

4. COMMUNICATION

Sameena Eidoo: Moving to Canada is not without challenges, upon relocating to this new place there exist many complex pressures, worries and barriers for newcomer families. Often topping the list of worries is that of the welfare of ones children, providing for them and their successful futures is often an essential priority of immigrant parents. This being said, schools can ease the worries of caring parents simply by opening the lines of communication to newcomer families and by creating an atmosphere in which regular communication is encouraged and promoted.

Caribbean Community Parent: I will give them an advice, I was keeping contact with the parents. I know one teacher, they always call, but some won't call. You know, just, even once a month, you call up and say well, "I am so and so, Johnny's teacher and I would like to know... I called to say hi". And the parents should also sometimes go to the school and say "Hi, how is my son doing? Is he behaving?" Because in your case they might say yes, sometime they do something and the teacher don't even bother to tell you because they're fed up, but you know if you keep in touch with each other. Sometimes a little phone call, you know, five minutes. Everybody's busy, five minutes won't hurt.

Sameena Eidoo: It is important that teachers and staff encourage parents to get involved with the school. Both parents and school personnel need to work together to build a relationship, both need to work on opening the lines of communication and getting the relationship rolling.

Educator : I guess one thing that we've worked hard on is to have volunteers within our school. We've encouraged many, particularly moms, to work within the classrooms in whatever capacity they can and what we've found is that some come with very little English but will do whatever you ask them to do, and it's an opportunity for them, they're actually learning English while they're here and they're becoming more familiar with the kinds of schooling that their child is experiencing. And much like you would think anywhere else, it encourages, they go back and say "Oh you should come it's quite good", and so over the years our volunteers have really increased because they're finding it a good place for them to be and for them to learn.

Mandarin Speaking Parent: Later that Kindergarten teacher told the Grade One teacher what I hoped for my daughter. The teacher was very upset. She said, "Why didn't you come talk with me directly when you had a question?" But the teacher felt, "Why didn't you tell me?" So for a while I felt very embarrassed when whenever I saw the Grade One teacher. I tried to explain that was not what I meant, but it was very hard to get the message through. Maybe it was because of the language, I found it hard to explain to her what I really meant. She called me and asked me to see her at school. So I did. It was because I had talked with the Kindergarten teacher, so this teacher was very upset. I could see that. She said, "I hope you can tell me directly if there is any issue." She did not understand and did not give me any chance to explain what I meant. I find this is the cultural difference. Unfortunately she misunderstood me. She felt I was complaining about her to the other teacher. That's how I felt. And also it was impossible to communicate. I couldn't get my meaning across.

Russian Speaking Parent: When we first arrived to Canada, I talked to someone, I don't know who it was. She didn't really introduce herself, she just said her name. Eventually it turned out that the courses for my child weren't selected correctly. So in Grade 11 we found out that

because the course selection was wrong in Grade 9, she has to take Grade 13. That is to say, no one explained to us the school system, or the credit system, nor how things are done. The school system is completely different in the country where we are from. We are used to trusting the teacher's word, because he or she is a person in a certain position of authority, and they know what they are doing.

Sameena Eidoo: What advice might you give to a parent who seeks you out because he or she is having difficulty relating to the teacher of his or her child?

Caribbean Community Parent: You have to learn to listen, like probably some people can't get across because as soon as the teacher, the principal say something that heats them they don't wait until the person is finished, they start to talk, so you know it can cause a problem. So like, sit and listen to what the person have to say and then the person will listen to you. Then I think you'll get whatever you have to say will come across better and you'll understand each other.