

Children with Special Needs and The Parent-Teacher Relationship



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Communication with your special needs child's teacher can sometimes be a challenge. The classroom is often set up with one or more teachers amongst what could be a varying symptoms, personalities and highly specific student needs.

With such diversity it is no wonder some parents feel their child is getting the short end of the stick. If not, it's always good practice to stay connected to your child's teacher so a potential lack of attention does not arise.

Proper Language

Playwright [Edward George Bulwer-Lytton](#) wrote in 1839, "The pen is mightier than the sword." "Sword" could be the non-diplomatic, emotional response you'll want to avoid when discussing concern for the education of your child.

Using the proper language in any potentially confrontational situation always puts the accuser in a more positive light. It also, more often than not, results in the constructive conversation that you may be looking for.

[The National Center for Learning Disabilities](#) offers these 8 sentence starters to use when talking to teachers:

- "I'm concerned about my child's..." - Beginning a sentence with "I" or "I'm" is a better choice than "You", "You should", etc. It gives the clue that you are open to working out a concern rather than pointing your finger and blaming.

- “Help me understand...” - This statement allows a conversation to move forward as it offers the teacher an opportunity to explain their side of the situation.
- “What was the goal of this assignment?” - When your child is struggling with a particular educational task it is best to get the full picture rather than assume it is not working. Some tasks are backed by published studies which, in the long run, may be beneficial for your child.
- “Have you considered...” - Rather than “I think” or “Why don’t you do this” using a term like this let’s the teacher know that you may have information they don’t have. It will also avoid a defensive response as you are asking for their professional opinion or consideration.
- “I’ve noticed...” - Here is a clue you can give the teacher that you are watching and involved in your child’s progress. It let’s the teacher know that you may have a different take on the current educational process in which they may learn from.
- “It seems as if my child is having a hard time doing...” - Using the words “seems” or “appears” once again lifts blame and offers to move forward the conversation without raising defensive emotions.
- “His IEP [Individual Education Plan] provides him with _____ accommodations. How does that look in the classroom?” - This let’s the teacher know that you are fully aware of your child’s IEP and that you are ‘on point’ with his or her receiving what was agreed upon.
- “What can I do to help?” - Parents work hard to keep their special needs child happy and healthy. Unfortunately, because it can be such hard work, some use their child’s classroom time as a “break”. Offering to help is a great way to announce your willingness to go the extra mile for your child.

The Logistics of Parent-Teacher Communication

In this day and age everybody has a different personal communication choice. Be it email, text, phone or back and forth notes it is important to address the logistics of [parent-teacher communication](#).

First, find out the preferred way your child’s teacher likes to communicate. If you find it to be too difficult or not rapid enough offer another possibility. Sometimes teachers would be willing to change while others may be set in their ways.

If they are set in their ways chances are their trial and error has led them to their choice. It is here where you will probably want to concede, however adding in other communication choices on your end may prove beneficial.

Strength in Numbers

Connecting with other parents of children in your child’s class could be one of the best moves when communicating with the teacher. A group effort is always a strong message as well as an excellent [support system](#).

The relationship between parents and teachers of children with special needs can be a fruitful, progressive and exciting process if approached accordingly.

Remaining positive, upbeat and hopeful is always the best choice in allowing your special needs child to receive all they deserve from a classroom educational learning process.