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## Getting Along with the Teacher

"I hate my teacher!" my six-year-old announced last year on the first day of school. Suddenly the academic year turned dark and menacing. Was my child just being difficult or was this teacher really trouble?

Hannah's father said, "This teacher isn't going to change. We're going to have to help Hannah to adjust. She's got to learn to get along with this teacher even if she doesn't like her." I decided that he was right and that I had to figure out a way to use this situation for my child's growth. Essentially, here's what I came up with:

### **Explore. Don't Gossip.**

Some parents found Mrs. Adams highly critical, sharp with the kids, and difficult. Others were impressed with how much she had taught their children. While I wanted my daughter to learn, I did not want her ego and self-esteem to suffer in the process.

### **Get Involved, but Don't Spy.**

Once a month, I would volunteer. I was determined to go in with an open mind. Frankly, I think most teachers work hard for their money and I'm not sure I could handle 28 kids in a classroom.

Each time I went, I was more impressed. The children were doing very interesting things. I heard her sharp tone and I still didn't like it, but the kids, by gosh-by golly, were learning math, science, and reading. Mrs. Adams was even teaching advanced computer skills, having brought in her own computer because the school's was so old.

### **Empathize with the Teacher.**

As I helped the kids with journal writing or book reports, I saw that some kids were really difficult. One child was often out of control. Clearly a child with problems. I sympathized.

### **Help Your Child See that No Situation is Black or White.**

I wanted to show Hannah that few things are all good or all bad. So each day we had "Mrs. A. Stories." Hannah would tell me one BAD thing that happened with Mrs. A. in class and one GOOD thing. This particular exercise gave me some insight into the classroom dynamics and it gave her a sense of perspective.

**Take Action When Necessary.**

It became evident that some complaints were reasonable and others weren't. "Mrs. Adams says I walk down the steps wrong, but I feel like I'm going to throw up when I do it her way." I requested a parent-teacher meeting, pronto. Hannah should walk down steps in a way that was comfortable for her, I stated firmly.

While I was there, I brought up another of Hannah's complaints. "Hannah says that she feels rushed by you to complete assignments." Turns out that Hannah was a bit of a talker.

So, to Hannah, I said, "You need to stop socializing in class," and to Mrs. Adams, I said, "She shouldn't be talking in class. I will speak to her, but I would like you to let her walk the way she feels comfortable."

**Compliment When Possible.**

After volunteering one day, I wrote to Mrs. Adams. "From the classical music first thing in the morning to the organized activities in the afternoon, you have a clear direction and are giving these kids real tools to grow and learn."

Then I listed some specific things I liked. "As a parent, for all these things, I am grateful."

**The Payoff.**

One Saturday morning, Hannah was at her desk writing.

"How do you spell 'Best....Year... Love...Sad?'"

"Why?"

"I'm just writing to tell Mrs. Adams I'll really miss her. She was the best teacher I ever had."

Tears came to my eyes. I had worked diligently with Hannah all year, listening to her complaints, teaching her that she could count on me to handle serious problems, but that she might also have to change or adjust. Her self-esteem was intact and she had come to like someone she never thought she'd like. A good life lesson, I'd say.