

Ten things teachers want parents to know

We've all heard the tales of pushy parents barging their way into school, to berate Sir or Miss over little Johnny's syllabus.

Or the Mums shoving burgers through the railings at lunch, to flout the head's healthy eating rules.

But while most of us would hope to behave rather better when it comes to dealings with our children's teachers: are we really giving the profession our full respect?

Top American teaching guru, Ron Clark points out: "Today, new teachers remain in our profession for an average of just four and a half years, and many of them list 'issues with parents' as one of their reasons for throwing in the towel."

Closer to home, Kevin Rooney, Head of Social Science at Queens School in Bushey, Herts, has insisted: "We need to let parents be parents and let teachers teach. A pressing issue is the loss of teacher autonomy in the classroom."

Whether it's outright hostility or a loss of respect, many teachers would say it's not just the pupils who need lessons in how to behave – and parents too might benefit from a few do's and don'ts.

So, to mark World Teachers' Day this Wednesday (5 October) we bring you the Top ten things teachers want parents to know:

1. Be involved

Yes, teachers do want parents to get actively involved. But that doesn't mean thinking you know better when it comes to curriculum decisions, or what marks to give your oh-so gifted offspring.

What it does mean is more than just turning up to parents' evenings. As one teaching website notes: "Parent involvement helps students learn, improves schools and helps teachers work with you to help your children succeed."

So keep communication lines open, checking in every so often to raise any questions you may have. If possible, volunteer to help occasionally – or ask the teachers if there is anything you can do at home.

2. Check up on your children

No, we don't mean follow them to school disguised in a bouffant and funny glasses. But do look at their timetables and go through their folders with them regularly – so they know you're on top of what they should be doing.

And read every letter and report that's sent home with your child. Which leads us to...

3. Be organised

You can't be expected to know about the letter you need to sign if it's crumpled in the bottom of Sophie's bag, among the empty yoghurt pots and broken bits of pencil. Establish a routine where your child clears out their bag nightly so you get any important letters and homework doesn't disappear into the black hole.

4. Homework's for kids

There's a fine line between helping and taking over. It's important to review your little one's homework, but if he or she gets an answer wrong don't just tell them the right answer – help them understand why.

Teachers on parentdish.co.uk note: "Homework is for children not parents - if it's really beyond their capabilities let the teacher know."

5. Let your child make mistakes.

Teachers don't want perfect students, they want students who try hard. Don't get caught up in thinking every assignment has to be perfect. It's important for teachers to see where a child is going wrong, so they can go over material again.

6. Don't leap on the defensive.

Remember, teachers are usually in the job because they want to teach – not because they're out to get you/your child.

So if you're told there is a problem with your child's behaviour, don't jump to their defence – listen to what the teacher has to say. As one quips: "Don't automatically believe everything your child tells you and, in turn, we won't believe everything they say about you!"

7. Don't talk negatively about a teacher in front of your child.

US teaching guru Ron Clark points out: "If your child knows you don't respect their teachers they won't either, and that will lead to a whole host of new problems."

8. Manners are important.

As one teacher on teachers' website educationworld.com points out: "As much as I treat all students equally, the child who remembers to say 'thank you', 'please', 'excuse me' is thought of more fondly."

9. If the teacher is doing something right, let them know.

Buck the trend and send an email or call when your child enjoys a class event, or says something nice about their tutor. It can make all the difference. And if you're really pleased, why not let the head know?

10. If they're doing something wrong, don't overreact.

If there's something you're not happy about, speak to the teacher first rather than going straight to the head/head of year.

As one teacher wryly says: "If you've got a problem, come and see me first, going straight to the head is just rude. Next time I have a problem with little Johnny and your parenting I'll ring your boss and see how you like it."