

The 6 Best Ways to Approach Your Child's Teacher

By now, many of us have seen some version of the cartoon below. The two scenes highlight the change society has experienced in recent years. Where once the teacher was the wise, all-knowing authority to be respected, now the child is the one who can do no wrong.



We often shake our heads over this scenario, bemoaning the fact that parents shelter their children far too much. And this is certainly true in many cases.

But are there also instances in which it is appropriate for parents to go to bat for their children, particularly when they have good reason to believe they are being bullied or at risk of getting lost in the education shuffle? Most of us would say yes.

The question then becomes, how do we do so without behaving like the modern, pushy parents who think their child can do no wrong?

Famed educator and author Susan Wise Bauer provides a practical solution to that question in her book [*Rethinking School*](#). As Bauer infers, many parents have become aware of the ways in which schools can be hindrance rather than a help in the education of their child. Unfortunately, parents often end up shooting the messenger (the teacher), so to speak, in an attempt to make sure their child does not fall through the cracks. To combat this problem, Bauer offers six steps for parents to follow when interacting with their child's teacher:

1. Believe the Best – As Bauer explains, “You should *always* start out with the premise that the teacher, the

administration, and the staff have your child's best interests in mind and want your child to flourish." Starting a dialogue from any other position is likely to make things worse for you... and your child.

2. Be a Positive Presence – Kind parental interaction in both the classroom and other venues is the best way to build a relationship with your child's teacher. Once the teacher regards the parent as a friend and not an enemy, any concerns or problems can be dealt with much more easily.

3. Educate Yourself, But ... – Many parents approach their child's teacher as know-it-alls ready to lecture on the latest statistic. While Bauer believes it's good for parents to do their research and learn these same statistics and ideas, she also cautions parents not to shove them down the throats of teachers. Instead, Bauer suggests, "Bring your research, but use it to show that you're not just complaining without understanding the issues."

4. Go Through the Proper Channels – No matter the issue, Bauer urges parents to avoid circumventing the teacher. Keeping them in the loop is a sign of respect that teachers appreciate.

5. Don't Beat Around the Bush – According to Bauer, being specific about problems goes a long way in helping the teacher find a resolution. To do this, Bauer suggests parents "document specific *times* when the child was bored," or bullied, or didn't understand a concept.

6. Provide Creative Solutions – "Simply complaining is *never* productive," writes Bauer. But providing "workable alternatives" to the issues being raised is helpful. These alternatives should place the work on you (not the teacher), should not cause classroom disruptions, and should be cost-effective.

In essence, Bauer's tips advance one simple idea: show respect. This idea, of course, is nothing new, and was once

advanced by the famous philosopher John Locke in [Some Thoughts Concerning Education](#):

“But yet, to keep up [a teacher’s/tutor’s] authority with his pupil, besides concealing that he has not the power of the rod, you must be sure to use him with great respect yourself, and cause all your family to do so too. For you cannot expect your son should have any regard for one, whom he sees you, or his mother, or others slight. If you think him worthy of contempt, you have chosen amiss; and if you show any contempt of him, he will hardly escape it from your son: and whenever that happens, whatever worth he may have in himself, and abilities for this employment, they are all lost to your child, and can afterwards never be made useful to him.”

Would the ongoing debates over education diminish if we took this advice in more of our dealings between parents, teachers, and school administrators?

[Image Credit: U.S. Air Force photo by Mark Herlihy]