

Communicating with Schools



**ADULT & CHILD
THERAPEUTIC FOSTER CARE LICENSING
PROGRAM**

Build Good Relationships



- **Establish contact early and often.**
 - Consider dropping a friendly note or making an appointment with the teacher early in the year just to touch base.
 - Don't wait for an issue to emerge to introduce yourself to your child's teacher.
 - ✦ Raising a concern will be easier and less confrontational if open communication has already been established.
 - Make it clear that you want the teacher to contact you if any problems develop with your child.

Build Good Relationships



- Let the teacher know you want to help your child learn & tell the teacher what he/she needs to know about your child.
 - ✦ You have important knowledge about your child's likes, dislikes, needs, and problems.
 - It may be your child learns better when he/she sits close to the teacher. Maybe there was a death in the family and your child is having trouble concentrating. If your child has special needs, make these known from the beginning.
 - ✦ If you notice a big change in your child's behavior, school performance or attitude during the school year, contact the teacher immediately.
- Determine the best means of communication
 - ✦ Exchange email addresses and/or phone numbers
 - ✦ Sign up for access to SIS, school-related newsletters, social media blasts, etc.

Get Involved



- **Learn what the school offers.**
 - Read the information the school sends home, and ask to receive information in your native language if necessary.
 - Talk to other parents to find out what programs the school offers. Maybe there's a music program, after-school activity, sports team, or tutoring program your child would enjoy. Remember to keep track of events throughout the school year.

Get Involved



- **Volunteer at your child's school and/or join your school's parent-teacher group.**
 - Teachers appreciate it when parents help out at the school! There are many ways you can contribute.
 - You can volunteer in your child's class or in the school library.
 - ✦ Offering to chaperone a class trip will also help you get to know the teacher better, as well as allow you to observe your child firsthand.
 - If you work during the day, you can attend "parents' night" activities or your child's performances.
 - At most schools, a group of parents meets regularly to talk about the school.
 - ✦ This group is usually called the PTA or PTO. The meetings give you a good chance to talk with other parents and to work together to improve the school.

Be Supportive

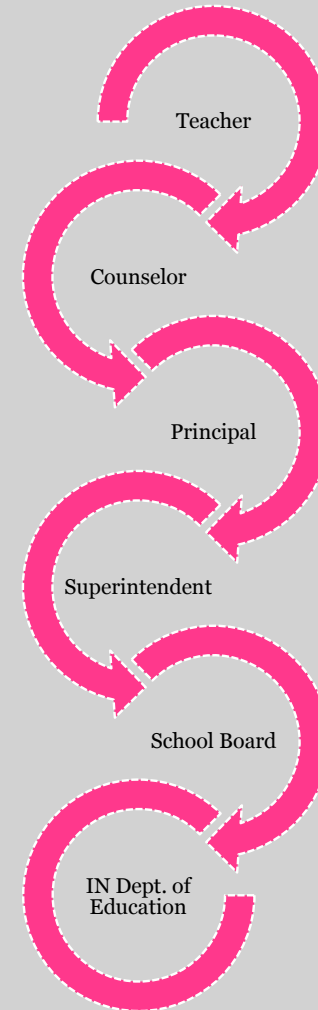


- Find out how your child is doing and stay informed during the year.
 - Ask the teacher how well your child is doing in class compared to other students. If your child is not keeping up, **ask what you can do to help**.
 - It's important to act early before your child gets too far behind.
 - ✦ Parent-teacher conferences, benchmark reports, and report cards offer some indications of how well your child is doing in school.
 - Be sure to review all paperwork that is sent home from the school.
 - ✦ You also need to know how things are going between these updates.
 - Use the SIS to stay informed on progress, assignments, tests, etc.
 - For example, if your child is having trouble in math, contact the teacher to find out when the next math test will be. This allows you to address a problem before it mushrooms into something bigger.

Follow the Hierarchy



- **Begin with the teacher.**
 - In most cases, an informal chat with the classroom teacher should be the first step in addressing any issue.
 - Starting with the teacher gives you the opportunity to escalate your complaint should a suitable solution not be reached.
 - Use your power wisely.
- **Get to know who's who at your child's school – each school is different.**
 - There are many people at your child's school who are there to help your child learn, grow socially and emotionally, and navigate the school environment.



Document



- Document things as they happen.
- If a problem occurs, gather the details.
 - Document what your child has done, said, or read.
 - Perhaps your child is struggling with a subject that used to come easily, or maybe he/she has voiced concerns about being teased. It makes sense to act when you observe an issue or your child tells you something's wrong.
 - Trust your own judgment and move forward, but also make sure you have all the information available.
- Keep a running record of communications.
 - Document all your communications, both to be on the same page about expectations and so you'll know **who** told you **what** and **when**.
 - If you move beyond the casual chat level, express concerns in writing. Keep a **copy**, and send the letter by certified mail.

Communicate Effectively



- Be considerate of others' time.
 - Make an appointment rather than dropping in.
 - Be punctual and give advanced notice if you are unable to attend a meeting.
- Plan what you're going to say. Choose your words carefully. Try to start with something positive.
- Build a partnership and negotiate solutions. Work as a team.
- Be diplomatic, tactful, and respectful.
 - Avoid the blame game.
 - ✦ Mixing an important issue that concerns your child with busy teachers and school administrators can make for potentially frustrating feelings. For best results, try to keep your cool.

Communicate Effectively



- Focus on what your child needs.
 - If educational jargon has left your head spinning, feel free to ask for clarification.
 - ✦ Even though you may have to be persistent, keep in mind that ultimately everyone involved wants what's best for your child. Don't assume the worst.
- Bring along your sense of humor.
- Listen.
- Summarize what you have discussed and a timeline. Plan a follow-up meeting or means of communication.

Maintain Composure



- Recognize, monitor, and respond appropriately to your emotions.
 - Grief
 - ✦ Denial, Minimization, Victimization
 - ✦ Anger
 - Defensiveness
 - ✦ Fear
 - Overprotectiveness
 - Intimidated, Transference
 - ✦ Sadness
 - Guilt, Inadequacy
 - Regret
 - Helplessness, Hopelessness

Be Informed



- Ask questions.
 - If something concerns you about your child's learning or behavior, ask the teacher about it and seek their advice.
 - ✦ Your questions may be like these — Is my child doing well in school? What specific problem is my child having with reading? What can I do to help my child with this problem? How can I get my child to do homework? Is he or she having trouble learning, behaving, or studying? Is there a problem with another student, teacher, or administrator?

Be Informed



- **Learn about and know your rights.**
 - Most issues have a good chance of being addressed to everyone's satisfaction within your school community, but if you are unable to get to the resolution you need, legal means are available.
 - ✦ If your child's disability affects his educational performance, you have the right under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) to have your child tested to determine his special education eligibility.
 - ✦ You can also request mediation or a "fair hearing."
 - Mediation brings you and the school district together with a neutral third party who is trained to help everyone come to an agreement.
 - At a fair hearing, you and the school district present the dispute and a judge issues a decision.

Connect with Others



- Identify and use your resources.
 - Within the school
 - ✦ Teachers (Teacher of Service, Teacher of Record)
 - ✦ Student Services - Guidance Counselor, Social Worker, Parent Liaison
 - ✦ Administration - Dean of Students, Assistant Principal, Principal
 - Adult & Child
 - ✦ Caseworkers – Specialists, Therapists, Case Managers, etc.
 - ✦ Tracie Mansfield - tmansfield@adultandchild.org, 317-635-3306 (work), 317-800-9871 (cell)
 - DCS
 - Local PTA to connect with other parents
 - Department of Education www.in.doe.gov

Sources



- Be Your Child's Advocate
<http://www.scholastic.com/parents/resources/article/parent-teacher-partnerships/be-your-childs-advocate>
- Tips for Talking With Teachers
<http://www.uaex.edu/publications/pdf/FSFCS207.pdf>
- Twenty Ways to Help Your Child Succeed in School
<http://www.colorincolorado.org/article/twenty-ways-you-can-help-your-children-succeed-school>
- Special Education Advocacy
<http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/advo.index.htm>
- Understanding Common Education Terms
<http://www.schoolfamily.com/school-family-articles/article/10775-understanding-common-education-terms>