

The following information is from Ron Clark's book, *The Excellent 11: Qualities Teachers and Parents Use to Motivate, Inspire and Educate Children*, and has been copied with permission from Ron Clark. (*The Excellent 11* and Ron Clark's *The Essential 55* are both in the TAPELS library).

How Parents Can Show Appreciation for Teachers

Teachers have the weight of the world on their shoulders. With all of the stress and pressure we experience it is greatly appreciated when parents go out of their way to be respectful, helpful, and positive.

- *Get both sides of the story.* About 90 percent of all problems between parents and teachers can be solved by giving each other a chance to tell their side of the story. Children will often give an account of what happened in a way that avoids placing any negative light on themselves, and this can lead to big misunderstandings. As a parent, it is hard not to believe every word your child says and to take his or her word for fact, but just remember that before becoming upset or displeased with a teacher you should give that individual the opportunity to tell the story from his perspective.

- *Be patient.* When I talk with my parents at the beginning of each year, I always ask them to be patient. I tell them how beginning a new school year with a new teacher and harder

standards is difficult for children. Often they will complain that the work is too hard, that they are given too much homework, or that the teacher isn't fair. Sometimes when they say they don't like a new teacher, it really translates to the fact that they don't like having to do harder work than they did the year before. Good teachers find ways to smooth over this transition, but I ask my parents to bear with me for the first few weeks and to take any complaints from their child with a grain of salt.

- *Avoid negativity in the home.* There are times when parents will be upset with their child's teacher. It happens all the time, and even the most veteran, capable, and respected teachers will have times when parents are unhappy for one reason or another. When this happens, I would ask that parents deal directly with the teacher and avoid speaking about the matter in a negative way in front of their children. If a parent shows disrespect for the teacher at home, the child will feel that he or she has the right to show the same disrespect for the teacher in the classroom.

- *Give an occasional token of gratitude.* I love food, and some parents have sent their child into school with a container of soup or various cakes and desserts. It's so thoughtful, and it energizes me to continue working hard. Parents have also sent cards thanking me for my efforts. Such displays of gratitude mean a lot and really give teachers a shot

in the arm. In our job, sometimes it is easy to become frustrated and depressed, and receiving such positive feedback from parents can really go a long way. Of course, I make sure to remain unbiased toward the child in the classroom. Parents shouldn't assume that being kind to the teacher will affect the child's treatment in class.

- *Contact teachers during appropriate times.* One of the most disrespectful things a parent can do is to show up at the classroom unexpected to have a discussion. I love to have parents visit the school, sit in during lessons, and talk with me about their child's performance. All of those things, however, should be scheduled. Teachers have enough on their plates, and when they are in the middle of a lesson they have worked extremely hard to prepare and all of the students are paying attention, it is distracting to have to go into the hall to talk with a parent who has shown up out of the blue.

- *Be a positive role model.* Whether on a field trip, volunteering, or just visiting the school, it is important for parents to realize that they are setting an example for all of the students. I once had a parent go on a field trip where we rode in a van for six hours. She sat in the passenger seat and talked to me using curse words the entire way. When she did so, she would lean over to me and say the expletives in a lower voice. The kids, however, could still hear every word. I was mortified. I had another parent show up to volunteer

wearing a T-shirt that said in huge letters, "Don't Piss me Off." Things like that can be frustrating, but it is also just as bad when a parent shows negativity or favoritism, or doesn't treat the students with respect.

- *Handle issues with the teacher before going to the principal.* I can't say enough about this. Not only is it disrespectful, but it also isn't fair when parents contact the principal before discussing an issue with the teacher. If an attempt is made to handle the matter with the teacher and no progress is made, then a parent is more than welcome to set up a meeting with administration.

How Teachers Can Show Appreciation for Parents

Developing a good relationship with your students' parents is crucial to having a successful school year. When the parents know that you respect them and want to work closely with them in order to help their child, they are far more willing to help you in any way possible, whether it be by baking cookies, volunteering for a field trip, helping with homework, or dealing with disciplinary issues.

- *Contact parents often.* The number one mistake that a teacher can make is not keeping in contact with the parents. I can remember doing my student teaching in an eleventh-

grade class. I was doing an assignment where I was supposed to familiarize myself with the student records, and I saw that Trent, the class clown who never paid much attention in school, had an IQ that was extremely high. I decided to call his mother to let her know I didn't feel he was living up to his potential in class. When I told her about the score on the test, she was shocked and said she never knew. She said I was the first high school teacher to ever even call the house and that my interest in the education of her son meant a lot to her. When Trent walked into the class the next day, he thanked me for the call and paid attention the entire lesson. He went on to have an A average for the entire time I was teaching, while he had only a D average previously.

That instance showed me a lot about the power of keeping in contact with parents, and I have made every attempt to keep the lines of communication open through cards, notes, phone calls, conferences, and home visits. Almost all parents will work with a teacher and bend over backward to help them if they are kept informed and notified about how their child is doing in class. This must be done, however, in a positive and respectful manner.

- *Give examples of ways they can help their child.* Parents always ask, "What can I do at home to help my child?" To make your life a lot easier, have an answer for them. I used to tell parents, "Just make sure he is reading or that you are reading with him each night." That was the main thing I

asked of parents, and of course, that is essential. I started to learn, however, that when I was more specific with parents they were willing to really help implement my suggestions. I started asking parents to ask six key questions as they read with their child. I put these questions on a card and sent them home with each book:

After reading the title, what do you think this book is going to be about?

Why do you think the author chose to include this illustration?

What predictions can you make about what will happen next?

How did the story make you feel?

What did you think of the way the book ended?

In what ways did you enjoy this book?

Just by giving parents this guideline, it let them know the importance of not only making sure their children are reading the books but also that they are discussing what they read and putting some thought into the author's decisions. I began to use that strategy in all subjects. When we were

doing fractions, I asked parents to buy flash cards and practice with their children. I soon started to notice sets of flash cards in kids' book bags, and when we went over fractions in class I could tell their parents had worked with them. When I would make copies of vocabulary worksheets, I would make five extra copies, and when parents wanted extra work, I would have them within arm's reach. I asked the parents to look over their child's writing each night to check for capitalization and spelling mistakes. I didn't want to just ask them to "check the grammar" because that can be too intimidating and overwhelming. Just checking the two items was reasonable. When I was in New York City and we were learning about dinosaurs, I sent home a letter encouraging parents to take their children to the Museum of Natural History. The following Monday a few students told me how they had seen each other there over the weekend. Not every parent is going to take a teacher's suggestions, but for those who will it is well worth it to give them guidelines of ways they can help.

There are so many things parents can do that have nothing to do with how much money they make, where they live, or how much education they received themselves. *Never assume that a parent won't give the effort.* What I have found is that parents will make the attempt if they are given specifics, and in the end that will take a lot of pressure and stress off the teacher and help the child be a lot more successful.

- *Thank parents for their help and support.* Parents can be extremely busy with work and the responsibilities of raising a family, and contributing to the school can really be time-consuming. When parents give their help, whether it be by tutoring in the class, making costumes for a play, or baking cupcakes, it is important to show them how much their efforts are appreciated. I would try to send notes home whenever possible, but usually because I was so busy I would only have time to give a call or thank the parents in person. The key is that in some way teachers let them know how much their help means to them and that their efforts are appreciated.

- *Remember the emotions involved with being a parent.* It is a difficult thing to turn your child over to someone else for seven hours a day. Parents put a great deal of trust in teachers, and when we teach their children we need to treat them with kindness and compassion just as we would like someone to treat our children. And when we talk with parents, we must find ways to discuss their child's progress in a way that is respectful and avoids being negative. It is also important to make sure that you are honest with parents. There is no need to blow smoke or try to dance around an issue. Parents appreciate the truth, but it should be told in a way that doesn't belittle or demean their child.