



MEDIATE FROM A DISTANCE If your child gets off to a bumpy start with a teacher, you might not need to intervene directly, Bailey says—older kids can work through some issues on their own. Listen as your child describes the problem, then suggest ways he can address it with the teacher one-on-one. For example, if he feels his math teacher is covering material too quickly, you could advise him to approach her after class and say: “Mrs. Lewis, I’m having a hard time keeping up with the trig lessons. Can you help me figure out a way to get up to speed?” Giving him the right language allows you to help without getting in the middle of things.

DON’T PLAY THE BLAME GAME Some classroom issues do warrant a speedy response on your part. For example, if your child complains that a teacher doled out detention unfairly, it makes sense to get in touch with the school right away (more on that below). But try to withhold judgment until you hear the whole story. Bailey suggests: “Open the conversation by saying, ‘Here’s what my child is telling me and how she’s acting at home. Can you tell me what’s going on in class?’” You might discover that your child omitted certain details—say, that she received detention after ignoring several requests to stop whispering with her friend. Once you have a fuller picture of the situation, you can move on to solutions. A measured approach shows your child that you value fairness and personal responsibility, and aren’t just angling to bail her out.

KNOW HOW TO GET IN TOUCH—AND HOW NOT TO If you have something you need to address with a teacher, find out how she likes to communicate, Bailey says. Some teachers place phone calls after

As kids grow older, it’s best for parents to play a supporting—not starring—role in the school environment.

hours; others respond to e-mails during free periods. Respecting her preferences will ensure your concerns are addressed as quickly as possible. And steer clear of the approach *no* teacher prefers: being ambushed with an impromptu parent-teacher conference before or after school. If you’d like to speak with a teacher in person, schedule a meeting in advance and let her know what you plan to discuss. This allows her to gather all the necessary information about your child and make the meeting more productive for everyone.

ACCEPT CAUSE AND EFFECT Do-overs for midterm exams. Weeklong extensions for book reports. *Extra* extra credit. When kids drop the ball on schoolwork, many parents respond by inundating teachers with special requests. But you’ll do more for your child by allowing her to face the consequences, Tate says. So if your daughter does poorly on a test, do some digging to find out what went wrong and help her make a plan for next time—say, to study smaller chunks of material over several days rather than cramming the night before. And let the original score stand. “Getting good grades is one thing,” Tate says. “Even better is earning them.” ■

Should your child change teachers?

At some point, your kid is bound to get an instructor he just doesn’t click with. Here’s how to tell whether a classroom move is in order.

Every kid in your child’s grade wants the fun teacher: the one who rewards hard work with cupcake parties. Your child ended up with the strict teacher: the one who rewards hard work with—more hard work.

Don’t be too quick to request a new instructor when your child doesn’t mesh perfectly with his assigned teacher, Post University’s education dean Jane Bailey says. Learning to get along with people of different

personalities is an important part of growing up. Plus, most schools create classes to reflect a balanced mix of needs and strengths, and they’re loath to recalibrate unless there’s a pressing reason.

Bailey cites these justifiable reasons:

- The teacher is not providing sufficient feedback to help your child grow and improve.
- The teacher has a pattern of being overly punitive.

- Your child has a learning challenge the teacher is unable to address. “Any time learning is negatively affected, a child should not have to stick it out in that class,” Bailey says.

If this describes your situation, and your attempts to remedy it with the teacher have been unsuccessful, make an appointment with the school’s head administrator to talk about making a switch.