

10 QUESTIONS

parents can ask to make schools more caring and safe places

MAKING
CARING
COMMON
PROJECT



Parents want to ensure that their children are safe, respected, and able to learn when they are at school. But if you're like many parents, you may feel that you don't know what happens inside school walls. When parents and school leaders talk together about what the school is doing to help students, everyone benefits.

These questions below can encourage educators to think about what they're doing now— and also what they can do differently—to assure students feel safe and to build children's capacity for caring and respect. The school staff you speak with might not have answers to these questions right away. But by asking the questions, you can show them what matters to you and your children.

Ask these questions when you go to your children's Back to School Night, set up a time to discuss them with the principal, assistant principal, guidance counselor, or teacher, or send an email with some or all of the questions. You could also bring your questions to the representatives on your school's parent council or suggest that parents and school staff work together to pick a few questions that are most important for your school community and meet on a regular basis to work on them.

1. Does our school use a program or curriculum to teach social and emotional skills like conflict resolution, showing understanding and empathy for others, and being aware of emotions?
 - How do we know that this program works? Are there any studies?
2. How are students taught to cope with frustration, anger, and other challenging feelings? Who teaches these skills and what are the strategies they teach?
3. How do adults in our school make sure that all students feel safe and treat each other well? What role does the school expect classroom aides, bus drivers, and other support staff to play?
4. How can students tell teachers when they are feeling upset or in need of support without the rest of the class knowing?
 - What process is in place to support these students when they talk to a teacher?
5. How do students know whom they can talk to if and when they are having a problem?
6. How do teachers and other staff deal with aggressive, mean, or hurtful behavior during recess and lunch?
7. How do teachers and other staff know what they are supposed to do when they see aggressive, mean, or other hurtful behavior?

- How are they trained in *how to stop* hurtful behavior when it happens?
 - How are they trained in *how to keep it from happening* in the first place?
8. How does our school work with students who repeatedly act in aggressive, hurtful, or disrespectful ways?
- Beyond punishment, how do school staff help those students learn how to act differently?
 - Is there a process to refer those students to additional supports and resources inside or outside the school?
9. How do children know what the expectations are for their behavior toward others both in and out of classrooms? How do school staff make sure that children understand and follow these expectations?
10. How can parents provide feedback to school leaders and staff?
- Who can they go to when there is a problem?