



Where Excellence Is Tradition

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High levels of communication key to strong parent/teacher partnership

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High levels of communication foster a positive parent/teacher relationship, which contributes to a student's success. But how much contact and interaction is appropriate? When can active parent engagement interfere with a young adult's necessary maturation and strides toward independence? At what point does a parent go from providing valued hands-on support to becoming an obstacle to a student's growth?

Sara Mosle, a teacher and journalist, addresses this issue in a recent piece in the New York Times. She offers the following practical guidelines for how best to reduce the mutual anxieties and establish the kind of trust that is essential to respectful and productive parent/teacher communications.

1. Parents should encourage their teen-ager to take the lead in solving a problem. Give them space to be proactive and exhibit initiative in sorting out their issues.
2. Know the limitations of electronic communications. Misunderstandings and conflicts often can escalate when using e-mail in ways they never would when communicating face to face. Unless conveying general information, parents should initiate a phone call or schedule a meeting.
3. When using e-mail, don't copy the school's administrator. It can be disrespectful by seemingly sending the message that you are not confident that the problem can be addressed and solved.
4. Both humility and transparency are important. This includes acknowledging when a mistake is made, for both the parent and teacher. Sincerity and honesty will prevent defensiveness and pave the way for understanding and collaboration.
5. Work to identify and build on strengths. Focusing on what the parent, child or teacher is doing right is a key beginning point. When an individual's strengths are acknowledged and valued, we are better positioned and equipped to focus on the challenges and improvement that is needed.
6. Focus on identifying concrete solutions. Mutually identifying specific desired outcomes will keep the focus positive and objective.

Being aware of these key strategies will strengthen parent/teacher communication and help maintain a strong partnership.

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