

Handy suggestions for creating and maintaining positive parent/teacher relationships.

## Parent/Teacher Relations

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*Editors Note: The suggestions that follow are geared toward parents of students with behavior problems, but can be modified for any type of student.*

### Lack of Parent Involvement

The parent who never shows up for a meeting, can't be reached by phone, and returns few if any written notes has clearly given up. It might be too late, but just in case it isn't, be persistent. Continue to make phone calls. Write notes for the child to take home. Send a weekly or monthly postcard through the mail. Be positive! This parent can't take any more bad news about the child's behavior. Find something good to say. Write, "Joe has a beautiful smile. It really brightens my day." You don't have to add that he only smiled once in a week full of cursing, vandalizing, and fighting. Or, "Mark's handwriting is really improving." Don't include the fact that you haven't finished counting the number of items he has defaced with profane language while practicing his handwriting. If the parent never shows signs of taking an interest, it is sad for the child. This is even more reason for the teacher to provide a nurturing as well as disciplined classroom. The child can benefit from the care and teaching he or she receives at school. Helping the child learn to function in society as a whole no matter what the rules at home might be is a must.

### Bridging the Gap

Some parents have conquered a great deal in their own lives and have a deep understanding of their child's needs. These parents are doing well. They know how to care for their child in helpful ways. But they are tired and sometimes discouraged. Living with a child who has an emotional or behavioral disorder is exhausting. These parents need encouragement and occasional support in the form of information about behavior management, child care opportunities, and other community support services. It is generally extremely satisfying to work with such parents.

One of the most valuable things teachers can do for these parents is to help them learn to apply behavior management techniques at home. Give the parents a few basic rules to follow, then help them brainstorm ideas based on the rules. The rules I give parents are as follows:

- Select no more than two behaviors to work on at a time.
- Select observable, enforceable behaviors to correct. For example, "Put all personal belongings in their correct places when not in use," instead of, "Be neater."
- Have a hierarchy of rewards and punishments. Use rewards when at all possible.
- Make sure rewards and punishments relate to the behavior. Having a child scrub the entire driveway for pouring tempera paint down one side of it makes more sense than sending the child to bed early. Likewise, a reward in the form of one new color of paint

per week for appropriate use of the paint makes more sense than giving the child a candy bar

- Do not demand immediate mastery. If the child has been screaming for 5 hours per day, start out by rewarding the child for reducing this to 4 or less hours of screaming per day.
- Have a plan to follow. The child will probably increase the inappropriate behavior in the beginning just to see whether the parents are really serious. Stick to the plan for at least 2 to 3 weeks.
- The plan will work best if all members of the family participate in helping the child learn the new behavior.
- Base all rewards and punishments on known likes and dislikes of the child.
- Be as matter of fact about the plan as possible when sharing it with the child.