

Speaker 1 ([00:03](#)):

Welcome to Be Evolved, a podcast for parents and educators who prioritize developing possibility and expansion within the total educational process for themselves and their children or students. We invite you to listen to the podcast with your child or student in mind and with yourself at the center of the learning experience. Ultimately, our goal is to bridge the gap between educational expertise and research, translating it into practical action. Gaining knowledge plus taking action is what it means to be evolved. Hello everyone. Welcome to our September edition of Be Evolved. I'm Mary Miele, your host, and I'm here with Caitlin Hassan, our director of early childhood and elementary school programs, and Becky Reback, who's our director of middle school, high school and adult programs here at Vault. We know if you are anything like us and you're listening to this podcast, you are feeling the craziness of September.

([01:08](#)):

We are no different. We were just on the call before and we were just all sharing how busy it is right now and probably on your mind is the transition to school for your children and there's a lot to discuss. Today we're going to really focus on giving you some practical ideas of how to speak with your child's teacher. So if you have a very young child, Kaylyn's going to give you some tips and ideas for that particular age group and then Becky's going to share some tips and ideas for middle school and high school students. Stay until the end because we'll sum everything up with just some general, everyone can use these ideas portion of this episode. So we hope to leave you with some really good strategies and scripts for approaching your child's teacher and helping your child to have the very best year possible. So let's get right to it, shall we? How about Caitlin, we will start with you. Thanks for being here today for having me. Alright, so we're going to talk about our youngest students, so anywhere from twos when they're starting school, two years old, all the way through about fifth grade. And the question I have for you is how do you suggest parents of early childhood or elementary school students initiate strong relationships with their child's teachers from the start of the school year?

Speaker 2 ([02:48](#)):

Yeah, great question and I think it's always so important to set the foundation for these relationships. Teachers are such an important partner in your child's educational journey and you want to make sure that you start off on the right foot and keep things very positive. I think something that's really important at the beginning of the year is providing an introduction. So you could either send a friendly introductory email or certainly attend your child's first day of school or so. Obviously different schools have different formats for what that may look like, but certainly get in there and see the classroom for yourself, meet the teachers in person. That's always so important and keep things very friendly and positive from the start. I think if you have any really important information to share about your child, whether it's something about their academic needs, behavioral needs, anything related to that, it would be great to send a brief email at the beginning of the year.

([03:38](#)):

I think an email is always a good format and then perhaps suggest a follow-up phone call or meeting if you feel it's warranted. I know being a teacher or myself, it can be hard to schedule a lot of meetings at the beginning of the year when teachers are very busy and they're trying to get to know the students for themselves too. So I usually suggest email probably being the best format and then if they feel any follow-up is needed, that's great and the teacher may want to do that kind of follow-up phone call or meeting after giving your child a few weeks to acclimate into their new school environment. Just because we know that sometimes children don't feel completely comfortable until a few weeks or days in. I think it's also great to express support in a couple different ways. That can be via email just saying, thank you so much after the first week or first month of school, say how much your child has enjoyed their experience so far. And if teachers give you the opportunity to do any kind of volunteer work or activities

in the classroom, definitely take part to the extent that's possible. The more involved you are, the more you show support and I think establish that great relationship with teachers.

Speaker 1 ([04:42](#)):

Yeah, it's great. And I think just to your point too is something you mentioned which I really feel is so important to drive home is just how important it is to get involved in a way that really works for you. So go in and do one volunteer opportunity if that's what you can do because it allows your teacher to see you as a person and to really get to know you in a way that is beyond the time when there might be a concern coming up. So it just establishes a really nice relationship

Speaker 2 ([05:19](#)):

Unless you just be a parent in the classroom as opposed to just coming right in with a concern. And I think being able to participate with your kid and see your kid in action is the best way to get to know how they are in their everyday classroom life.

Speaker 1 ([05:30](#)):

Absolutely. And it's really your child's second home, especially at that age. So it's fun to go in and really see what they're experiencing on a day-to-day basis and make some really good memories of that experience as well. So thank you. Those were really great pieces of advice. So now we may not be here right now, but I think every parent who has a school aged child will have a difficult situation come up for their child, whether it be that the parent is concerned about the child's reading or math or maybe there's a social concern or challenge that has been reported or the child comes home in tears because something has happened and they have to tell you all about it and they're very upset or are hearing from another mom in the playground that something happens. There's so many things that can come up during the year that would cause a parent some level of concern or distress. And so what are some of your tips? Let's be a little proactive here, right? Let's get some tools in her toolbox. So what are some tips that parents can use when they have to have a difficult conversation about a young child's behavior or their developmental progress with the teachers?

Speaker 2 ([06:44](#)):

Yeah, great. So I think first and foremost, stay calm, which it can be really hard to do when it's an emotional situation about your own kid who feels like an extension of yourself in so many ways. So it can be really hard to stay calm, but you have to enter these kind of difficult conversations for a place of calm as best you can, and I think staying focused on your child is also the best route. I think a lot of times kids come home at this age and want to report in on things that may have happened, whether that's with another child and I think sometimes parents jump to wanting to talk about perhaps the other child in this scenario, but really you need to stay focused on your own. Teachers really can only most of the time talk to you about your own child and how their situation is being handled, so keep it focused on your own child.

([07:32](#)):

And I think with that too, take everything that your young child says to you with a grain of salt. I think kids sometimes don't see the full picture of the scenario or they miss nuances in the situation. So I think allowing the teacher to fill you in on the full picture of the situation can be really helpful because kids just don't always get everything just right or may miss the memo when they're relaying the story to you or something like that. When you're talking with your child's teacher, keep the language as positive as possible. Frame conversations positively, invite them to provide some advice on how to best handle the situation moving forward because they are certainly experts in this age group. You're the expert on your

own child, but they know this age group and developmentally what's appropriate and can make some really great recommendations for you.

(08:21):

Definitely listen actively throughout the conversation, make sure that you give them space to speak, share their perspective and insight and take in what it is that they have to say, especially if they provide any recommendations. Take that to heart and work on seeking solutions together. I think again, this is a partnership between you and your child's teachers to support your kids, so you want to make sure that you are working together as best you can. Feel free to share strategies that may work for your child at home that you see that are very effective and perhaps your child's teacher can implement that in the classroom, but perhaps they may have ideas to share as well. So be sure to kind of listen to one another and do your best to take away from the conversation some action steps that you can take from here.

Speaker 1 (09:07):

That's really great advice and I often tell parents the same sort of scenarios as well, but I also would add to that to ask a lot of questions. So make sure that you're just coming in and you're saying, this is what my child said today. Is that how you experienced the situation or is this something that happens often? Right? Really looking for those patterns and paying attention to when something is happening over and over and over again as opposed to once or twice is really also really key at this age. So I think it's very important just to know that we're here for you too, if you feel as a parent you are not sure how to address some of these challenges. Caitlin, do you want to talk a little bit about how parents might be able to work with you or find you if there is a question about how to address a particular issue that does come up for early childhood?

Speaker 2 (10:04):

Yeah, we certainly kind of come up with action plans for parents of how to best approach a conversation, how to share information with teachers about your child or anything like that. So you can feel free to go to our website and book that way you can feel free to call our office line, you can email us. So lots of different ways to get in touch and we'd be happy to set up either a 30 or 60 minute consultation with you if it's kind of a one-off thing or a longer term engagement if you feel like you need some more support over time.

Speaker 1 (10:35):

Exactly. So good to know you're not alone. It's hard. As one of our educators here said to all of us as we're parenting children, we're learning as our children are learning. So it's really nice to know that you're in that kind of community here at evolved and there's a lot of resources and support you can get when you're going through developing relationships with your child's teachers. Thank you so much Caitlyn, and I'm going to go ahead and turn things over now to Becky Reba, who is our director of middle school high school and adult programs, and we're going to talk a little bit about the next age group and then again, don't leave us. We're going to sum everything up at the very end and make sure that you have a couple of really nice actions to take as you go forward with forming these relationships. So let's get into it, shall we, Becky?

Speaker 3 (11:28):

Absolutely.

Speaker 1 (11:29):

Okay. So how do you advise parents of middle school and high school students? And I maybe want to take them separately to foster the strong relationships with teachers, especially since academic pressure

increases and your student is going to likely have more than one teacher for various subjects. There's a lot of different people to meet and know about and learn about.

Speaker 3 ([11:51](#)):

Absolutely. I mean I think that we can them separately and together. I think that what's important to remember is your middle school student is learning how to advocate for themselves right now. So you probably, at least in the beginning of middle school, the early part of sixth grade or fifth grade, depending on when your school transitions to middle school, you're going to help them and you're going to maybe do more of the communicating or help sit with them to write the email or something along those lines. But as they get older, you want to slowly release the support that you're providing your child so that way they feel really confident and ready to advocate and reach out to their teacher and speak with the teacher themselves as they get closer and closer to the end of high school and to college or whatever lies beyond high school for your child.

([12:39](#)):

Something else that becomes tricky is that if you have parent teacher conferences in middle and high school, they're usually 10, 20 minutes. They're not very long and you have multiple teachers to get to. So you want to just make sure that you are maintaining regular communication with the teachers, making sure that you're having an understanding of what's going on in their class, what is expected of your child and what your child needs to do if they're not meeting expectations. And that's a really good opportunity for your child to see the teacher after school during a free period before school, whatever it might be, and you can help facilitate that conversation even before you walk into your conferences in November. You should establish this line of communication earlier in the year. So if teachers have an understanding of who your kid is and can really help support them from the get go, obviously you want to make sure you're attending the meetings.

([13:34](#)):

If they offer the opportunity for your child to attend their parent teacher conference, a hundred percent your child to do that. It's a really valuable time for them to learn about themselves and again, practice those advocacy skills in those sort of safer settings at this age, again, at every age, really, and I think Caitlyn touched on this too, but you want to be your teacher's partner. You don't want to make them feel like you're walking in, yes, you are the expert on your child. You want to make sure that they have certain information on them, but you want to make sure that they feel that it's a mutual relationship and respect between the two of you. So making sure that you appreciate what they're doing and let them be the expert in the area that they're the expert in while you are the expert in your child and you're sharing that information back and forth.

([14:22](#)):

And it can certainly be a back and forth dialogue. And then again, just encouraging your child to get involved in this piece of the conversation and saying, when you taught this lesson, it really worked for me because X, Y, and Z, this lesson was really hard for me because A, B, and C. So getting your child involved in that conversation and communication and appreciation of their teacher also I think will help their relationship with their teacher, especially if it's one that they're not totally in love with, which definitely happens as you move into the older grades and you have multiple teachers, you're not going to like every single one. And Mary and Caitlin have heard me say this many times, you're not always going to like the people you work with and you work for, right? You're not always going to love your boss or your colleague or your boss's boss.

([15:10](#)):

And so you have to learn at these young ages how to work with everyone. And I hear so many times that the teacher doesn't like my kid or my kid doesn't like this teacher. And I'm like, okay, but how are we

teaching this skill, which it's a real skill on how to handle working for somebody that you do not enjoy. And this is like sixth grade, fifth grade, middle school, high school is the perfect time to start learning that lesson. Honestly, I even think my preschooler needs to learn the lesson. Sometimes he doesn't have the best teacher and he needs to learn how to manage that, but certainly by middle and high school, we want to make sure that we understand how to do that.

Speaker 1 ([15:49](#)):

I love that you brought that up. That's really a good reminder.

Speaker 3 ([15:53](#)):

Yeah, I think people forget that and it's definitely a big piece to the teacher student relationship puzzle.

Speaker 1 ([16:02](#)):

Absolutely. I know, I was just thinking about that a little bit when you were talking because I think it's also important for parents to also be clear about what their role is in the parent teacher student triangle. And sometimes there will be concerns that a parent feels. And what I say is it's important not to rush to the finish line without really exploring the race. You don't want to necessarily say, oh, my child is really struggling in this class because this particular teacher isn't doing A, B and C. And let's say you say that to your child and your child hasn't really investigated everything that's going on. They may show up for that class and then not actually work through what's challenging because all they've heard from the parent is how challenging the teacher is and that their challenge because of the teacher. So we have to almost be very mindful about what we're saying in front of our children, especially in the middle school and high school age, absolutely.

([17:08](#)):

About their schools and about their teachers. Because what we really are trying to work on from a more macro level is we want our kids to go to school every day and do hard work within each of their classes and participate and respect their teachers for something and to work through the work that they're doing. But if we as parents are on the back end of things saying, well, I see that this class is really hard, I don't know that teacher doesn't really know how to break this down, or this teacher isn't really providing you with a really good study guide or whatever. I mean all of that may be true. It's just not really serving your child to hear all of those grievances because they're not hearing them in context of, and you can actually still learn within that particular context. So another way to think about it is let's say you get into a situation with your middle school or high school student and you're realizing, wow, this is a hard class because the teacher doesn't give a study guide.

([18:08](#)):

You could ask questions of the teacher, I just noticed my child does better when he has a study guide. Is that possible? What's going on? But you could also say to your child, wow, it's hard not to have a study guide. How are you handling that? How is it possible for you to learn without the study guide? How can I learn with you? All of those things are possible. It just puts a much more productive spin on your relationships between the three of you, the teacher, the student, and the parent when you speak in those ways as opposed to literally giving your child all of your grievances. And what they're going to really do with that is they're just going to see them as obstacles for their learning and not necessarily jump to the next conclusion, which is I actually can learn within this particular challenge. So we just want to be careful about how we're talking about things, I think is what I'm trying to say.

Speaker 3 ([19:04](#)):

Absolutely. And teaching your child how to take ownership over their own learning and they're going to want you to jump in for them. And like Mary said, I think to a certain extent you can because they're still a child, but it has to be done in tandem with them also speaking up and finding something that's going to work for them too. Because otherwise we're raising a generation of kids that blame everyone else for their problems. And we don't want that because like you said, Mary, they can change this if they work. It's hard work. No one says it's easy, but it's definitely something that is changeable. And a year is a short term, right? A school year is a short term, and then they learn the skill of how to manage this and then they can apply it. Hopefully they don't have to, but if they do, they can apply it to the following year.

(19:59):

But I think that yes, you can come in and help your child and support them, and you really need to push them to figure out how they're going to support themselves. Are they going to email the teacher? Are they going to have a study friend every week? Whatever it is that works for them is something that they can try, but it's really important that you help them work through this. And sometimes, I mean, my children are young, but even my daughter who's in first grade, before we got her teacher, we sat and had a conversation about we could get lucky and you could be obsessed with your teacher and you might not love your teacher, and what are we going to do if we don't feel the love kind of thing? And that happens from the youngest ages, so especially your middle school and high schoolers, this is the time to really push them into thinking that.

Speaker 1 (20:48):

Yeah, absolutely. And there's so much learning that can happen with those kinds of dialogues, which we're happy to support the development of. So just going into perhaps what may come down the line, because there's going to be challenges that middle school and high school students face, and we do want of course them to advocate, but sometimes children can't advocate for one reason or the other, or a parent really needs to model or step in. And how would you sort of advise parents in terms of balancing the advocating for their child while also encouraging them to have more independence for their children within the communication with their teachers?

Speaker 3 (21:26):

Yeah, I mean the first thing of course always is encourage your child. Maybe that looks like you sit down and help them write an email to their teacher saying, I had a hard time on this assignment, or I'm just having a hard time setting for this test. Whatever the situation is. Definitely sitting down and helping them to write the email or at least sitting with them and it coming from their email address because most middle school and high schoolers have at least a school email address at this point in the way our education is. So definitely first thing you want to encourage your child, at the very least, even if it makes your child insanely uncomfortable to do that, it starts to push them past their comfort zone. And that's a huge piece of learning as well. So that's going to be the first step.

(22:09):

If your child is doing that and advocating for themselves or at least reaching out and they're still having a hard time, then I think it's worthwhile for you as the parent to reach out reach. I always say reach out to the teacher before anybody else, before the head of school, before the guidance counselor or less, of course there's a big emergency kind of thing, but have a conversation with the teacher that goes back to that collaboration, that relationship with the teacher, that appreciation of that they are in the scene in the situation with their child. And it's good to give them that opportunity to have a conversation and go in with a lot of curiosity. And depending on the situation you maybe even want to have and the age of your child, maybe want your child to be there and listen in on you talking to the teacher and advocating for them so they can start to learn and understand what that's like.

(23:02):

Again, I think that's very dependent on the situation and the child, but it could be beneficial. And then ask those questions. Be curious. Don't ask yes or no questions. Ask open-ended questions that are going to elicit conversation and are going to lead to more questions and then help with solutions. I think in terms of the teacher and saying, I know that this worked in the past, would you be open to that? Would you be amenable to trying that? Could you meet with Sally tomorrow morning if I brought her in early? Something along those lines. And then just from there, just gradually releasing the support from your kids. So hopefully, ultimately they can advocate for themselves while you're always there and supporting them in the background. And I wouldn't take it to the next level of the head of school or the assistant head or something like that, unless it really is a longstanding issue with the class or this particular relationship that you have. And I would also say encourage your student not only to talk to the teacher, but also maybe to a guidance counselor or another trusted adult and ask them what they recommend that they do that a trusted adult that's at the school, maybe it's a homeroom teacher, maybe it's a teacher from last year that they had a really nice connection with and say, Hey, this is what's coming up for me. What do you recommend I do? Can you help me a little bit? Because sometimes it also just is better not coming from mom or dad.

Speaker 1 ([24:25](#)):

It's very true. That's happens in some of the cases I've worked with where the child was having a really hard time, let's say in one class, and maybe the personalities of the teacher and student didn't necessarily align, but maybe also was the subject itself. And we had another adult come in and just talk with the child about, Hey, I'm here. I'm in this school. I know you. What's going on and how can I help you? And validating some of their feelings around the subject and just saying, I get that. That's hard. But you can do that. I mean, I've seen you do other hard things, and it might've been the same exact thing that the parent was saying. It just sort of came from a different angle with a person who isn't their parent who doesn't really have the same level of stake in the game, let's just say.

([25:09](#)):

Right, so it means a little more. Yeah, exactly. So I mean, I think it does take many, many adults to help raise a child, but sometimes it actually just takes one other person to come in and say to your child, I believe in you and I think you can conquer this. I've seen you do it before. And so as a parent who's really aiming to form this relationship of parent, child, teacher, it's good to enlist another if you feel like that would be helpful to facilitate that triangle and have a successful relationship. So I hope these things are very helpful to you as you all start your school year, and I just want to leave you with a nice sum up to be able to help you along. So just a couple of really key strategies that you can use right away. So number one, formulate an email that introduces yourself to your child's teacher and your family and introduces your child maybe by saying, here's a couple things that my child is very good at.

([26:11](#)):

This is something she loves or he loves, and this is something that my child struggles with and this is how we handle that struggle in case it comes up. And we'd love to continue to talk with you. If you want to have a call, let us know when we're very accessible. Then you might do another email that's sort of appreciation based. So if you notice that the teacher took the time to give all of the class something, or just simply your child had a great day at school, or they had a really good lesson, you could certainly let the teacher know that was such a positive experience and that you're so grateful that it happened. So those are two correspondences that you could just go ahead and take action on right now. The next is just to think about really talking positively with your child about all of their experiences, whether it be a positive experience at school or one that's un preferred.

([27:03](#)):

I'm not talking about an experience in which a child is being harmed or hurt. I'm not talking about anything like that. I'm just talking about if your child is struggling to make a relationship with someone or

your child is struggling to learn something or your child is struggling to acclimate or has a lagging skill of some kind. You can still be very encouraging and positive about the school. Try to find the things about your child's school that you feel really good about. And sometimes that's easier done than others, but you always want to speak very highly of your child's school because really their school is an extension of themselves when they're there, and they are going to be very proud of themselves if they attend an institution that you are proud of. So try to find ways to speak positively about your child's school even when you're being challenged within that environment.

[\(27:51\)](#):

And then the other one is just make sure that if you are helping your child through a challenge at the earlier years, you are speaking with a teacher directly about those concerns by asking questions, being curious, writing down what you're seeing, but then asking the teacher what they're seeing and coming up with a solution that you both feel can work both at home and at school. And as your child progresses into their later years, you are teaching your child to do that for themselves. So they're starting to really assess how they're feeling in each class and what kind of support they might need from the teacher, and you're helping your child with the communication around that. That's your first line of defense there. If you feel as though that's not successful, then you step in because you're still the parent and you have a child and you may need to step in and have a conversation.

[\(28:44\)](#):

This is just broad strokes skills around forming this relationship. We know that these relationships can very nuanced and they're involving human beings. So that's why we offer education consulting here at Evolved, where we take the time to hear what's going on and then help you to communicate with your child's school in a way that we feel can be the most productive for your child's overall development. So it's important just to know that we're here to help and we're here to listen. Sometimes even just having parents come in and just give us some of their feelings and ideas about the matter helps everyone to sort of write down what the priorities are and what's really important or crack a pattern behavior through the experience that you're having. So just know that we're here and this is so important to your child in their education. It really is, and it's also a huge opportunity for all of us to learn alongside our children.

[\(29:45\)](#):

So I really thank you for listening. I hope this was helpful in helping you to have these kinds of conversations. And I want to thank Caitlin and Becky for being here today and for their continued work with our families here at Evolved. Have a great rest of your September. I hope you do well, and don't miss as many appointments as we all have with all the things going on, or the missed snack or the missed lunch or whatever it is. If you did that, you're in great company. We are all handling a lot, that's for sure. And listen, October will be here before you know it, and it doesn't necessarily become easier. It just becomes a little more familiar, and you will continue to evolve with your child if you're willing to do so. So thanks again. Have a great rest of your month, and we'll see you in October. Bye.

[\(30:40\)](#):

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