

Talking to Your Teacher – Really, You Can!!

Do you ever wish that your time at school could benefit you more? Do you wish that your teachers understood you better and knew how to help you achieve more? Well, it's within your reach. It may take some courage, some new skills on your part, maybe some insight into your self, but the results may make a tremendous difference in how comfortable you are in school, your grades, and what you really get out of your education.

You've been a student for most of your life. You've experienced teachers who you clicked with, and ones who perhaps you have had your share of struggles with. But you are the same person regardless of the class, right? Well, maybe. Perhaps when you think about it you may find that how the teacher presents the material, where you sit, and how you interact with the teachers and others actually effects how well you pay attention and how well you learn the material. So, now, as the year begins, take an active role and craft your learning more to your style.

How can you do this? The first step to take is to know yourself well as a student. How do you learn best? Listening, reading, hands on, talking about the material out loud, writing it down, drawing a diagram?? There are lots of short, easy tools you can use to help you gain more insight into your unique style of learning. Once you know your style you are in a better position to know how to make the class time work better for you. (As an added benefit you may find more effective ways to study at home as well.) Now here's the important, bold step. Share this information with your teacher. It will help him or her know how to help you better understand the material that you are expected to learn!

If you learn better by listening and find note taking distracts you, perhaps you can ask the teacher (or a friend) for the notes. Let the teacher know in advance so she/ he understands that just because you aren't writing, it doesn't mean that you aren't paying attention. If visuals help you, ask the teacher if she could present some of the material using some diagrams or charts perhaps. Try to think of other times you have experienced successful learning in the past what made those methods work for you. Very often teachers are appreciative of your interest and concerns and willing to work with you to help you achieve.

How about where you sit? It's always nice to sit next to your friends, but if you feel you are distracted during a class you may have trouble with, request that your teacher move your seat to one where you think you will learn better.... they are often more flexible when they see that you are making an effort to learn more effectively. You can speak privately to you teacher so your friends don't know you are the reason your seat was switched.

Consider going to your teacher's extra help. This time often allows you to work one-on-one with your teacher and gives you the opportunity to ask questions you weren't able to ask during class. A bonus is that it shows your teacher you're making the extra effort to improve.

In many classes, class participation is counted toward your grade. If this is particularly difficult for you, consider talking privately with your teacher and seeing if there is a way perhaps they can make it more comfortable. Sometimes if they are aware of your hesitancy, but recognize that you are trying, they may give you other opportunities to improve that part of your grade. Maybe to help you get started in participating they can work out something in advance where you know what question they will be asking you. Many teachers are open to emailing back and forth. This might be an added way for you to participate as well as get you the help you need more comfortably.

The bottom line: teachers are people, too. They can't read your mind and don't always know your concerns or intention. Learning how to speak up for yourself and explain your needs and your rights is known as advocating for yourself. This is a valuable life skill that you will use in many areas of your life. Be prepared to tell your teachers how you learn best and how you work best to deal with your challenges – and how they can help you succeed. Help them to see you as an individual learner who truly cares and is trying his/her best. Take a chance and reach out to your teacher – you just might really benefit from the results.

Written by Cindy Goldrich, Ed.M., ACAC © 2012 PTS Coaching. All rights reserved. Articles may be reproduced or electronically distributed as long as attribution to *PTS Coaching* is maintained.