

Helping children manage challenging situations with teachers

By Cathy Lumsden, The Adlerian Team

“We see things not as they are, but as we are.”

- The Talmud

How many times in your child’s school career have you heard “I hate my teacher” or “my teacher is so mean.” Most children at some point in their lives utter their frustrations about school and/or their teachers. Common reactions from parents to these statements are “What did she/he do?”, “Don’t say such things” or “Being negative won’t solve your problems.” How do we teach our children to deal with challenging situations they may face in their school years? They have a right to express their feelings but require guidance in working through options to deal effectively with daily challenges. Our children need to view themselves as creative and resourceful problem solvers from an early age.

Children’s perceptions

In many areas of our school and work lives, we experience people we consider to be challenging. We all have different reactions to different personalities. One student may perceive a teacher as being challenging whereas another child may have a completely different experience. Everyone perceives events and situations through their own “lens”. Whether their perceptions are accurate or not is not the crucial part to examine; it is more about how they can learn to handle the situation when strong emotions are involved.

Effective approaches to assist your children

It is important that you allow your children to express themselves when they are frustrated by their teacher. Often when children feel heard and understood by their parents they are able to move forward and find strategies to deal with the situation. If a solution is needed to a problem, they may be more creative when they feel listened to. Children who do not feel listened to may become defensive and angry at the parent as well as the teacher.

After your child has expressed his or her frustrations and is calmer, teach him or her how to see the situation from another perspective. Perhaps the teacher is

dealing with a difficult life situation and is stressed or your child may not have noticed that she was treating all the children the same or your child's behaviour may have triggered the teacher's reaction. Moreover, if a teacher gets annoyed sometimes children will feel angry, embarrassed or hurt. These negative feelings can overwhelm children and consequently they misinterpret the situation. Sometimes it is necessary to gather information from your child when he or she is calmer, as well as from the teacher. Suggesting that your child speak to the teacher the next day in order to clarify the problem is a good strategy to keeping the lines of communication open.

Encourage your children to 'teach the teacher'; demonstrate to the teacher all of their wonderful qualities. Help your children make a list of things they are capable of and how they contribute to the school and classroom. This often helps children feel better. Saying to your child "You and I know what your ability is, maybe we have to find ways that your teacher can see it too."

Another approach to getting along with the teacher is to help the child find something in common with the teacher. For example, one student loved snowboarding and discovered that his teacher also enjoyed this sport. The student started asking the teacher questions about where she boarded, what kind of hills they like and then they shared some of their snowboarding experiences. This also helped the child view his teacher in a more positive light.

It is important not to speak badly about your child's teacher in front of the child. Negative attitudes will only perpetuate a lack of motivation for your child and may increase the negative cycle.

Be careful not to always rescue your child. Appropriate consequences to misbehaviour help children to learn from mistakes. If the child and teacher are having a challenge resolving the issue at hand over several weeks then it is helpful to meet with the teacher to understand his or her perception.

If your child has the perception that a teacher dislikes him or her, suggest the following experiment for two weeks. Every morning when your child awakens, he or she will say several times "my teacher likes me." Encourage him or her to repeatedly say it at school as well. Going to school with this attitude may allow your child to see the positive things the teacher does.

Parents can help their children learn valuable life skills about dealing with perceptions and challenges in their lives. Listening to them, expressing feelings, teaching them how to take different viewpoints about a situation and not always

blaming others are important life lessons. Remember that in the heat of the moment they may not be able to learn these skills. The time to teach may be at a different time like driving together in the car or snuggling at bedtime. Be patient with your child and yourself. Take baby-steps as these skills are not always easy to learn. Hopefully these tips will give your children the self-confidence and responsibility they need to succeed in facing challenges in their school year and, thus, preparing themselves for similar situations throughout their lifetime.

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Cathy Lumsden is an associate at the Adlerian Counselling and Consulting Group Inc. She has 24 years experience in counselling individuals, families and groups. She has facilitated training programs and professional seminars focused on conflict resolution, team effectiveness, communication and stress management in both Canada and the United States. Please write to us at The Adlerian Centre at 1729 Bank Street, Suite 205, Ottawa K1V 7Z5, call 737-5553 or e-mail us at info@adleriancentre.com with your reactions or ideas for this column. www.adleriancentre.com

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