



Partnering Positively With Parents

Chapter Overview

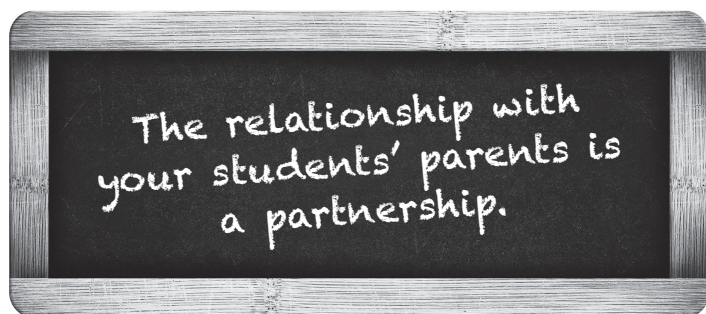
- » Why a good relationship is important
- » What a good partnership looks like
- » How to establish and maintain a good relationship:
 - Communication
 - Aim for win/win outcomes
 - Establishing and maintaining boundaries
 - Easy relationship builders
- » Parent types and how to optimise your interactions:
 - Easy
 - Overly Assertive
 - Overly Controlling
 - Invisible
 - Vulnerable
 - Aggressive
- » When parents contact you

One of the most important aspects of teaching is that of the partnership between teacher and parents. It can also be one of the most challenging! A positive relationship is beneficial for all parties - child, teacher, parents and school. On the flip side, a difficult relationship can be damaging for everyone. Don't underestimate the negative influence parents can have on your career, or state of mind, so learning to be proactive and healthy in the early years of teaching can really minimise stressful situations for you.

Whilst writing this book I often posed questions on social media, to both teachers and parents, regarding a topic I was looking for feedback on. I asked this question, "Parents, what advice would you give your child's primary school teacher in order to have a great partnership?" The volume and depth of responses was amazing. This leads me to believe that it is a concerning and important issue for parents, one they are passionate about getting right. Of course, parents play a role in establishing and maintaining a good relationship with you, but there are many ways you contribute also. This chapter focusses on what YOU can do to foster a great partnership with parents.

Many of the examples and theories contained in this chapter are transferrable to other people in your workplace, not just school parents. Your interactions with colleagues, leadership and school children will all improve if you employ some of the relationship building techniques I write about.

I want to stress that the management techniques and suggestions outlined in this chapter are mine only. They are not theory based, they are experience based. (Although you will definitely find some of my techniques in behavioural theory). Through trial and error, as well as input from more experienced colleagues at the time, I have developed some actions to respond to parents, as well as learnt to change my own practices to avoid difficult interactions in the first place.

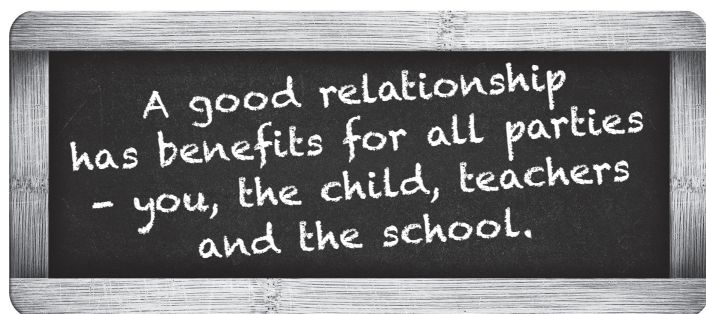


Why a Good Relationship is Important

The main aim when desiring a good relationship with parents is to view it as a partnership. When all parties contribute constructively then everyone benefits, especially the child. Advantages for the student may be increased motivation for learning, regular attendance at school, a positive attitude towards school and learning, and possibly even improved behaviour.

A good relationship with a parent paves the way for healthy and constructive interactions. They are more likely to speak positively and supportively about you, which has a flow on effect to their child. When a student observes their parents speaking encouragingly about a teacher they will naturally be more predisposed to desire a good relationship also.

A parent who is happy with their child's teacher and school is very unlikely to cause you trouble if an issue arises. You may have a student in your class that is difficult to manage, has learning issues or social problems. If the relationship you have with their parent is a good one you are more likely to be able to work together to improve the situation for their child.



What a Good Partnership Looks Like

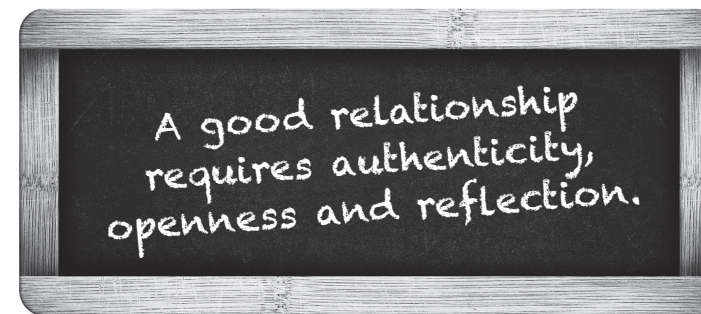
A partnership involves two or more people working together on a joint interest. In a school setting, an important partnership is between parent and teacher, where your joint interest is the child's wellbeing and education. There are other partnerships involved in education but this is the relationship this chapter focusses on.

You only have control over what and how YOU contribute towards an effective partnership. It is impossible to control the effort, frequency or style of the parent's input and futile to attempt to do so. You must responsibly maintain professionalism and courtesy at all times, especially when it can become a little more challenging.

A good partnership would look a little something like this:

- » Regular, clear and honest communication
- » Ability to give constructive feedback
- » Respectful interactions
- » Openness and willingness to **receive** constructive feedback
- » The child's best interests are at the forefront of all interactions
- » Meeting deadlines and following up/through on plans and suggestions

It must be acknowledged that in partnerships such as these, a parent will not always strive to contribute in the most pleasant or healthy manner. This situation will be addressed in more detail later in the chapter.



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How to Establish and Maintain a Good Relationship

Whilst you may have twenty-five other students, for a parent, their child is your most important student. They want you to ensure their child feels safe, respected and positive about their learning at all times.

There are many ways for you to establish and maintain a good working relationship with parents.

Communication

This is the number one concern listed by parents in my very unofficial poll! What do they want? A whole lot more of it.

In preschool or childcare, a parent has daily access to their child's teacher and carer. They are receiving