

**TOOL
11**

12 Parent Advocacy Secrets

Check off the advocacy strategies you plan to use to work with your child's teacher this year.

- Start early in the school year.** Set up a meeting in the first few weeks of school to sit down with the teacher, even if just to chat and get to know her classroom rules. Starting the relationship early helps to address potential problems and identify difficulties before they become disasters.
- Ask what you can do at home to help your child grow academically and socially.** Let the teacher know what you are focusing on at home, so she can contribute ideas. Learn to work together.
- Help the teacher see your child as an individual.** Tell her about his strengths, potential behavior issues, learning challenges, and health conditions. If there are changes in family circumstances, such as a death in the family during the school year, let the teacher know, as these can adversely affect his behavior.
- Let go of past bad experiences.** Not every teacher is created equal. You might have had difficulties in the past with other teachers. It is best to put this aside as you try to work with this year's teacher.
- Get involved.** Join the parent organization, volunteer to help in the classroom, add your name to be a chaperone on field trips, attend school functions. When you are involved, you not only have the chance to observe how your child behaves, you have the opportunity for positive interactions with your child's teacher.
- Reach out in good times and bad.** If you contact your child's teacher only when he is doing poorly or acting out, you might have a more negative view of the teacher, or your interactions might be defensive. Instead, when your child says something nice about his school day or about his teacher, take time to send her a note of appreciation.
- Respect the teacher's time.** Keep in mind that the teacher has many students, and cannot stop everything to talk when you want. During your early conversations, discuss the best ways to communicate that will allow regular discussions but not interfere with her ability to attend to the rest of the class. Explain the best ways to reach you.
- Document communication with the teacher.** Write down the date of the communication, what you discussed, and the resolution. This helps you keep track of what steps you should take and what you expect the teacher to do.
- Have a clear objective in mind before talking to the teacher.** Think about your concerns before reaching out. You might say, "I'm concerned about Elana's poor math grades. I'd like to set up a time to talk about steps we can both take to make sure she doesn't fall behind."
- Be specific when making requests.** If you are asking for the teacher's assistance, instead of saying, "Jeremy needs help gathering materials to bring home," and expecting the teacher to assist him, say, "I am concerned because Jeremy often shows up at home without the materials to do his homework. Can you work with Jeremy each afternoon to make sure he has everything with him?" Clear expectations prevent misunderstandings.
- Avoid criticizing the teacher.** Whether in person, over the phone, or through email, always pay attention to the words you use when talking to the teacher. Criticizing is the quickest way to make a teacher feel defensive.
- Focus on solutions rather than problems.** Keep your conversation solution-centered, rather than focusing on how your child misbehaved, treated others disrespectfully, or is having learning challenges.