

CALM DOWN Approach

Advocate for Your Child in School

I want to share our own experiences in this post. Our second grader goes to a “good” public school in California. We love that our school places a lot of emphasis on reading and writing, organizes special meetings with local authors, and has been focusing a lot on getting children moving during recess. At the same time, our daughter has been complaining all year that she is bored and that everything has been “too easy” for her. When she is trying to use multiplication instead of addition, her work is marked as “incorrect”, and a teacher is complaining that our daughter is “correcting” her in class when her slides have spelling mistakes.

I recommend using the CALM DOWN approach when advocating for your child. The only situation when I recommend an immediate intervention is when your child reports being bullied or you observe your child being bullied.

CALM DOWN Approach

C – Craft your desired outcome

- Envision specific changes that could improve your child’s school life.
 - Do you want to “skip” your child?
 - Do you want testing and a pull out into an appropriate grade level?

A – Assemble your evidence

If your child is struggling in school but not at home:

- Record him doing his work or reading.
- Bring doctor's records if your child has a disability that requires accommodation.
- Bring samples of work done outside of school hours.

L – Learn your rights and consider your options

- Different countries and states have different rules on accommodating both struggling learners and gifted learners.
- Consider what you will do if your requests are not met.
 - Negotiate a partial solution.
 - Look at private schools or homeschooling.

M – Meet with your teacher first

- Teacher may not be aware of the situation.
 - He or she deals with many students of very different needs.
- Meeting with your child’s teacher doesn’t bring results?
 - Schedule a meeting with the principal.

D – Don't get confrontational

- Your child's teacher has your child's best interests at heart.
- Teachers are also human and focused on his or her goals.
 - Challenging advanced learners is not one of the goals our teachers are asked to meet.

O – Offer help

- Volunteer in the classroom.
 - Time spent in the classroom will give you a new appreciation for your student's and her teacher's challenges.
 - It is understandable that a teacher needs to spend her energies getting struggling students to the level expected.

W – Write things down

- Put things in writing, especially if you are trying to put an IEP in place.
- Document conversations.

N – Next steps

- Be clear about next steps and timelines.
- Reminders are needed to progress towards resolution.
- Progress can be slow.
- Consider alternative "next steps" if your school cannot accommodate your child.

Final Thoughts

- While you are going through these steps, it is important to do it in a way that doesn't directly involve your child or involves him or her as little as possible.
- We don't want our daughter to know that we are unhappy with her school unless we are prepared to take her out. We also want her to continue to put forward her best effort in her studies.
- Changing schools is a big step for any family.
- Parents have options and the rights and the responsibility to be an active partner and an active advocate for our children in school.

Edited from a post written by Natalie, mom and blogger at [Afterschool for Smarty Pants](http://afterschoolforsmartypants.com) as seen on *Imagination Soup* (<http://imagination soup.net/2014/01/29/read-this-if-your-child-is-unhappy-at-school/>)