

# Helping Hand

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## Constructive Conversations with Your Child's Teacher

Sometimes you may disagree with a grade your child receives or a decision your child's teacher makes. You may not like the way your child's teacher presents a certain topic or manages behavior. As an expert on your child, you need to share your concerns with your child's teacher. As an education professional, the teacher needs to work with you to address your child's needs. Often the issue is a simple misunderstanding on your part or the teacher's part. Other times, changes need to be made. Perhaps the teacher needs to change, but you may need to change, too.

### The teacher is your partner

You may not always like your child's teacher, but you need to work together to provide your child with the best education possible. Do not undermine the teacher's authority in your child's eyes. When you discuss your concerns with your child, ask him or her to explain the situation, but withhold your opinion until you've discussed it with the teacher.



### Suggestions for a constructive discussion:

- Address the issue before it becomes a problem. You may agree with the teacher once you understand the situation better.
- Respect the teacher's time by scheduling an appointment to discuss the issue. This will give the teacher time to prepare by collecting samples of your child's work, for example.
- Prepare for the meeting by writing down your thoughts. Think of potential solutions to the problem. This should help you stay focused on what is best for your child.
- Start the conversation with something positive. For instance, "My daughter really enjoys writing in your class. However, I have been disappointed in the number of spelling errors in her finished work."
- Share your ideas for solving the problem. Remember that your goal is to meet your child's needs, not to evaluate the teacher.
- Practice active listening. Try to understand the reasons behind the teacher's actions or decisions.
- Remain calm, but be firm in your position if you still disagree with the teacher. Make sure you explain the reasons behind your concerns. If necessary, ask to include an administrator in the conversation.

# Children and Violence

Even in neighborhoods where violence is low, children should know how to respond to dangerous and potentially dangerous situations. Talk with your school-age children about safe street behavior, focusing on the following common sense suggestions:



- Avoid dark, deserted or dangerous streets—even if it means taking the long way around.
- Pay attention to what’s going on around you. Walk away from possible danger, such as groups of older kids or adults behaving in a threatening or suspicious way. If you get scared, go into a store, restaurant or gas station where other people are around.
- Let your parents, a trusted neighbor or a police officer know about anything going on in your neighborhood that doesn’t seem quite right.
- If someone tries to hurt you or you think someone is going to hurt you, run away or scream to get attention.

# Basic Information About Panic Attacks

A panic attack is a sudden surge of overwhelming fear that comes without warning and without any obvious reason. It is far more intense than the feeling of being stressed out that most people experience.

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If you suspect your child might be suffering from panic attacks, contact your physician or school counselor for help.

### SYMPTOMS OF A PANIC ATTACK

- racing heartbeat
- difficulty breathing, feeling like you can’t get enough air
- terror that is almost paralyzing
- dizziness, light-headedness or nausea
- trembling, sweating, shaking
- choking, chest pains
- hot flashes or sudden chills
- tingling in fingers or toes
- fear that you’re going to go crazy or are about to die

# Coping as a Family with Allergies and Asthma

Asthma and allergies are a family affair. When one member manages an illness by avoiding certain foods or making sure the home is free of allergy or asthma “triggers,” everyone else has to cooperate. Brothers, sisters or parents might want a pet, but they may have to do without one. Planning for family trips might get more complex, with the need to bring medications, allergy-free food, or a special pillow. The family might find its choices more limited when it eats out. A child with an allergy to peanuts, for instance, might have to avoid Thai restaurants. Sometimes the family will stay home because one child is too sick for an outing.

## Extra Attention?

Add to this the fact that the child with special needs will probably get extra attention, and you risk sibling resentment. It’s normal for brothers and sisters to compete for attention from even the most even-handed parents. When one child has a chronic disease, he or she usually has a powerful claim on the parents’ time and effort that the other kids can’t match. Even the most understanding sibling, says the American Medical Association (AMA), may come to resent all the parental concern to a brother or sister.



## Attention-Seeking

Siblings can express their jealousy by getting into trouble or picking fights. They might hide their feelings but become convinced that their parents love the asthmatic child more. They might feel guilty about being healthy or fear that a condition like asthma is catching.

## Pay Attention

Parents need to take extra pains - and pay close attention to signals from their kids - to keep the sibling balance intact. Some of the problem, as the AMA notes in its “Essential Guide to Asthma,” might be solved by education and involvement. Siblings should know what triggers the disease and how to prevent episodes. They must know that asthma (or allergies) aren’t infectious. All the children, including the one with the chronic illness, should have a share of the household chores. Parents need to set aside time to spend with each child and to reassure each one that he or she is also very special.

## Common Asthma Triggers

**Allergens** - pollens, molds, animal dander, dust mites, cockroaches, food allergies

**Irritants** - strong odors, sprays, chemicals, air pollutants, cold air, tobacco smoke, formaldehyde

**Respiratory infections** - colds, pneumonia, sinusitis

**Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)** - a condition in which stomach acid flows back up the esophagus (heartburn)

**Medications** - prescription and over-the-counter drugs, aspirin, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (such as ibuprofen), beta blockers

**Exercise** - especially in cold, dry air

**Weather changes** - associated with cold (in winter) or air pollution

**Nighttime** - may be due to combination of external factors (colder air, exposure to bedroom dust mites) and internal ones (normal nighttime reduction of adrenal gland function and certain natural hormones that keep airways open)

**Stress and anxiety**

# Twelve Tips for Drug-Free Children

Drugs are the number one safety threat to children, and one that they are very likely to encounter at school or among friends. How can you encourage your child to remain drug-free? Here are 12 tips for strong parenting, that will encourage them to respect your wisdom and guidance about many matters, including drugs.

- Accept the role of parent as your responsibility—let others be their friends.
- Make parenting a priority—be there.
- Learn about problems facing today's children—they are different than problems you faced.
- Give clear messages about expectations—be specific about how you expect them to behave.
- Enforce stated consequences when family rules are broken—children who don't follow family rules today may break society's laws (and consequences) tomorrow.
- Clearly state consequences of failure to follow family rules—consequences are not negotiable.
- Be aware that many in the community put children's buying power above children's well-being—don't expect the community to reinforce family values.
- Don't assume that the parents of all your children's friends have the same rules you do—some have different rules, some have none.
- Believe that children want rules to guide them—let them paint you as the “bad guy.” Sometimes you are doing your best as a parent when they don't approve or maybe don't even like you!
- Remember that teen-agers need parental supervision as much as toddlers— just a different kind.
- If necessary, love your children enough to let them hate you—for a while.
- Know that children are never too big for a hug—even when they are grown.



**For more information, contact:**