

**A Parent's Guide
to
Dealing More Productively With Your Child's School**

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All too often the first personal contact a parent has with personnel at their child's school is when a problem has arisen – usually academic or disciplinary. Before that occurs . . .

Be proactive by becoming involved in the school where your child attends. Join the parent organization, attend the Fall Open House and participate in Parent/Teacher Conferences. Communicate with school personnel and become familiar with the people who work with your child daily before a problem arises. School personnel relish interested parents.

In order to help your child academically please consider the following suggestions.

1. Be certain your child eats right and gets the proper amount of rest and exercise.
2. Be supportive at home by valuing education. Today, unless your child wins the lottery, becomes a Hollywood star or can play ball well enough to make the big-leagues, education is the most practical and dependable way to earn an adequate and productive living as an adult. With the rising cost of higher education, success in public school can mean scholarship money for college. Not every person, however, wishes to attend a four-year university. Productive and Respectable careers can be learned in one of Florida's many Community Colleges or even in our high schools. <http://ctebrevard.com>
3. Help your child with his or her homework. Most teachers give homework, so if your child indicates that none was given, you might want to check on it. Show an interest in your child's work by asking to review it.
4. Have books in your home which are at your child's reading level and limit the amount of computer game playing and television watching. Help your child with reading and numbers especially in the early years. Children who begin school ahead of the others, often stay ahead.
5. If your child receives a poor grade on a homework assignment or weekly test, speak immediately to your child and contact the teacher to arrange a personal conference so that you may learn first hand what your child must do to improve. Don't wait for the end of the grading period or the semi-annual Parent/Teacher Conferences. Call immediately! Your child's teacher wants to hear from you and values your interaction. Educators lament disinterested parents.
6. You are allowed to see your child's educational records and nobody else, other than appropriate school personnel, is so allowed. If you believe that your

child's educational records are in error, the school must have a procedure by which you may challenge those records and, if they are erroneous, have them corrected.

7. Students with special needs must be accommodated by the school district. There are strict State and Federal laws which dictate the school services which must be provided and the school district is required to advise you of your child's rights in a language which you can understand.

In order to help your child in a disciplinary action please consider the following suggestions.

1. Most children get into varying degrees of trouble at some time or other. **IT DOES NOT MEAN THEY HAVE BAD PARENTS!**

2. A school disciplinary action is designed to be a learning experience. If you work with the school officials to that end, your child will gain positively from the experience. On the other hand, if you choose to fight the school officials and undermine the school to your child, he or she will learn only that "my parent will get me out of trouble." Try telling that to the judge when your child is an adult. Relatively speaking, the discipline meted out by school officials is minor compared to that which is imposed upon adults when they break the law. Your child does not need you to be a pal. Your child needs you to be a parent!

3. Be aware of who your child's friends are. Insist that your child be home at an agreed time and always know where your child is even is he or she is a high school senior. This suggestion relates back to the previous discussion of homework.

4. Each school has a student handbook which is made available to all students and parents. In that handbook are many of the rules of student conduct and the respective consequences for violation of those rules. Be certain you have a current copy of that handbook and know its contents. If a student infraction is addressed in that handbook, the school officials are bound to follow their own rules.

5. Other than minor corrections administered by the teacher in the classroom, most student discipline is meted out by the school Assistant Principal(s) or school Dean(s). These professionals are not unpleasant people, but sometimes they have an unpleasant job. Know your rights and those of your child. If you are in doubt, ask the Assistant Principal or Dean. They are bound by law to explain them to you in a language you can understand.

Following are some commonly imposed consequences for violation of school rules.

A. A “Saturday School” is a common consequence usually for first offenders or for somewhat minor infractions. It involves your child attending a detention usually on Saturday morning and, normally, you are responsible for your child’s transportation. Your child and you have a right to know why it was imposed (in a language you can understand) and your child has a right to give his or her side of the story. Students who fail to attend an imposed “Saturday School” usually then receive a “Suspension.”

B. A “Suspension” is the denial of the right to attend school from one to ten days, depending on the infraction. It is imposed for repeat offenders or for more serious infractions. You and your child have a right to know why it was imposed, hear a summary of the school official’s evidence (in a language you can understand), and your child has a right to give his or her side of the story.

C. An “Expulsion” is the denial of the right to attend school for the remainder of the semester, the school year, or even the school year and all of the next school year. It is the most serious punishment the school may impose and requires a very lengthy procedure to protect the rights of your child. It culminates with the school board which must make the final decision. **This is another reason to make certain that serious and knowledgeable people serve on your school board.**

When Conflict Arises

Remember that discipline is a learning situation for your child. It is better to learn lessons the easy way early in life rather than the hard way later. To that end:

Be open minded and sensitive to the knowledge and responsibility of the school personnel.

Although it is often difficult, try not to become defensive but stay focused on the issues and helping your child learn.

School personnel are not allowed to speak to you concerning other students and/or the punishment they received, even if those children were involved in the same situation as your child.

Look for options within the student handbook which are relevant and appropriate to the situation. If the situation is addressed by the student handbook, the school personnel must follow their own rules.

Remember that children and teenagers can be very creative and often will “spin” the situation to their favor when giving you their side of the story.

“If you believe only half of what your child tells you happens at school, we will believe only half of what your child tells us happens at home.”

*School principal to a group of parents -
circa 1940.*