



ASK Jane

Q: Dear Jane,

I'm a grade school teacher with a lively but well-behaved classroom. Unfortunately, during free time on the playground a few students don't know when their play becomes too rough or too dominating. This situation not only intimidates the others, it also results in others' not wanting to play with them. I've asked to meet with the parents, but they say it's my problem and don't want to come in. What can I do to help them get involved? I don't want their children to get in trouble or be left out.

Urgently,

Mrs. Henderson

A: Dear Mrs. Henderson,

Involving parents in their child's school life is an important goal. There is much research to show the value of parent involvement, linking it to higher academic grades, regular attendance, improved behavior, better social skills and school promotion.

The key is to start building a relationship with parents and caregivers of your students from the beginning, taking advantage of those moments at drop off and pick up, Parent-Teacher conferences, and through any other communications that you may have with families

via calls & texts, newsletters and emails, to create a welcoming environment. Having regular positive contact with parents will show that you care about their child and will help to strengthen your relationship.

Raising a problem situation shouldn't be first time you talk with a parent; that will be better received and less threatening once you have a relationship in place and have built some trust.

If a parent is avoidant, remember that he/she may be feeling intimidated. Parenting is a very vulnerable endeavor, so parents may have self-doubts, worry that their child's behavior reflects poorly on them, and fear that they will be

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judged or criticized as a result. For the same reasons, parents and caregivers may blame you, the teacher, for the child's behavior—which may be how it felt to you in your example. Do your best not to be defensive or blaming in return. Be sure to really listen to what parents say, so you can understand what each child's behavior means to them and empathize that they may not feel they can affect what happens at school. In fact, they are correct: ultimately it is up to you to manage the behavior while at school.

However, when home and school work together, it increases the likelihood of the child trying harder and doing their best in both settings, because it creates greater consistency and increases the child's sense of security.

So, while you might not be asking the parent to “do” something, I am guessing that you would like them to give their child the same message about behavioral expectations at school. It's a powerful thing and much more effective when home and school are on the same page working together cooperatively.

Show the parent or caregiver respect for their most important role in the child's life, stressing that they know their children best and can offer you valuable insights. Let them know you're concerned that the children may be hurting their own ability to make friends by their behavior; that

way you'll indicate you have their best interests at heart. If you each bring your perspective from your unique role with the child, you will have much greater success in addressing issues that come up.

Remember that you both have the shared goal of wanting to help children do their best, be successful and thrive.

Most Sincerely,

Jane **JPA**

