

Making Teachers Your Allies

--Cynthia Ulrich Tobias, M.Ed



With the input of dozens of my trusted colleagues who are classroom teachers of all grades, here are some practical and effective strategies for communicating with your child's teachers:



- **Presume the best and treat the teacher as an expert.** Be positive and upbeat in your attitude and approach.
- If you want to make sure the teacher knows about learning styles, you can avoid getting a defensive response by simply letting the teacher know what you have read, and **asking for his or her opinion**. (Perhaps even ask if you can loan the teacher a copy of *The Way They Learn* so the teacher can give you some ideas for further reading.)
- When discussing your child, **start many of your questions with the same four words**: "*What can I do?*" For example, "Jane's learning style is very different from your teaching style. I think it's great that she is learning how to deal with lots of different approaches. I'm wondering, though, *what can I do* to help her understand the way you teach? *What can I do* at home that might help her succeed better in your classroom?" Let the teacher know you and your child are taking the responsibility for learning and coping with the classroom demands.
- Recognize that there are very practical limitations on what the teacher can do for your child. **Try to make it as easy as possible for the teacher to accommodate your child's learning style** while still meeting bottom-line outcomes. For example, if you have discovered that your child needs to follow a certain system for recording and keeping track of homework, you go ahead and make up the necessary assignment sheets so that the teacher would only need to fill in a couple blanks and sign the bottom.
- Know that **teachers become more aware of active and interested parents**. A teacher will often make an extra effort to watch out for that parent's child—not because of favoritism, but out of a heightened sense of awareness and personal appreciation for the child.
- **Make contact with the teacher under ordinary as well as extraordinary circumstances**. If you only show up under negative circumstances, it can put the teacher on "red alert" when you contact them and can trigger a defensive response.
- **Don't rely solely on the information you get from your child about a particular teacher**, since each person sees the world from his or her own perspective. Naturally, your personal loyalty rests with your child, but do your best to look at the situation objectively before talking to the teacher.
- **Do your best to avoid phoning the teacher right after school**. There are many details demanding the teacher's attention and it may have already been a hectic or exhausting day. If possible, call or email in the morning, leaving the message that you would like to hear from the teacher at his or her earliest convenience.





- **Whenever possible, start and end your communications with the teacher on a positive note.** Look for the best in the situation and build on strengths as you find them. For example, can you tell that the teacher is genuinely concerned? Reinforce that by mentioning how much you appreciate that concern in the first place.



- **When you're communicating with the teacher, keep your child in the loop as much as possible.** Discuss your conversations with the teacher honestly and positively. Don't make them a secret, or your child may feel like you and the teacher are teaming up against him. Emphasize the positive aspects that both you and your teacher discussed about your child. Talk about how to use those strengths to overcome areas of possible weakness or limitation.

- **Remember, every teacher is a lesson in learning for your child.** The more variety he or she experiences in the classroom, the more opportunities your child will have to discover and develop natural style strengths and to use them to cope with uncomfortable style demands. Instead of resenting a different teaching approach, do your best to help your child understand and value a variety of methods. By helping children discover and appreciate their teachers' unique styles, you can be preparing them to face a world of differences with the confidence of knowing they can use their strengths to cope with almost anything!



Adapted from *Every Child Can Succeed: Making the Most of Your Child's Learning Style*, by Cynthia Ulrich Tobias, published by Focus on the Family.

