for your relationship with parents. By focusing on their child's successes, you are able to equate parental interaction with positive news, ensuring that parents will be more willing to hear you out when there is an issue.

#### Teacher Newsletter Template Resources:

*Links to some FREE newsletter templates you can use to communicate regularly with your parents.*

*Education World:*

[http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_admin/newsletter/templates](http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/newsletter/templates)

*Pinterest:*

<https://www.pinterest.com/explore/teacher-newsletter-templates/>

*Word Draw:*

<http://www.worddraw.com/classroom-newsletter-template.html>

*Reading Rockets:*

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/classroom-templates>







### 7) Collaborate: Find Some Common Ground

By showing a willingness to learn more about your students from their parents, they will be more willing to work with you throughout the school year. Don't be afraid to speak casually with them about your hobbies or interests outside of school. Demonstrate to parents that you have taken time to get to know their child as a whole-beyond the classroom. Show an interest in them & their child, and they'll return the favor.

### 8) Keep the Focus on Their Child

If parents complain about unfair treatment towards their child and offer examples to support their conclusion, acknowledge that you often do different things with different students because you want to help each become more successful or learn more about responsibility. Then turn the focus back where it belongs, their child.

## 9) Be Proactive & Prompt

### Proactive:

Contact parents as soon as you see academic problems or negative behavior patterns develop. You'll have a better chance to change these patterns if you catch them early. Here are some things to discuss with parents:

- a. Areas where their child excels
- b. If their child is attentive during lessons
- c. Where their child stands academically
- d. Specific areas where their child experiences difficulties
- e. Specific ways they can help their child at home
- f. How well their child gets along with classmates
- g. How long homework should take to complete
- h. Allow parents to share their concerns and ask questions
- i. If you are unsure what a parent asks about, request specific examples



### Prompt:

A key to solving the problem is to make the parent's concern a priority and provide a quick response. Do not put off these conversations for long. While it makes sense to take a little time to figure out why the angry parent is trying to get in touch with you, delaying a response might just make the parent angrier.

It is best to communicate expectations about your response time. Best to under-promise and over-deliver. For example, I will return emails and phone calls within 48 hours, then surprise and delight them by getting back to them within 24 hours.

## 10.) Build Their Trust

Building a parent's trust is often a gradual process. Parents need to know that you have their child's best interest at heart. The best advice is to do what you say you are going to do. If you say you will communicate within a time frame-do it! In conversations with parents, be aware of what is said and how it is said, tone of voice used, body language demonstrated, the environment. These can all have an impact on how parents perceive you. In order to establish trust, you have to first demonstrate "respect for others" before you've earned the right to be respected...and then go and do the things that build trust over time.



One way to build trust is to establish a strong school community. This can set a positive foundation that helps you deal with the difficult issues that arise from time to time. Then, when you have to deliver difficult information to a parent, you have established a healthy relationship and they know that you value them as a partner and valuable member of the school community.

Creating such a strong community takes additional time and effort, but it truly a case of an ounce of prevention is worth its weight in gold. Check out our links below for some great resources on how to build a school community with your parents.

## Remember: Strong Communities = Happy Parents

### *Creating a School Community Resources:*

Several leading program developers have focused on using one or more of these approaches to build community.

- James Comer's School Development Program: [www.schooldevelopmentprogram.org](http://www.schooldevelopmentprogram.org)
- Eunice Shriver's Community of Caring program: [www.communityofcaring.org](http://www.communityofcaring.org)
- The Northeast Foundation for Children's Responsive Classroom:  
[www.responsiveclassroom.org](http://www.responsiveclassroom.org)
- David Hawkins's Seattle Social Development Project: [www.promisingpractices.net](http://www.promisingpractices.net)
- Developmental Studies Center's Child Development Project: [www.devstu.org](http://www.devstu.org)



*\*Tips compiled from a variety of sources including the book, Dealing with Difficult Parents by Todd Whitaker*



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