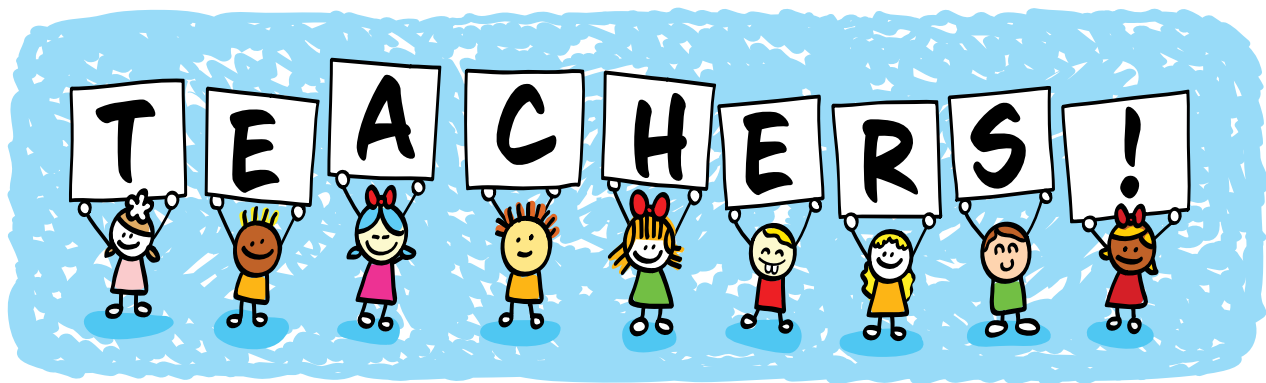


ABCs of Being Smart: T is for Tips for Working with Teachers

By Dr. Joanne Foster



For parents of toddlers to teens—here are some time-tested tips.

Traits to Tap

When meeting with teachers to strengthen home and school connections or resolve any issues, it's best to be as open and positive as possible. **Be:**

- **Thankful**—Convey gratitude for the work teachers do.
- **Thorough**—Do your “homework” and get the facts straight before confronting the teacher about issues having to do with your child.
- **Thoughtful**—Give preliminary thought to what you think might work to improve any specific difficulties and also build bridges with the school—and be sure to listen thoughtfully to the teacher's ideas and responses to your questions and suggestions.
- **Truthful**—Be honest about any concerns you might have, and why they matter.
- **Tough**—Maintain resolve, but do so while being mindful of the perspectives of others (e.g., tenacity in moderation).
- **Timely**—Be considerate of people's busy schedules, and strive to find convenient, appropriate times for conversations with the teacher about what you think requires addressing.
- **Tactful**—Watch your tone, written communication, words, and body language, all of which convey messages.

- **Tranquil**—Adopt a calm, diplomatic approach that will help drive momentum forward (because tension is counterproductive).

Things to Try

Teachers typically have a “toolbox” of top strategies they use to help make their classrooms welcoming, effective learning environments. Here are suggestions for parents who want to fortify the contents of any such toolbox. **Add:**

- **Trust**—Let teachers, counselors, and school administrators know that you have confidence in them, and in everyone's ability to work collaboratively. Confidence is empowering.
- **Teamwork**—Bring your strengths and viewpoints to the table, tie them constructively to others' contributions, coordinate efforts, and thereby develop a shared ethic.
- **Trailblazing**—Be creative; think in new and innovative ways.
- **Tracking**—Keep an ongoing record of your child's accomplishments so teachers can build on what's known.
- **Talk**—Facilitate more discussion, dialogue, and sharing of ideas.
- **Training**—Advocate for additional teacher training opportunities. (For instance, professional development on differentiating programming for gifted/high-ability learners, or workshops on promoting inquiry-based learning, or...)

- **Tasks**—Suggest ideas for activities and learning experiences that relate to your child’s particular interests, including those in non-curricular areas.
- **Thinking skills**—Help children develop their creative and critical thinking skills. (There are lots of exciting programs for this online and elsewhere.)
- **Technology**—Find out what’s of-the-moment, and how it can enhance learning and teaching—at home and at school.

Turbulence and Transition Times

Sometimes problems arise, requiring parents and teachers to strategically focus on improving the status quo for a child. The approach will depend on circumstances, but here are some tactical measures to consider. **Prepare to:**

- **Troubleshoot**—Help to determine the source or causes of a problem. (Sometimes what underlies a problem is temporary, tangential, or simple to address. Sometimes it’s more complex.)
- **Tolerate**—Show patience, and a willingness to chat, weigh alternatives, and possibly compromise; avoid coming across as unyielding, confrontational, short-tempered, or disrespectful.
- **Tweak**—Take it one step at a time; don’t attempt to fix everything all at once.
- **Twist, Turn, Try**—Be amenable to looking in different directions—such as consulting with different people,

considering different resolutions, and exploring ideas from different contexts.

- **Tread carefully**—Be part of the solution, not part of the problem.
- **Target**—Find out what’s really at issue, what’s already been done to address it, and what you can do to help—today, tomorrow, and beyond.
- **Triumph**—Remember that when troublesome situations occur, parents, teachers, and children can work together toward transforming turmoil into a triumphant tour de force. ☺

Author’s Notes

Joanne Foster, Ed.D., is co-author (with Dona Matthews) of *Beyond Intelligence: Secrets for Raising Happily Productive Kids* (2014, Anansi) and the award-winning *Being Smart about Gifted Education* (2009, Great Potential Press). As a parent, teacher, consultant, researcher, and education specialist, Dr. Foster has more than 30 years of experience working in the field of gifted education. She teaches at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, and writes and presents extensively on a wide range of topics at conferences and learning venues across North America. Her book *Not Now Maybe Later: Helping Children Overcome Procrastination* (Great Potential Press) will be released in early 2015. Visit her website at www.beyondintelligence.net or email at joanne.foster@utoronto.ca.



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