

Home and School¹

- It is important for parents to be aware that no matter how good an educational institution may be, the reality is that the institution will almost always focus on what is best for the majority of the students². Therefore, it is possible that the unique needs of an individual student will get lost in the shuffle, particularly when the needs of that individual are contradictory to the needs of the majority.
- Parents must therefore keep in mind at all times³ the unique nature and needs of their children and be prepared to advocate on their behalf⁴.
- Experience has shown that teachers will pay more attention to a child whose parents interact with them regularly regarding his progress than a parent that does not.
- Parents should compliment and express appreciation often to their child's teacher for the work he is doing with their child. It is wise to even present him with gifts.
- If you have reason to complain to a teacher about something he is or is not doing, preface your remarks with an ample dose of positive feedback.
- Always refer to your children's school and teachers with utmost respect in front of your children⁵.
- When a child comes home feeling that his teacher or the *hanhalah* treated him unfairly, it is important to validate the child's hurt feelings. However, it should be done in a way that does not undermine the teacher.
- The child can be told that according to the way he perceived the incident he is vindicated for feeling hurt and wronged, however explain to the child that it is quite possible that the teacher has a totally different perspective on the occurrence and from his vantage point he was actually correct in acting the way he did.
- In the above instance it is wise to contact the teacher to hear his version of the event. More times than not there was some misunderstanding on either side that can be easily resolved.
- In the event that the teacher acknowledges to the parent that he erred⁶, the parent

1. The *Torah* community in America over the past 60 years has superhumanly succeeded in developing a highly competent *Torah* educational system, successfully transmitting our rich *mesorah* of yesteryear to a new generation. The majority of *mechanchim* are wholly committed and experts in what they do and produce amazing results. What follows is not at all a criticism of the system or any individual school; rather it is an attempt at guiding parents on how best to interact with the system and how to properly fulfill their role as parents and as their child's advocate.
2. Institutions by definition are designed and configured (rightfully so) for the maximum benefit of the multitudes.
3. It is a grave mistake to entrust one's children to the system without being on guard to protect their particular interests.
4. Schools actually appreciate when parents are actively involved in the educational process of their children. (Obviously when parents act in an overly intrusive manner it will not be appreciated.)
5. Children won't thrive and receive the benefit they could potentially gain from the school they attend if they feel or even suspect a parent's lack of respect.
6. Remember teachers are human beings too.

should respectfully request that he apologize⁷ to the child. Failure to apologize will erode the child's respect for that teacher.

- It is totally within the boundaries of normalcy for children (particularly young children) to sometimes act unruly, wild, or disobedient, and it should never be considered a character flaw⁸.
- The classroom environment in which one has to sit in place for a prolonged period of time is unnatural for many young children, causing them to act out.
- Teachers who place utmost importance on classroom decorum are not always able to view a child's negative behavior in a redeeming manner⁹.
- If a teacher calls to inform the parents that their young child is remiss behaviorally, and the parents feel that the teacher's assessment¹⁰ of their child's character or behavior might be incorrect or if they don't see any manifestation of that sort of behavior at home, they should not be overly concerned¹¹ (however, they should not totally disregard the teacher's words).
- It is of utmost importance for parents to avoid labeling their children and to always view them positively¹².
- If year after year every new teacher has the same negative opinion of a child, the parents need to concede that they themselves are not assessing their child properly.
- Children should never be led to view their home environment as an extension of school. The house should be a warm and loving refuge from a sometimes difficult and insensitive world.
- The fact that a child was punished or has had a difficult day in school should not affect the manner in which the parents deal with him at home¹³.
- Don't let the various scholastic tensions of school spill into the home. There must

7. It is important to realize that apologizing to a child does not diminish the child's respect for his teacher (or parent), but rather actually enhances his respect. A child knows how difficult it is to admit a mistake and will now view the teacher as a person of supreme integrity.

8. On the contrary, many people say it is the wild young children who turn out to be talented and gifted. Legend has it that many of our *gedolim* were extremely wild in their youth.

9. Experience has shown that it is often the young teachers who have never developed a long term perspective on children's misbehavior who are the ones constantly alerting parents to their child's so called misdeeds. Older teachers who have life experience will almost always choose to overlook the misconduct of very young children.

10. Most often parents know their child far better than the teacher (after all the teacher just got to know the child recently and only spends a few hours a day with the child, whereas the parents spend far more time with the child every day and have known since birth). Thus, if the parents are confident that the teacher's assessment is in error, they don't need to be unduly concerned.

11. The *chinuch* perspective of parents should always be long term focused. Because the child's acting out in the short term is not indicative that he will always act like that, it is not of supreme importance for the parents to rectify the issue. However, to the teacher who has to keep an orderly classroom for the sake of the entire class, it is a most pressing issue, hence their possible over reaction on this issue.

12. See *Yalkut Maishev Nefesh* (p. 39) on this topic.

13. Although the parents should definitely encourage the child to correct his behavior in school.

always be clear boundaries between home and school¹⁴.

- At the *Shabbos* table, the *parsha* sheet should be reviewed only if it does not turn into a source of tension for the child when he does not adequately¹⁵ know the subject matter.
- If a parent sees that his child is overly pressured by homework, it is not the end of the world if once in a while he lets the child skip doing his homework.
- If doing homework with the child causes undue stress in the child-parent relationship at home (this can often happen with fathers and sons reviewing *Gemora*) it is prudent to hire someone else to do the homework with the child, thus protecting the warmth of the parent-child relationship¹⁶.



14. Rav Matisyahu Solomon *Shlita*, see “With Hearts Full of Love” (page 80) where he elaborates on this point (he even decries the institution of homework as an intrusion of school into the home).

15. *ibid.*

16. At times it is wise for a father to choose to learn with his son a topic that they are not learning in school; this can be much less stressful on the child.