

Parent *pages*



Resources for Christian Parents in the 21st Century

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E-mail: To send or not to send

About 10 years ago, e-mail was so new to me I attended a workshop on how to use it. I now can't imagine my life without it.

I find it interesting that the generation coming up next does not rely at all on e-mail for communication. I am asking my daughter to help me set up a social networking page so I can communicate with the undergraduate students I teach.

Problems, always problems

Recently, I had a mother confess to me that she had just learned how to type and send a text message. In the time it took her to key the message to one son, the other son was able to text ahead to warn his brother that their mother was texting. Communication methods change—they change quickly—but problems with communication seem to stay the same.

When we consider face-to-face communication, we must understand that a small percentage of what we communicate happens through the words we speak. Most of what we communicate is reflected in body language and vocal inflection, neither of which shows up in e-mail. Also, our communication is filtered through the listener's perceptions

and assumptions.

If you are unable to see a reaction to your words, you will falsely assume that accurate communication has happened. This is one reason why we tend to be less inhibited when we e-mail. We are braver about an opinion when we can't evaluate the opinion by the listener's reaction.

Be selective about using e-mail

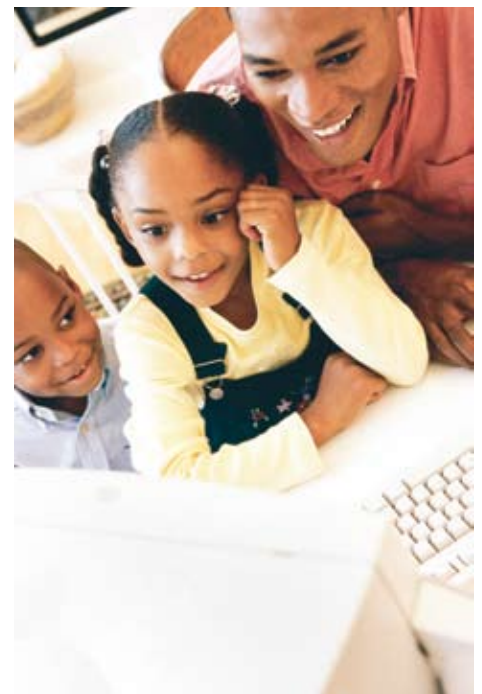
E-mail can be a great way to get a quick answer from a busy teacher, but it's not the best means of communication in every instance. As a teacher, I liked getting e-mail when the question was simple to answer and I didn't have to get to it right away. However, there were more than a few e-mails that I answered over the phone, or in person, because I needed to be careful about my response.

It can be hard to contact your child's teacher. They are usually too busy in the morning as children walk into the class,

they cannot easily take phone calls during the day, and you may hesitate to call them at home in the evening. Most teachers are clear about when they prefer to be contacted. If your child's teacher has not been clear, then be sure to ask.

If you choose to e-mail, then remember the following:

Children are not necessarily aware they are whining . . . they have developed a habit; are focused on what they want, not how to get it.



■ Don't assume that the recipient checks e-mail as regularly as you do; likewise, do not expect an immediate response. Questions about tomorrow's field trip, for example, are best handled over the phone.

■ If your e-mail communication requires more than one reply, then you are involved in a discussion. Discussions of issues or problems should be handled face-to-face or on the phone. This allows for better communication and easier clarification.

■ Do not make a practice of forwarding personal e-mails. Remember, when you

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e-mail school personnel, accidental forwarding can happen. Do not type anything you would not be willing to say in public.

■ Recognize that if you send an e-mail that contains a complaint, it is in your best interest for the teacher to set up an appointment to meet with you personally. You are welcome to request that the principal be present.

■ Be very careful about your wording as you are not conveying emotion but your reader may infer it. Smiley face emoticons do not communicate accurately. It is a good idea to read your e-mail, aloud, before sending it, to be assured that your words and structure are clear.

■ Be aware that good teachers cannot discuss other staff members, other parents, or children other than your own. This is gossip. Please do not include questions or information about others in your communication. These kinds of concerns should be brought to the attention of the principal or the pastor and should be handled in person.

■ When writing your e-mail, be sure to be clear about your goal, be specific about what you want done and show respect. If it is a word or an attitude that you wouldn't use in public, don't type it into your computer.

Not all e-mails deal with conflict but sometimes they can create it. If you are e-mailing because you are not feeling comfortable enough with a face-to-face talk, that alone is enough reason to avoid electronic communication. E-mail is best left for issues that can be resolved with factual information. Other issues that involve conflict or might inspire conflict should be handled in person.

Heavenly advice

God gives us the recipe for handling conflict:

"If a brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you, If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.

MATT. 18:15

Jesus is specific that we are to "go and show" not just send word. The burden for communication belongs to the person who

feels he/she has been wronged. It is important that in the verses just before, Jesus encourages us to be humble like a child. If parents and teachers can be humble, put the child first, and follow God's direction on dealing with conflict, then the problem can be resolved.

How wonderful that we have God, who cares about every issue we experience. It is His will that we live in peace and He is there to help us achieve that peace.

When discussing a tough issue with a teacher or a parent it is important to bring God into the discussion. A shared prayer that honestly asks for God's help in the resolution of the problem will not go unanswered. The participants will feel God's grace as tensions are eased. Whenever stress can be reduced, then information is communicated more effectively. Here are some other tips on verbal and nonverbal communication:

■ As you are speaking or listening, look for nonverbal clues such as eye contact, gestures, body posture and voice tone.

■ Be aware of what you are communicating and watch to see if the nonverbal clues agree with the words being spoken. If someone says "fine" but doesn't act like it is fine, the issue may not have been resolved.

■ Be aware of your voice volume and tone. When we get excited we naturally get louder and our tone becomes firmer. Most issues are resolved with compromise and not "might."

■ Avoid absolutes, words such as "never" and "always" rarely apply and can cause the listener react defensively.

■ Give specific examples instead of broad generalizations. This way the teacher can explain what was done for that situation instead of defending policies.

■ Rephrase what the speaker has said for clarification. This can go a long way toward preventing misunderstanding, especially if the argument has become heated.

■ Phrase the situation from the other

person's point-of-view before making your case. This will help you to understand their side and will reassure them that you have been listening.

Communication can be confusing and conflict is not fun. Because we are sinners in a sinful world we cause conflict and therefore must work to resolve it. Good communication goes a long way to prevent conflict. With good communication your P2T *communications will be GR8T ** and hopefully, the only issues that will occur will be those that cause you to

LOL.***

*parent to teacher **great ***laugh out loud



For Discussion:

- ▶ Can you think of an e-mail you sent that was misunderstood? Can you think of one you received that was misunderstood?
- ▶ What was behind the misunderstandings?
- ▶ Make a list of situations for which electronic communication would or would not be appropriate.
- ▶ What kinds of conflicts are most challenging to you?
- ▶ Think of a successful conflict resolution that you experienced in the past. What did you learn from that situation?

For Further Study:

For written communication tips:

- ▶ www.inc.com/magazine/20050901/managing.html

For information on Christian conflict resolution:

- ▶ <http://bookstore.peacemaker.net/html/christianschools.htm>

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