

Share Questions With Families

"How was your day at school?" "Good."

"What did you do?" "Nothing."

Time and time again, we hear about after-school conversations that go just like this one. Adults grow frustrated by limited responses, and children miss the opportunity to stay engaged in school-based learning after the day is done. But with some tips and practice, families can become skilled at asking effective questions and engaging children in thoughtful conversations about their learning, social interactions, and overall experience in school.

Inspired teachers know that building partnerships with students' families is an integral part of our practice. We also know family engagement includes regularly talking at home about what children are doing and learning in school. As you strengthen your practice of using questions to instigate students' thinking, you can share this strategy with families.

What you will need:

Time estimate: 5-10 minutes, as part of regular family communications

Materials: your newsletter or other communication tools

Directions:

In your next newsletter (or other regular communication), share with families the importance of talking with children about school: research has shown that family engagement has positive effects on school outcomes for children. To help families get started with talking regularly about school, offer some conversation starters and tips for formulating effective questions. (Consider creating a series, where you share a few questions each week.)

Tips for asking effective questions at home are similar to those we use in the classroom:

- Ask open-ended questions, and avoid questions with yes/no answers.
- Start conversations during casual time together - times when your child tends to be open to talking about all subjects.
- Ask about specific events, people, or activities.
- Avoid questions about behavior or discipline.
- *Listen* - pay attention while your child talks, and give her time to respond fully before jumping to your next question.

Questions and conversation starters:

- What did you find interesting today? What was interesting about it?
- What challenged you today? What did you do about that?
- Tell me about something funny that happened today.
- Tell me about something you are hoping to learn more about... what questions do you have about it?
- Who did you work with during social studies today?
- What did you play at recess? What were some other kids playing?

Resources

There are many more great questions that families can ask to generate deep conversations about school. For more ideas, check out the resources linked below. (These articles are geared toward families, so feel free to share!)

- From PBS Parents: "Questions That Work"
- From Edutopia: "15 Questions to Replace 'How Was School Today?'"
- From Understood: "How to Say It: Better Questions to Ask Your Child About School"

[Read about this teacher's](#) "Kindergarten Conversation Cards" that she sends home with students.