

A PARTNERSHIP WITH YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER AND SCHOOL

Strong partnerships between teachers and families create a shared vision for individual children's learning, academic achievement and wellbeing. Building rapport and trust, and working out how and when you will communicate, are important first steps in developing co-operative parent-teacher relationships that will make a positive and important difference to your child's success.

Building relationships is the foundation for parent - teacher collaboration. For parents and teachers to become partners in children's learning, rapport and trust must be developed. This takes some investment of time — between parents and teachers, and between parents and children — particularly if the relationship contains new or changing expectations.

As parents, taking the first steps on the road to building strong partnerships with your child's teachers and school can be hard. But every child deserves a quality education and, with some courage, you can make a big difference. According to some research, many teachers find it just as hard — they experience more anxiety about their relationships with parents than almost any other aspect of their work!

Why is this the case? In many situations, parents and school staff find themselves on a collision course because they come at issues from very different angles and therefore interpret them differently. Working through differences requires considerable understanding, goodwill and commitment. It is worth the effort because we all want the best possible outcomes for children.

Working in partnership can mean many things but the foundation of partnership is two-way communication. There must be respectful appreciation of the different knowledge parents and teachers have, and the mutually supportive roles they can play in children's formal schooling.

It is helpful for families to talk with teachers about things that are happening at school and at home that are impacting their children. These can be positive or negative.

It is especially helpful for relationship building, if teachers regularly contact families/carers to give helpful information and positive feedback, rather than waiting until there is an academic or behaviour issue. Trust typically builds when people get to know each other.

Shared Aims and Goals

Schools have different attitudes and approaches to building home-school partnerships. Some do it very well; others not so well. Even if partnerships are not a real part of the school's culture, you can work with your child's teachers to build 'mutually appreciative' relationships that will make a positive difference to your child's schooling experiences and outcomes.

Try building the relationship by really listening to each other. Talk to teachers about your aspirations for your child and your understanding of their interests and needs. Ask teachers about the curriculum, assessment, and their perception of your child as a learner. Talk with your child about what they are learning, their learning goals and their dreams for the future. Build a common understanding of your child's interests and needs, and what it means to be partners.

When you are listening, respond in ways that show respect and 'give and take' — give and take. Commit to take joint action in which you, your child and their teacher(s) co-operate to support your child's learning and wellbeing.



Keep it simple and 'doable'. You are busy, teachers are busy and your child needs to develop their independence as a learner.

Strategies will change as your child moves through school but your engagement in their learning is always important. Don't be afraid to discuss issues with teachers or school support staff if you or your child are struggling. External pressures can make it even more difficult for children to focus and concentrate in the school environment, including when their families/carers are stressed.

There are many different ways you can build connections to your child's learning and school, keeping in mind your family's circumstances and other life pressures. It can be helpful to:



- Ask your child about their day, acknowledge their efforts in learning tasks and look for ways to support or extend this learning at home.
- Talk with your child about their dreams for the future and your aspirations for them, without imposing your aspirations on them.
- Talk openly to the school about your child's interests and needs, and discuss how the school can support these, including in your family environment. Ask for confidentiality.
- Stay informed by attending information sessions and activities at the school or online.
- Take a look at the parent-friendly information sheets on the Australian Curriculum website (<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources-and-support/parent-information/information-sheets>).
- Keep in regular communication with your child's teachers and relevant school staff.
- Take an interest in your child's learning and assessment tasks but don't do their work for them.
- Look out for social opportunities where your family can build relationships with other families throughout the school year.
- Look out for opportunities to share your knowledge, ideas, experiences and contacts (e.g. volunteering, sharing culture, suggesting speakers and contacts from within your community and work networks).

Ways to Connect

These ideas can help to connect parents/carers, families and teachers:

- Learn each other's names and get to know each other.
- Share and show an interest in children's activities both at home and at school.
- Let each other know that you really do value each other's different roles and expertise.
- Acknowledge that you can learn from each other, and find opportunities to do this.
- As teachers, create invitations and opportunities for families to be involved in class, school and community activities in ways that suit their needs and circumstances.
- As parents/carers, recognise that you don't have to like or be an expert in a particular subject area to support your child's learning; just by taking an interest, you can encourage them to persist and solve their own 'problems'.
- Share experiences that might be affecting children's feelings, behaviour, learning and sense of security.
- Share strengths and difficulties with children's learning; work together to build on positives and address difficulties.
- Agree on best ways to communicate (e.g. face-to-face, email, telephone, text) and basic timeframes.
- Respect each other's differences and be committed to working together.
- Maintain confidentiality of information exchanged.
- Be respectful of schools policies and procedures.

For more information visit: www.austparents.edu.au