

YOUR PERSONAL LEARNING GUIDE FOR

# WINNING *with* PARENTS

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NOTES

Lined area for taking notes, consisting of horizontal lines.

# CHAPTER 1

## THE RIGHTS OF PARENTS

In our attempts to deal with all the changes in society, we're very concerned with rights. Particular attention is being paid to minority rights, workers' rights, women's rights, and children's rights. We can pick up almost any magazine and find an article on at least one of these issues. It's an absolute necessity for us, as educators, to talk about parents' rights.

In the past, the rights of parents seemed obvious and were taken for granted. Their children were theirs, and parents' rights affirmed the ownership. As parents they could punish their children—severely if they wished—without interference from society or the law. They could, and still can, give their children religious, social, and moral guidance without interference. When it comes to educating children, however, they have been dealt with differently.

This country has built its strength on the belief that all children should be educated to the utmost limits of their capabilities. Our intention is that every child should experience the benefit of wide-ranging educational opportunities. As a result, parents have had the right to expect society to educate their children.

In decades past, however, when parents left their children at the school door, they relinquished many of their rights. The school became "the parent." Belts and boards were used to enforce discipline. Expulsion was a ready tool for dispensing with the disruptive or obnoxious student.

As adults, many of us can remember being whipped at school—and again when we arrived home. With few exceptions, there was solid validation at home for what the school did—with few questions asked. Except for periodic report cards, parents heard little from the school. The law read children of certain ages had to be in school. It was up to the parents to get them there. Often, that was the extent of parent involvement.

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**THE LAW SIMPLY GIVES PARENTS  
WHAT WE, AS EDUCATORS,  
KNOW THEY SHOULD HAVE.**

Today, it's different. Many parents aren't asking educators to assume the duties and responsibilities of parents; nor do parents allow physical punishment. They want to know about problems involving their children and to have input when major educational changes are being considered. They won't allow their children to be expelled as a matter of convenience for the school. Above all else, they want their children to be educated to the utmost limits. And they want career teachers who understand educational and personal needs of children. Should these be rights of parents?

Most educators think so. Regardless of what we think, however, parents have specific rights under the law today. As educators, we had better know what those rights are if we intend to function within the law.

In all states, parents have the right to take legal action against a school official if their child has been disciplined with an "excessive or unreasonable" punishment. They can also question the supervision of their child, look at records, and challenge those which they believe to be unfair or untrue. Parents have the right to appeal a policy or decision which prevents their child from expressing an opinion on controversial issues. Parents can also examine instructional methods used.

In most states, parents have the right to appeal a decision that places a child in a class labeled for "disruptive students" or "troublemakers." They have a right to visit the classroom and have a minimum number of conferences with the teacher. Their children can be excused from reading assigned books, studying certain subjects, or attending activities that parents find objectionable on religious, moral, or other reasonable grounds. These are some of the rights of parents as defined by law. As teachers, we must know them—and never violate them or ask others to do so.

**THE RIGHTS OF PARENTS  
SERVE TO HELP OUR PARTNERSHIP.**

Our first job is to teach. But that doesn't mean we function in a vacuum. Teaching means many things—including dealing with academics and being sensitive to where children are in that process. It includes caring, encouraging, praising progress, and helping students always do better. Along with these necessities, we need to function out of a "sense of community" with other school personnel.

Once we open the school and classroom doors, however, we need to move into the larger community, which includes parents. We need to accept that parents have rights—and to be aware parents' rights sometimes get lost in all the care we must take to uphold everyone else's rights. If we're smart and empathetic teachers, we know that unless we respect the rights of parents, we can't expect their cooperation.

Schools cannot run well without parent-teacher respect and cooperation. Too much goes on in a good classroom these days for it to be regarded as an isolation ward. That's why we should welcome the fact that parents want the right to be interested in their children's education. We should feel no threat from such rights. Rather, we should develop a partnership out of desire—not because it's the law. After all, the children in our classes are more than just our students—they are their parents' children. And the education of these children is a *shared* responsibility. This must be our professional stance. Therefore, we do not have the right to exclude parents when things are going well or when they're going badly.

Our task is to involve parents, not prejudge them. Then we must accept their participation to the degree of their willingness. When they are unwilling, we must remember two facts. First, our responsibility to the child has doubled. Second, parents never lose their rights regardless of their degree of involvement, unless the law takes those rights away. Remembering these realities can serve us well in our work with students as well as parents.

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# PERSONAL LEARNING JOURNAL

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This is your personal learning journal for working with parents. It focuses on a four-step learning process specifically designed to enhance lifelong learning. Every step is important. To actually acquire and remember knowledge, it's important to write what you've learned as well as what you already knew. Likewise, it's essential to know what worked or didn't work and to reflect on these areas. When reflection is followed by adjustments—that is, *what* you will do differently as well as *when* you will do it—long-term learning and improvement are enhanced.

As you use the personal journal, you will find that it will serve you during your entire career. Simply write your journal entry after reading each message, and apply what you've learned.

## I. Learning/Planning

a. What did I already know about this topic?

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b. What did I learn that was new?

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## II. Action/Application

a. What strategies did I apply that were successful?

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b. What strategies did I try that didn't work?

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c. What did I *not* do—and what happened?

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### III. Reflection/Assessment

a. What will I do with what I've learned from this section?

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b. What do I still need to learn on this subject?

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c. How can I get this information?

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### IV. Change/Adjustment

a. What will I do differently the next time?

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b. When will I use what I've learned?

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