



## I have a disagreement with my child's teacher. What should I do?

When I was growing up, children were taught to respect adults without question. Now it seems that the pendulum has swung in the other direction and parents often side with their children without considering the other party. Parents need to keep in mind that a child will sometimes exaggerate details to gain attention from a parent.

It troubles me to hear parents speak disrespectfully about teachers, especially in front of their children. This practice will not resolve the issue and will not help your child learn valuable conflict resolution skills.

After working with a group of second and third graders, I have new-found respect for teachers! Teachers must deal with a

world of budgetary and political issues that make their hard job even more difficult. As parents, we should strive to work together with teachers. After all, we have the same objective – looking out for the well being of the next generation.

- Chris Jenney, parent

When a parent does not agree with his/her child's teacher, it is important to evaluate the reason for the disagreement. If a parent determines that the disagreement directly affects his/her child's education and well

being, then the parent should set up a time to meet with the teacher to discuss their concerns. During this meeting there should be a positive focus on how the disagreement can be resolved. The parent needs to be prepared to ask specific questions of concern and listen carefully to the teacher's response.

In some situations a compromise may need to be reached in order for the student's needs to be met. The most important thing to remember is that communication between the parent and teacher is vital if a student is going to have a suc-

cessful education. A parent should never let a concern build, but should contact the teacher immediately to help prevent any escalation of a situation. Often, once a parent contacts a teacher, they are able to obtain necessary information which allows a better understanding of what is happening in the classroom. If a parent has attempted to resolve the problem with their child's teacher, but is not satisfied with the results, they should request a meeting not only with the teacher, but with a school administrator as well.

- Rita Bryant, teacher

## Some things for teachers and parents to keep in mind (adapted from an ERIC Digest document)

When teachers and parents disagree, open communication is invaluable. Set up a meeting time that is agreeable to both of you. Late in the afternoon when both the parent and teacher are tired might not be the best option. It is important for teachers and parents to remember that they each know the child in a different context. It is also useful to keep in mind that different people often have different perspectives on the same issue.

### Teachers

**Do:** Know and follow school and district policies for addressing parent-teacher disagreements.

**Don't:** Openly discuss the issue in public settings. Respect the privacy of the family and use discretion about when and where and with whom you discuss the situation.

### Parents

**Do:** Talk directly with the teacher. Address complaints to the teacher first, either in person or by telephone. Then approach other personnel as specified by school policy. Always check the facts directly with the teacher before drawing conclusions.

**Don't:** Criticize the teacher in front of children. Criticism is likely to foster arrogance, defiance, and rudeness toward teachers. ■

# The Need to Know

Comic book kids never grow up. They don't need to. The Family Circus family stays young and adorable, waxing innocent to Grandma, meandering through the yard into eternity. We never seem to mind that for just about a half-a-century the Peanuts remained the same youthful darlings we chuckled at every morning. Perhaps that's the appeal; the comics don't change, but as we grow, we continue to relate, through the eyes of change and advancing age.

Now my own kids are reading the comics, or insisting that Dad read the funnies to them, and my entire relationship to the "funnies" has shifted from childish mirth to a mix of irony and something like alarm.

Take "Jeremy" of Jerry Scott and Jim Borgman's syndicated "Zits" comic strip. Here we are granted a fly's-eye view of the life of Jeremy, the perpetual 15-year-old, and his trials at school and at home. Are the anxieties of a 15-year-old, hormones and social changes aside, really that much different than those of a 4-year-old?

My oldest started pre-K this last year. Before that, he attended a private pre-school a few days a week. At the pre-school, a small handful of kids was easy to report on. The teachers, with a sincere stroke of dedication and delight, wrote home every day of the progress of their miniscule brood of 3- and 4-year-olds. At the end of every day I would revel in reading hand-written reports, however brief, of how my son enjoyed playing on the playground or making play-dough. The manageable homespun play-dough sessions have multiplied into choreographed group lessons deftly coordinated by qualified, specialized early education instructors and teams of administrators, boards and paraprofessionals.

I now tell my wife, with feigned reassurance, that no news is good news. We get two parent-teacher conferences a year, to report on mental progress so rapid it can only be likened to the passage of a bullet train to a strolling country peasant – two reports from qualified professionals who spend more waking time with my child in a week than I. And sadly, despite my greatest agonies and efforts, these reports will be the only ones I receive, since my son really isn't much help.

As an editor and parent, I've read a considerable share of parenting tips and tricks from psychologists and others concerned with child rearing. As often happens, an element of an article I was editing stuck with me

as particularly sensible advice, advice I continue to test with unimpressive results. This psychologist-writer was tackling the mysterious life of our children outside our sphere of influence. The doctor urged parents to ask more directed questions than "How was your day?" of the child. By asking our children who they played with, who they sat next to, or what pictures they drew – targeted questions – we increase the likelihood of eliciting more detailed responses. This doctor clearly did not have my child in mind.

For all my targeted questions, the answers are undoubtedly and consistently, "I don't know." So, at a loss, my wife and I agonize over our child's progress with an occasional reassuring reference to seasons, or dinosaurs or feelings – all subjects of pre-K study. We wonder what he eats when the menu consists of cereal with chocolate milk, "super donuts" and corn dogs. Does he have classroom friends? Is he acting out or misbehaving? Does he spend much time in time-out or is he the adequate angel he is for us at home? Parents of his friends suffer the same anxieties. And none of us think this mystery will be solved any time soon – or ever.

So we trust in our education professionals to report on any serious issues and we rely upon our instincts to feel our way through childhood and adolescence. The funnies change, not so much because of the characters, but because we begin reading them through glasses and eventually bifocals. And somehow, not knowing what goes on through the course of my child's day, this nagging

desire to hide, one time, in the lunchroom or behind the classroom bookcase to ease my mind knowing that I have taught my kids healthy habits, respectability and the ability to distinguish right from wrong just isn't very funny. Or is it? ■

Dan Downey is the father of three splendid boys. He writes in Jackson County and strives to be an exemplar of good sense and good nature.

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