Parents and Teachers: A Lesson in Building Partnerships

by (ARA)

Itâ€™s probably the most important relationship a child has outside the family and it begins anew every single year. â€œThe connection between a child and a teacher is a big one and it can affect everyone in the family,â€• says Randy Copas, vice president for residential services with Starr Commonwealth, a non-profit organization serving troubled youth and families headquartered in Michigan. â€œThe time to begin that relationship is long before the first parent/teacher conference.â€• Copas, a senior trainer with No Disposable Kids (NDK), an innovative school-based program to build relationships in schools, says the teachers he meets are thrilled when parents make an effort to establish a relationship. â€œOf course, the approach makes a big difference.â€• Copas believes a quick note, phone call or visit with the teacher at the beginning of the year is a great idea. â€œItâ€™s a real plus to meet when thereâ€™s no â€˜issueâ€™ on the table. By establishing a rapport early on, you create a healthy environment for communication in the future.â€• But donâ€™t be surprised if the teacher is somewhat defensive initially. â€œAn involved parent with no agenda is a rarity for many teachers,â€• he says. â€œBe patient. Once a teacher sees that he or she has your full support, theyâ€™ll be comfortable opening up.â€• Teachers appreciate inside information about a child and who better to provide it than you yourself? Let the teacher know what makes your child tick. Give them an idea of how your child learns; what seems to work for your child and what doesnâ€™t. Think about it this way. When you offer a teacher insight into your childâ€™s personality, what you are really doing is giving your child a voice. This approach is particularly wise for parents whose children have a history of academic or behavioral issues. â€œTeachers are only human, like the rest of us, and they talk among themselves about the kids coming through the system,â€• says Copas. â€œA child can get a reputation that follows him for years. You really want to interrupt that cycle.â€• How? Donâ€™t wait for problems to crop up. Be proactive instead and talk to the teacher candidly. While it may not be necessary to review every little detail, basic information can provide the teacher with the tools to handle situations appropriately. Regardless of the student or the circumstances, when you open up the lines of communication and bring an open mind to the discussion, you are taking the first steps toward a successful school year for everyone. Starr Commonwealth is a child and family services organization with nearly a century of experience in treating troubled youth and their families. For more information about Starr Commonwealth or the No Disposable Kids (NDK) training program to help build healthy school environments, call (866) 289-9201 or visit their websites at www.starr.org or www.ndk.org.