

How to Resolve Problems or Concerns at School

As a parent you have a vested interest in what happens in your school. This means that you have a responsibility to act on those things which concern you.

It has become more common over the past few years for parents to raise concerns about their children's schooling. One way in which you can strengthen the home/school relationship is to discuss with your child's classroom teacher any problems or concerns you may have about the learning program. Hearing a problem or concern is not much fun for a teacher but in the long run it is much better than not hearing it. At the very least it gives the teacher a chance to respond and, if necessary, work with you to resolve it.

What is the most constructive way to raise concerns or problems?

Step 1: Get a grasp of the problem

Before you visit the school, think carefully and work out what is really bothering you. Concentrate on describing the problem clearly and gathering supporting detail. This will help you to decide whether or not an approach to the school is warranted. The teacher's co-operation will be most readily available when your facts are correct and you show your willingness to be part of the solution. Besides, shooting from the hip encourages defensiveness.

Step 2: Arrange an interview

Your problems deserve more than a few hurried words with the teacher before the bell goes, so make an appointment for a time when you will be relatively free of constraints. Mentioning the reason for the appointment is not only courteous but also promotes efficient use of valuable time by giving the teacher an opportunity to prepare for the meeting in the same way that you have.

Step 3: Discuss what's bothering you

To encourage the teacher's active involvement, the following suggestions will help you keep on the right track:

Don't leave the teacher guessing. Observe social niceties by all means but remember the real purpose of your visit. A friendly, relaxed but businesslike manner will work best.

State your problem calmly and clearly.

Show that you want to be part of the solution by expressing your concern and asking what can be done.

Avoid intimidating behaviour such as shouting, aggressive body language, sexist or racist language, making threats, etc.

Work at staying calm and objective. This can be hard to do when the welfare of your child is involved but losing your temper does nothing to develop

co-operation and creative problem solving.

Listen at least as much as you talk. You might learn something new.

Keep an open mind.

Expect to compromise.

Summarise agreed actions. This helps to ensure that you and the teacher understand the important points in the same way.

Arrange a follow up meeting if necessary.

Step 4: Carry out the action you agreed to take on

This depends on what was discussed and agreed to at the meeting. The sooner you start on an agreed course of action the better. Be patient with your child and the classroom teacher – changes don't happen overnight.

Most meetings with classroom teachers result in satisfactory outcomes.

Occasionally you may want to address your problems or concerns to someone other than the classroom teacher. This may be the case when:

you have already approached the classroom teacher but no satisfactory resolution could be arrived at;

you believe that a higher authority must be consulted in the first instance;

your problem or concern is something other than what happens specifically in the classroom eg. an aspect of school policy, or

your problem or concern is about a member of the school's non-teaching staff.

The steps recommended for meetings with class teachers apply in each of these situation. Some additional suggestions are:

Involve as few people as possible. Involving more people does not guarantee a quality solution and sometimes works against it.

Try to get the problem resolved at the lowest possible level of authority.

Use existing lines of authority if you need to take your problem or concern beyond the school principal.

Avoid discussing the issue with others while your child is present in order to protect her/him from any emotional backlash.

Aim for a co-operative, problem solving approach. This does not mean that you should minimise the importance of your problem or concern or be less tenacious in your efforts to do something about it. You can be determined and reasonable at the same time.

Using these avenues will help you to resolve most of your school-based problems and concerns in a satisfactory way.

School Problems