

Be Your Child's Advocate...and part of your child's school solution.

in part by Amy KL Borrell

1. **Build good relations from the beginning.** Don't wait for a problem to occur before introducing yourself to your child's teacher. Identifying and dealing with a concern is easier if good communication already exists. There are many ways to be a positive force in your child's classroom.

Write a note or make an appointment with the teacher at the beginning of the year to get acquainted. Volunteering in the classroom or helping during a class trip also helps to get to know the teacher better.

2. **If a problem arises, get details.** Perhaps your child is having difficulty in a subject that used to come easily, or he/she has shared that they are being teased. Use your judgement and move forward, but make sure you have as much information as possible. This will assist school personnel in dealing properly with the issue.
3. **Begin with the teacher.** In most cases, an informal conversation with the teacher should be the first step in addressing most issues. This gives the teacher the opportunity to also become part of the solution.

Starting with the teacher also gives you the opportunity to follow the chain of command; allowing you to escalate your complaint until a suitable solution can be reached. The chain of command may look like this:

4. Teacher→Counselor/Asst. Principal→Principal→District Level/Superintendent
5. **Connect with others.** There is strength in numbers, and most likely school-based issues are affecting more than just your child. Look to connect with your local PTA/PTO to reach and learn from other parents.
6. **Keep a record.** Document all your communication. This allows you to records facts, i.e. dates, people, suggestions, etc if you need to move the issue move through the chain of command.

PIRC Pages

7. **Avoid the blame game.** For best results, maintain a professional attitude and approach. Be considerate of the school staff's time. Remember you are probably not the only parent they are working with. Follow these suggestions:
 - Keep an open mind
 - Trust professional judgement, while also trusting yourself. You know your child better than anyone else.
 - Realize principals and teachers have families too
 - Communicate honestly
 - Ask questions
 - Be a good listener

8. **Know your rights.** Most issues have a good chance of being satisfactorily resolved within your school community, however if you are unable to achieve a resolution, legal means are available. In matters of a child's disability, you have specific rights under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)

9. **Have a plan but be flexible.** Share your thoughts on a possible or preferred solution, but also keep an open mind about how to proceed. Parents and teachers have access to different first-hand knowledge of the child. The best thing for a child is for the school and parent(s) to be united.

This publication was printed in whole or in part, with funds from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement, Parental Information and Resource Center program, under Grant #84.310A