

How to Deal With a Difficult Teacher

Kids can be tough critics. Their teachers are either too hard or too easy, too mean or too nice, too hands-on or too hands-off. If your child is clashing with his teacher, your approach can go a long way toward resolving the issue. Follow these steps to help make the school year bearable—for you and your child:



- **Get involved.** Volunteering in your child's classroom or chaperoning a field trip can give you front-row seats to see what's really going on. Attend parent-teacher meetings and use every opportunity to build a positive relationship with the teacher before you start in with the complaints.
- **Be a role model.** No matter how frustrated you feel while dealing with a difficult teacher, keep your cool and act with maturity. "Development in childhood is a time when the youth learns to cope with dealing with difficult people by learning how to communicate effectively about their feelings," says Lisa Bahar, a professional clinical counselor and family therapist. "This starts with modeling by the parents or primary caregivers." The way you deal with this conflict will show your child the correct way to approach a conflict with an authority figure.
- **Don't play the savior.** It's tempting to save the day, but becoming a superhero isn't good for your child's development. Try to step back and give him some space to deal with the situation on his own. If he can't improve his relationship with his teacher, then you'll know for sure that he needs your help.
- **Take your child's side ... at first.** When your child first approaches you with a problem, listen and be sympathetic. Let him tell his side of the story. It's the best way to get the most information out of your child. You can ask questions to find out more about the situation later.
- **Define the problem.** When your child complains about a teacher, take time to figure out exactly what he's saying. For example, if your child says "She's doesn't like me," it might really mean something more specific, like "She gets frustrated when I'm spacing out." The problem could be something you never would have imagined. Maybe your child thinks he is brighter than the teacher and challenges her on everything under the sun, or maybe he's struggling in the subject and is taking the easy way out by blaming the teacher.
- **Hear the teacher out.** Contacting the teacher for the first time can be awkward. Approach the conversation with the mentality that you are just trying to understand the situation and would like to make it workable for both the teacher and your child. Be respectful of her point of view, and then focus together on what your child needs in the classroom. Avoid personal criticism at all costs.
- **Make a game plan.** "The goal here is to give the child the space to explore feelings about what is happening and how they see the problem, and then learn how to help find solutions or ideas on how to survive the situation," says Bahar. That might mean helping your child come up with a way to share his concerns with the teacher. Alternatively, it may mean setting up a meeting with the teacher yourself, but consider including your child in the meeting so that both sides feel understood.
- **Keep it in perspective.** Your child probably feels like the teacher is ruining his life. As a parent, your job is to help bring him back down to earth. "Remind your child that his time in this difficult teacher's classroom is limited," says Suzanne Raga, author of *You Rock! How to Be a Star Student and Still Have Fun*. "Once the school year is over, their child will probably never have to see the teacher again. There is an end in sight!"
- **Focus on academics.** Acknowledge that your child may never like this teacher, but ensure that he understands that he is still accountable for his own actions. "Emphasize the importance of being cordial in the classroom and turning in quality homework," says Raga. "A teacher may not be your child's favorite teacher, but consistently being a great student and acting respectfully toward teachers and peers will go a long way."
- **View it as a life lesson.** Your child's interactions with this teacher, as much as he may not enjoy them, are learning opportunities. Raga emphasizes that you should point out to your child that there will be other people in his life who have a different personality, temperament or communication style, and he will have to learn how to deal with them respectfully. Bahar says that in the long run, your child will be better able to manage his emotions and deal with interpersonal relationships.
- **Climb up the hierarchy.** If the problem is causing your child to dread school or hate learning, you may need to go further than a meeting with the teacher. Find out the school's policy about parent-teacher disagreements, such as whether you will need to file a formal complaint. You may need to speak with the school's principal, or possibly even the superintendent, to get your child's needs addressed. If your child is truly suffering, you may want to consider homeschooling for a period of time while the school goes through the process of addressing the complaint.
- **Keep records.** If there's a major concern about a single event between your child and a teacher, make sure to document the date, time and specifics of the event immediately. If other children were involved, speak to them and their parents, and document their stories as well.
- **Thank the teacher.** If you see that the teacher is making an effort, even if the problem isn't resolved, make sure to show appreciation. Take advantage of teacher appreciation day or holidays to give the teacher a tangible "Thank you" for taking the time to work with you and your child.

Nobody said school was easy on kids, teaching is even harder, and parenting is no piece of cake—but with empathy, understanding and cooperation, you can make things easier for everyone.