

Tips for Parents by Susie Kohl

Five Things Your Child's Teachers Want to Know

ONCE UPON A TIME, teachers lived in the same community as their students and knew a lot about their lives. They were aware when out-of-town relatives were visiting, and when someone in the family was sick, the teacher, who was also a neighbor, might bring chicken soup. However, today teachers often live in different cities from their students, and they are dependent on communication from parents to help create a full and up-to-date picture of children's lives.

Parents often don't realize how eager teachers are to hear about anything that might affect a child in positive or challenging ways. For example, it's discouraging when a teacher who has been struggling to understand why a child has been breaking into tears hears after the fact that his father was away travelling. Here are the top five categories of things teachers need to know, especially during times of change.

1. What's going on at home?

Are grandparents visiting? Does having visitors help? Does it change your routine?

Is your child getting enough sleep?

Are you and your partner arguing or separating?

Do you get regular time with your child? What do you enjoy doing?

Are you renovating your house or moving to a new one? Are you planting a new garden?

Does your child do chores? Does he have a behavior chart?

2. How's your work going?

Do you have an exciting new job? Are you temporarily out of work?

Are you working longer hours? Do you have an out-of-town trip planned?

3. Does your child have a new endeavor?

Is she taking swimming or riding lessons after school?

Have you started him in math tutoring, or are you doing workbooks every day?

Does he have a new interest?

Is he reading new books?

4. What techniques do you use to manage behavior at home?

Is your child acting out more at home? How are you responding?

5. How does your child feel about school?

Is she worried about friendships? Academics?

In many cases, these questions are just starting points for a conversation between a teacher and a parent. One parent commented about a conference recently, "Talking together helped us realize issues we weren't aware of. We didn't understand that he was getting so much negative attention, and we were able to make positive changes and see immediate results." One of the child's teachers said she had never seen such a transformation.

Although teachers welcome all forms of communication, a conference can yield the most productive results because it allows for collaboration and generates new ideas.

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