

How to Communicate with your Child's Teachers



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Introduction to Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support

Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support (PBIS) was designed to provide various levels of support for children that have behavioral problems.² PBIS was created by evidence based research that enhances school, family, and community environments.²

The purpose of PBIS is to decrease bad behaviors while increasing good behaviors.²

PBIS has three levels of support: primary, secondary, and tertiary.²

1. **Primary Support** is an intervention that aims at addressing problem behaviors before they occur in a school-wide setting in which all students are given the same expectations and consequences. For example everyone is required to have a parent or legal guardian call if a child is going to be late to school.
2. **Secondary Support** is a classroom intervention that addresses students that have reoccurring behavioral problems and are at risk of developing more severe behaviors. For example a child refusing to stay in their seat.
3. **Tertiary Support** is the last and more intensive level of support. It addresses the most severe and serious behavioral problems such as physical assault.

PBIS and Parents

PBIS focuses on helping children in a learning environment such as in school and out of school.²

Parents have an important role in supporting their child in their learning environments such as, at school and at home.¹

Good grades and behavioral success with PBIS has been connected to parents that:^{2;3;4;5}

- ✓ understand and support their child's intervention
- ✓ work as a team with their child's teachers
- ✓ regular communication with their child and their child's teachers



Parents

Although parents have an important role in the success of their child's life, most parents tend to feel unsure about their ability to advocate for their child.⁴

Parents may ask themselves:^{4;5}

- **How do I talk to my child?**
- **What am I supposed to say to my child's teacher?**
- **Am I supposed to just listen during a parent-teacher conference?**

Parents **need** to take an active role in advocating for their child.^{1;2;4;5}

Advocacy is a very important part of PBIS.^{1;2} With advocacy, a child's needs, legal rights, and services will be protected and supported.²

The next page will provide information on how parents can become confident in themselves. Parents will learn how to talk to their child, their child's teacher, and what to say during a parent-teacher conference to protect their child's needs.

Advocating for your Child

How to feel confident when advocating for your child

1. Begin by becoming familiar with your child's school.⁴

Research has shown that parents who attend school events such as: the beginning of the year open house, school BBQs and picnics felt more comfortable in starting conversations between teachers and other parents.⁴

- Build yourself a support group by introducing yourself to other parents and teachers.
- Exchange contact information such as your cell phone number or email address to further promote future communication.
- Attend parent-teacher conferences with questions and concerns.

Most schools offer support groups for parents such as the Parent Teacher Student Association also known as the PTSA. The PTSA is a great way to connect with other parents and teachers to advocate for your child.⁴ The more support you can build for yourself the more confident you will become in helping your child.⁴

2. Build a good relationship with your child.⁴

Get to know your child.

- Know who your child's friends are, what they do on the computer, and what television shows your child enjoys.⁴
- Make clear and simple rules for your child. When a child understands the rules they will know what you expect from them.⁴

Importance of Communication

An important part of advocating for your child is communication.^{2;4}

Communication with your child and your child's teachers needs to be consistent.^{2;4}

Consistent communication helps:³

- Build good relationships with the parent and the child and parent and the teacher
- Parents monitor their child's progress at school
- Provide positive support for good behaviors being displayed at school. Provide the teacher with insight on the child's behavioral progress at home
- Discuss targeted behaviors to become aware of certain triggers that result in negative behavior
- The teacher becomes aware of the behavioral intervention

Communication with your child's teacher can also ignite motivation from the teacher. The teacher can take an active role in implementing the behavioral intervention because he is now aware that the parent is serious about being a part of their child's life at school.³



Ways to Communicate

Most parents and teachers lack in communication because there was no set way in what ways they should try to get a hold of each other.⁵

Set up a communication system with your child's teacher.

1. Provide the teacher with different ways to get in touch with you such as:⁵

- Cell phone number
- Email address
- Work phone number
- Discuss the option of text messaging
- Instant messenger (i.e., AOL, MSN, SKYPE, I-CHAT)
- Weekly progress notes.

2. Ask the teacher to tell you about your child's good and bad days.⁵



Myth or Fact

Please take a moment to think about the sentences below. Determine if they are fact or myth. The answers will be provided on the following page.

1. Zero communication from the school means everything is going well for my child.
2. Children and teenagers find it annoying when their parents tell them “good job” for having a good day in school.
3. Teachers and parents do not have time to talk to each other.
4. Parents do not feel confident in supporting their child at school.

Myth or Fact Answers

1. Zero communication from the school means everything is going well or my child.

The answer is **Myth**. Parents often assume that if there is no communication from the teacher then everything must be going well for their child, resulting in parents taking a step back in their child's academic progress. On the other hand, when teachers are trying to communicate but fail due to parents being uncooperative or unreliable means of communication (e.g., no voice mail machines), teachers become frustrated and give up in attempting to communicate with parents. Communication between teachers and parents should not focus solely on the child's misbehavior rather it should embrace and reinforce the positive behaviors that are being displayed in school as well.⁵

2. Children and teenagers find it annoying when their parents tell them "good job" for having a good day in school.

The answer is **Myth**. Research has shown that students have acknowledged that being appreciated for their good behaviors in class reinforced them to keep displaying the good behaviors.⁵

3. Teachers and parents do not have time to talk to each other.

The answer is **Myth**. Parents and teachers need to make communication between one another a priority. When it comes to your child there is no such thing as "I do not have time."⁵

4. Parents do not feel confident in supporting their child at school.

The answer is **Fact**. Research has shown that parents do not feel confident in supporting their child. Therefore, steps should be taken for parents to feel supported and empowered to advocate for their child.⁴

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Do I really need to meet my child's teachers on the first day of school?

A: Yes, knowing who your child's teachers are can benefit you and your child. Introducing yourself in a face to face meeting with the teacher gives you a chance to discuss your child (the good and the bad) and your expectations for the year. It also gives you a chance to exchange contact information such as, cell phone numbers, email addresses, etc.

Q: My child is in middle school and thinks it is embarrassing if I go with him on the first day of school to meet his teacher, what should I do?

A: Respect your child and find another way to meet his teacher. Most middle schools and high schools have an 'open house' during the first week of school where parents are asked to come with their child to meet the teachers. If your child's school does not offer an open house do some research and find the teacher's email or phone number through the school's directory.

Q: I gave my child's teacher my cell phone number and email address but I have never received any phone calls or emails. Should I wait until the teacher finally decides to contact me?

A: No. Remember communication is a two way street. If you have not heard from your child's teacher, email or call them. Ask for an update with how your child is doing.

Q: What do I bring to a parent-teacher conference?

A: Bring a list of concerns or questions. For example if your child never seems to be doing any homework at home: ask the teacher how often they assign homework, ask to know if your child is completing their classwork. Discuss your child's behavior in school and at home. Ask the teacher if they have any concerns and make it clear that you want to be involved with your child's life at school. A parent-teacher conference is another opportunity for you to talk about your child's behavioral intervention.

Annotated Bibliography's

Heiman, T. (2002). Parents of children with disabilities: Resilience, coping, and future expectation. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities, 14*(2), 159-171.

The article discusses the importance of social support, resources, and effective intervention programs in building familial resilience for families that have a child with a disability. The author was funded by the Department of Education and Psychology from the Open University of Israel and the research was based from a presentation from the 11th World Congress of the International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual Disabilities. The research focused solely on Israeli families that had a child with an intellectual disability, physical disability, and or learning disability. The methods used were a series of interviews that focused on questions regarding the parents past feelings towards their child's disability, present feelings, and expectations for their child. The results found that majority of the parents first experienced a multitude of negative emotions (e.g., guilt, anger, confusion, sadness, etc.) in learning their child had a disability. However, after years of experience with their child, parents became more aware of their child's deficits, understanding, and empathetic towards their child's needs. The future expectations were defined as worrisome towards their child's welfare, education, and security. The concluding discussion from the article suggests that providing parents with social support, resources, and effective interventions can lead to an overall increase in familial resilience and positive outcomes for the child. This article relates to the topic of how parents should talk to their child's teacher, in the sense that parents should acknowledge the importance of social support through the use of building a positive relationship with their child's teacher. The article provides the necessary research to help motivate parents to take the initiative to approach their child's teacher and begin to build a positive relationship. With constant communication, the teacher and parent can work together to help the child, provide support for one another, and discuss various interventions designed specifically for the child with the disability. Ideally if the parent and teacher can cohesively work together the outcome may result in a positive experience for them but more importantly for the child.

Jull, S., & Miranda, P. (2011). Parents as play date facilitators for preschoolers with autism. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 13*(1), 17-30. doi:10.1177/1098300709358111

The article discusses the importance of parents as facilitators during preschool play dates for children with autism. The authors were funded and approved by the University of British Columbia's Behavioral Research Ethics Board. The method used for the research was to work with two mothers that had preschool aged boys diagnosed with autism along with two recruited playmates. The concept behind the research was to train the two mothers on how to become effective facilitators during their child's play dates. The mothers were taught how to promote positive social interaction, develop appropriate social skills, and to help the mothers learn how to prepare appropriate play date activities to facilitate the goals of promoting positive social interaction and social skills. The results concluded that the mothers actively participated in learning proper facilitator techniques. However, they failed in consistently implementing all of the facilitator skills they were taught. Although the mothers did not always implement all of the techniques, the consistent effort put forth in planning appropriate play dates and the constant social interaction with that of a typical

developing child proved to have a positive outcome for the child with autism, in regards to learning concepts of sharing, turn taking, and more verbalization of needs. In relation to how parents should communicate with their child's teacher, this research would suggest that play dates are beneficial in promoting positive social interaction and social skills. Parents should approach their child's teacher with questions regarding who does their child most frequently play with in class. If their child does not actively play with the other children the parent should ask the teacher to observe and record which child consistently approaches her child to play. Knowing which child consistently approaches her child gives the parent an advantage in setting up a play date with a child that displays interest in playing with her child. The willingness of the other child could help promote an effective outcome for a parent facilitated play date between the two children. The communication between the parent and teacher is also beneficial because it requires them to work together as a unit in achieving a positive outcome for the child with the disability.

Park, J. H., Alber-Morgan, S. R., & Fleming, C. (2011). Collaborating with parents to implement behavioral interventions for children with challenging behaviors. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 43*(3), 22-30.

The article discusses the importance of professionals collaborating with parents in implementing behavioral interventions for children with challenging behaviors. The authors were funded by the Council for Exceptional Children to publish their research and expert opinion on the importance of collaborating with parents in implementing behavioral interventions for children displaying challenging behaviors. The article takes the position that it is crucial for parents to be encouraged in taking an active role in implementing the behavioral interventions designed for their child. The authors provides a list of criteria for practitioners to take into consideration in working with families and they are as follows: understanding the parents, helping parents understand the designated behavioral approach for their child, collaborating with parents in designing specific interventions, training the parents in implementing the intervention, teaching parents how to record the targeted and desired behaviors, and the importance of maintaining parental involvement. The article provides parents with the knowledge and awareness that they have a crucial role in helping their child overcome their challenging behaviors. The conclusion of the article reiterates the stance of the authors: effective behavioral change in a child is in response to a cohesive effort put forth between the collaboration of trained professionals and parents in consistently monitoring, recording, and implementing the behavioral intervention. In relation to the topic of how parents should communicate with their child's teacher, this article provides parents with evidence that they need to take an active role in participating and implementing the behavioral intervention for their child. Having parents understand how important their role is in collaborating with professionals (e.g., psychologists, behavioral specialists, and teachers) can provide parents with the much needed motivation to initiate communication with their child's teacher. In communicating with their child's teacher, parents can monitor their child's progress at school, provide positive reinforcement for desired behaviors being displayed at school, provide the teacher with insight on the child's behavioral progress at home, discuss targeted behaviors to become aware of certain antecedents that result in a negative behavior, and most importantly the teacher can become aware of the behavioral intervention. Communication with their child's teacher can also ignite motivation from the teacher to take an active role in implementing the behavioral intervention because the

teacher is now aware that the parent is serious about being a part of their child's life at school. With that said, a child displaying challenging behaviors has a higher probability of decreasing those behaviors when the parent and teacher can communicate and work together as a team.

Sanchez, M. (2010). *The effects of a formal empowerment and education program on parent's empowerment and involvement in their child's education*. (Ed.D., Boston College). , 208.

Retrieved from

<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=2013876051&Fmt=7&clientId=174544&RQT=309&VName=PQD>.

The article proposed the importance of implementing parent focused programs in all school districts that focused on empowering parents in becoming more confident in advocating for their child. The article is a doctoral dissertation and was published by Boston College. The method used was a cross case analysis of six parents in which they actively participated in an educational and empowerment program. The purpose of participating in the program was to determine if the parents felt more empowered to become involved in their child's academics. The empowerment programs focused on teaching parents how to effectively communicate with their child, how to have effective communication with their child's teacher, and how to create a positive home environment that allowed the child to focus on their homework. The results were positive, parents felt more confident in their ability in being a parent, parents felt empowered in taking the initiative in opening communication with their child's teacher, and opening communication with their child. The outcome of the empowerment programs provided successful relationships between the parent and child and between the parent and the child's teacher. The author suggests that schools should provide parents with such resources and empowerment programs to help promote an effective and beneficial relationship between schools and parents. In relation how parents should communicate with their child's teacher, this article suggests that parents need to be provided with support in feeling confident enough in their ability to advocate for their child. However, the implementation of such parent empowerment programs is not offered at most schools, if any. Bringing awareness to parents of the effectiveness of such empowerment programs could provide parents with enough knowledge to propose a plan to their local school districts. The goal would be for parents to have a support resource that teaches them how to become more confident in their ability as a parent and to learn how to effectively communicate to their child, and their child's teacher.

Storm, P. S., & Storm, R. D. (2002). Teacher-parent communication reforms. *The High School Journal*, 86(2), 14-22. Retrieved from

<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=277495321&Fmt=3&clientId=11123&RQT=309&VName=PQD>

The article discusses the importance of a cohesive relationship between parents and teachers, and how to improve effective communication between both parties. The authors noted that communication between parents and teachers must be a joint effort. Parents often assume that if there is no communication from the teacher then everything must be going good for their child; resulting in parents taking a step back in their child's academia. On the other hand, when teachers are trying to communicate but fail due to parents being uncooperative or unreliable means of communication (e.g., no voice mail machines),

teachers become frustrated and give up in attempting to communicate with parents. The purpose of the article was to provide information on the importance of positive psychology. Communication between teachers and parents should not focus solely on the child's misbehavior but to embrace and reinforce the positive behaviors that are being displayed in school as well. The authors of the article are collegiate researchers funded by Motorola and acknowledged by the American Psychological Association for their study on PDA-Palm Pilots as an effective means of communication between teachers and parents. The methods used were over 1,000 students from an urban public school district were randomly chosen to participate. Parents received a free Motorola Palm-Pilot and a SCORE card that provided access codes for each kind of behavior (good and bad) that would be communicated to the parents. At the end of every school day teachers were to send a page to the parents and the parents were to respond to confirm that the message was read. At the end of the study, parents, teachers, and students agreed that the Palm-Pilot was an effective means of communication. The communication of good and bad behaviors led parents to seek out guidance on how to approach their adolescents in addressing difficult behaviors. The students acknowledged that being appreciated for their good behaviors in class reinforced them to keep displaying the desired behaviors. Teachers noted that the Palm-Pilot was more effective and easier to use versus daily phone calls to parents. Both parents and teachers agreed that the Palm-Pilot allowed growth towards a positive relationship between both parties. In relation to the topic of how parents should communicate with their child's teacher, this research provides parents and teachers with the knowledge that all communication does not have to be bad in regards to the student, and that positive aspects of the student should be communicated on a regular basis. The study also provides educators and parents with a more effective means of communication via the use of PDA's. However, with today's technology PDA's are out-dated. Other means of communication could be used such as, text messaging, emails via cell phone, and Blackberry Messenger. The point of providing alternate forms of communication is because parents and teachers both live a busy life, using PDA's, text messaging, or emails via the cell phone provides parents and teachers with a quick, simple, and effective means of communication between one another. Furthermore, research proves that consistent communication has been effective in building a relationship between the parent and teacher, for quickly addressing problem issues with the child, and for consistent positive reinforcement for good behavior. Therefore bringing awareness to both teachers and parents about alternate forms of communication would be beneficial.

Glossary

Advocate: protecting and support the needs and services for children.²

Empowerment: strength and confidence⁴

Evidence-Based Practice: practices and support that have been validated by professionals.²

Intervention: involvement with an individual that helps assists them in their problems.²

Positive Behavior Intervention and Support: provides different levels of support for children with behavioral problems: primary (school-wide), secondary (classroom), and tertiary (individual). The purpose of PBIS is to decrease bad behaviors and increase good behaviors.²

References

1. Heiman, T. (2002). Parents of children with disabilities: Resilience, coping, and future expectation. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities*, 14(2), 159-171.
2. Kerr, M.M. & Nelson, C.M. (2010) *Strategies for addressing behavior problems in the classroom, 6th Edition*. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company. ISBN-13: 978-0-13-604524-3
3. Park, J. H., Alber-Morgan, S. R., & Fleming, C. (2011). Collaborating with parents to implement behavioral interventions for children with challenging behaviors. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 43(3), 22-30.
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