



SUCCESSFUL ENCOUNTERS – PARENT TIP SHEET

This article is for parents as a guide for their encounters with schools. The way that 'encounters' with the school are handled or mishandled can make or break the outcome. Getting off to a bad start can sometimes negatively affect the end result so the idea is to work with the school to benefit your child and all children at that school.

PLAYGROUND OR CLASSROOM APPROACH

Approaching teachers or principals in the **playground or classroom** is the least advisable way of attempting to deal with an issue. This type of approach undermines the importance of the matter and can send the teacher or principal straight into defence mode since they may feel attacked or ambushed. In addition, it risks the privacy of all the parties involved and may upset students who are nearby who witness the exchange. Good advice is to only approach teachers or principals in the playground or classroom for a positive and friendly interaction.

THE WALK-IN

Also undesirable is the 'walk-in'. Schools are busy places and the office personnel or school staff may not have the time to give your issue the attention it requires. Even so, if you find yourself in the school office with your concern there are 3 things to remember:

1. treat the frontline staff with the utmost respect and courtesy, they are far more likely to help you if they feel valued: remember they are the gateway to the rest of the school staff
2. if you are not clear about who to speak to or what the school processes are, be patient with the staff while they explain; they are only trying to help you
3. be mindful of others in the office or environs around breach of confidentiality for your child, the teacher or other children and parents.

THE TELEPHONE CALL

Far more effective is the **'telephone call'**. To get the most out of this interaction, you need to:

1. find out who is the right person to speak to before launching into the entire 'whodunit' story so as not to waste the time of the person answering the phone
2. try to keep your emotions in check at this stage so that the person on the other end is not offended making them less likely to want to hear you out
3. understand and agree if they ask you to call back at a better time or direct you to another party.

AN APPOINTMENT

If you have obtained an appointment with the teacher or principal, here are a few steps to remember:

1. arrive a few minutes early so you can take time to calm yourself in the school foyer
2. if you feel nervous, say so and you are likely to be treated with more compassion and understanding
3. don't forget to show them compassion too, as they may be feeling nervous
4. if you feel angry, try to explain this in a way that will get the best effect, for example: "I need to tell you that I am very upset about because"
5. go in to the meeting with the intention of finding a solution, which is NOT sacking the teacher or expelling the other student
6. in a face to face interview check your body language, be aware if you are using your size, voice or temper to intimidate or bully them as this will not be helpful.

A MEETING OR MEDIATION

Sometimes the best way to resolve an issue is to hold a **mediation between the affected parties**. If you are invited to take part in one of these meetings or ask for one, there are a few things you can do for best outcome:

1. find out who else will be at the meeting and ask if you can bring a support person too
2. even though it is natural for parents to be emotional when it comes to their children, try not to let your anger or disappointment dominate the meeting,
3. don't make it personal, don't attack their professionalism, age or knowledge of children, whether they have children or not,
4. don't get overly stuck in 'the facts' as told by one person (I.e. your child) there may be another set of facts equally deserving of consideration which when combined with the child's set of facts actually come close to what really happened
5. adopt a collaborative rather than competitive position so that a solution which benefits your child and the school is possible.

As parents, the most precious thing in our lives is our children and so it is completely natural to jump to their defence to support them. As their strongest advocate, it is imperative we manage our behaviour in a way that will get the best result for them, while preserving the relationship with the individuals who work at the school.

Remember that approaching your school with respect and courtesy will open more doors than taking out your anger or frustration on them.

For more tips on how to engage positively with your school and downloadable resources or to book me for a workshop for teachers or parents visit my website at

www.lindamcneil.com.au