

# PARENT CONVERSATIONS

One thing I've noticed over the years is that the wisdom shared in "Parent conversations" is rarely exclusive to parents. This month's column is no exception. It could just as easily be titled "How should I handle a disagreement with my coworker?" Or "spouse" or "neighbor" or . . . well, you get the picture.

—Nicole Balza

## HOW SHOULD I HANDLE A DISAGREEMENT WITH MY CHILD'S TEACHER?

AS A TEACHER and parent, I cannot begin to count the number of disagreements that I have witnessed and mediated over the years between children. You would think that it might get easier to navigate them as the years go by, but the truth of the matter is that every disagreement includes different people and unique perspectives that often make coming to a consensus difficult.

However, with children, I have noticed that three things are important for a successful resolution to take place:

1. An existing relationship prior to the disagreement.
2. A willingness to listen and acknowledge different perspectives.
3. A calm, thinking state of mind.

Helping students achieve these three things is some of my favorite work to do with them because when they disagree but still value their relationships, listen to each other, and remain calm, the problem-solving and discussion that follow are so valuable and insightful.

In Ephesians 4:31–5:2, Paul tells Christians to walk in the way of love: "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and

walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

These words speak to the hearts of both children and adults and apply to all things that we do in life, including resolving disagreements. The strategies that we use to help children work through disagreements apply to adults as well. Therefore, parents should build a relationship with each of their children's teachers and start

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getting to know them at the beginning of the year. Spending time talking together and asking questions will help you to know each other and avoid making assumptions. Then when a disagreement arises, parents and teachers can communicate with kindness and compassion, knowing that they have already established a positive relationship.

Just like children cannot resolve disagreements when they are angry or upset, neither can adults. Parents need to work through these feelings and be in a calm, thinking state of mind before engaging in a problem-

## HAVE PARENTING QUESTIONS?

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solving discussion. In our digital world, it is very easy to send a quick message when upset. Adults need to build habits that allow them to find calm before sending messages. If a disagreement is important enough to cause strong feelings, then it is important enough to discuss in person.

Listening to others' thoughts and perspectives can't happen in a one-way message. Parents and teachers need to communicate with each other face-to-face so that listening, understanding, and resolution can occur. After all, the goal is to grow the body of Christ and to resolve disagreements so that teaching, learning, and walking in Jesus' love can continue.



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**THE BEGINNING** of another school year is often filled with excitement and optimism. Children, parents, and teachers look forward to getting to know one another. Those first weeks can often feel like a honeymoon. Everything is new, and all seems well.

And then it happens. Your child comes home with a concern, a story about an episode at school, homework that has disappointing comments or grades, or a new expectation in the classroom. Your concern is immediate, and you wonder how to approach the situation.

It's a rare person who is comfortable with confrontation. We can be tempted to ignore a concern to avoid conflict. However, if we avoid the conversation, we have no opportunity to resolve our concerns. "Brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Corinthians 13:11).

As you reach out to the teacher:

- Begin with prayer. Pray that the Lord would bless you both as you seek to work together.
- Consider your concern carefully. Is this something that might have been misunderstood? Even with the best intentions, your child is sharing information from his or her perspective only. The best way to find clarification is to speak with the teacher.

- Ask the teacher for a good time to meet when you won't be interrupted. Addressing concerns at drop-off and pick-up is a busy time for the teacher.
- Remember, you are an expert on your child. Your child's teacher is an expert on children and education. Your partnership is best for your child and all children in the class.
- Consider the teacher's perspective. Your priority is your child. The teacher's responsibility is your child and all the other children in the classroom.
- Approach the conversation by seeking to learn. Ask questions that help you understand before you make conclusions. Often a little clarification can completely turn the conversation to a better understanding.
- Ask "How can I help?" and "How can you and I work together on this?" Questions like these can minimize defensiveness and build the partnership.

## **In most cases, a thoughtful, respectful conversation will lead to understanding and resolution.**

- Never criticize your child's teacher in front of your child. Your child's respect for teachers can easily be impacted by you. Picture your child standing between you and his or her teacher. Your relationship with each other has a significant impact on your child. Imagine how it feels for your child to know how much you both respect each other.
- Protect the teacher's reputation by keeping this conversation between the two of you. We can be tempted to speak to others to get more information. Don't talk *about* the teacher. Talk *to* the teacher.
- Express your gratitude to the teacher for all he or she does and for the opportunity to work together.

You care deeply about your child. The teacher cares about your child as well. In most cases, a thoughtful, respectful conversation will lead to understanding and resolution.

Blessings on this new school year for you, your child, and your teacher as you grow and learn together!



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