

51 - The Importance of Parental Support

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Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Host Dr. Shipley: Hello everyone and welcome to Early Childhood Chatter with Dr. Shipley and Dr. Heald. We will upload a new episode every other week on Wednesdays.

Host Dr. Heald: Twice a month, we will come to you with a 10-minute professional development that you can quickly listen to for new ideas to try.

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Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Today, we have with us Brooke Layton, and Brooke lives in Florida with her husband and two children. She is a school administrator and teacher for over 13 years, and today, she is a full-time writer, adjunct professor, and mother who creates curriculum for schoolhouse teachers, a division of the old Schoolhouse Magazine, which is cool, and loves reading and writing encouraging stories while raising her two boys, Tristan and Gabriel.

I've worked with Brooke many times over the years, and she always has great things to share. So, Brooke, thank you so much for being here.

Brooke Layton Speaker: Oh, you're welcome.

Thank you for having me.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: So, your session today is about how important parental support is in the classroom. So, tell me why this topic is important to you.

We've talked about this several times, but what is it about this that you wanted to talk about?

Brooke Layton Speaker: Well, I get this question a lot, especially in my classes that I teach for the University of Arizona. How can we get parents more involved? Does it really matter? And yes, it does matter. One of the most important factors in a student's success is parental involvement.

So, whether you're an educator or even a parent, how you view your child's education can either contribute to their academic success or it can actually hinder the ability to them to succeed. And I believe it's vital that your student's parents support you as you progress through the year. It's been my experience that when you gain their trust of the parents, then it's that much easier for you to succeed with their students because they're backing you up at home.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: So, how do you go about gaining that respect and trust with the families in your classroom, like from day one? What did you do?

Brooke Layton Speaker: Well, I would say achieving this is not, it's really not easy, but once you get it down, it becomes easier. If you're a teacher, I would start out by making the parents feel welcome. And you know, honestly, most of you teachers that are doing this are probably already doing this, but be transparent, let them know your teaching styles, your beliefs, and make it evident that their child's needs are always your first priority.

Like when they feel that that's when they'll start to trust you and want to get more involved. I would encourage the parents to come in on a regular basis. Keep in mind, even though you're the teacher, the parents are, they know their child best of all.

Like they'll tell you things that will make a huge difference in the classroom, because they know they're, they're the expert on their child. And that'll be your greatest resource from the first day of school, till the end of the school year. And if you're looping with those parents and those students for the next school year, you'll develop an even better relationship with them.

Yeah. So that's, that's really important. And sending home that message to parents, I would say, if you're, if you're a brand-new teacher, the first step in achieving this is keeping the parents in the loop.

Always consider sending home a parent newsletter. That's kind of like basic, most of the schools tell teachers, okay, we need to send a monthly newsletter out. But if you're not, that's a good idea because it lets you know, it lets the parents know what you're teaching in the classroom, what strategies you're using, how they can help with those strategies at home.

And I would always use research-based strategies. That way the parents start trusting you. They know that you're the expert.

This is one of the things that I felt was like the most monumental things that made the biggest difference, was doing random phone calls. I would do random phone calls with every single student to just state one positive thing about every student every week. So, I would have, I would be calling, you know, I'd have my checklist, I'd like mix it up.

So, I wasn't calling every Monday, the student, you know what I mean? And then I would call and say, "okay, well, Johnny did so good on his writing today. Or he answered this question in such a great manner" and like write down what he said. And they'll enjoy listening to you and they'll look forward to your phone calls.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: That's so important because truly our parents are only sending us their very best, right? So, when we create these partnerships, and these relationships and we keep them focused and we really let our families know that we're able to support their child and want them to do well, that's a good thing. That's going to create that strong bond. Brooke, you had mentioned sending resources to families, and just really giving them some knowledge. Because that's our other job as teachers, we really want to create the partnerships by showing that we do have the credibility, and we are professionals and able to share.

Do you have any ideas about resources that our educators can provide families with that will be helpful in the home?

Brooke Layton Speaker: Oh, yes. I remember teaching. I would always have all of these books and I loved those books that had like lesson plans and baking activities, recipes, different activities you could do with your students at home or in the classroom, which I'm actually I've written a book and it has all of that in the back of it.

I'm so excited about that. But yeah, I would look for things like that. A lot of times I would tell my parents I am very anti-worksheet, anti-sit-down worksheet, get it hands on, play a game, create a game, go outside, look at nature, talk about the plants.

How does that relate to what you've learned in science? Because if you're sending home those monthly newsletters, you know what's coming up as a parent, you know what they're learning about. Ask those questions. You know, talk about, you know, how the bees are pollinating the flowers and, you know, describe that to me. What did you learn in class? You know, tell me how does this happen? And they really start to take ownership of their own learning.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Brooke, in my classroom, I had an open-door policy constantly. I invited families in all the time. They were in doing the cooking center.

They were in helping with art center. They I really enjoyed having families work with me because that helped build that relationship in the classroom also. So how do you feel about an open-door policy? How did you use it? How did you get those families to come in?

Brooke Layton Speaker: Oh, this is a really good one, because I know if you're a new teacher, this is one where you're you're really nervous about this.

But if you're a veteran teacher, you're like, oh, yes, please come in. So, I would say, yes, I've always had an open-door policy for those of you that are nervous about having an open-door policy. Don't, trust me.

The more you make the parents feel welcomed in your classroom, the more apt they'll be able to support you and your educational goals for your class. So, consider just for a moment, with an open-door policy, parents will begin to view your classroom, in my opinion, as their classroom. So, this can be really helpful because as they think that it's their classroom, your success is their success.

So many new teachers, I know, like I said, that they fear thoughts of parents. They may question their abilities to teach, or they may not even have respect for them as a professional because, you know, they're new and they may be, you know, just nervous about it. But in my experience, if you have confidence in what you're doing and you always put the students' needs first and you have those research-based strategies that you're using, you'll always win over the parents every single time and you'll have them asking you and calling you.

I noticed when I was in there last week, so-and-so was really struggling with reading. Do you need help on this day? I can sit with him and read with him. And that's been my experience that's really helped me.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Hmm. Brooke, you sound like you might have done this once or twice in your career.

Brooke Layton Speaker: I have.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Could you just tell us about one of those, you know, positive interactions that you had with families and maybe a potential impact it had on their future?

Brooke Layton Speaker: One student I can think of, like right off the top of my head, I will honestly never forget this student. You know, I taught for so many years and there's always this handful of students you'll never forget. This student went by Jo Jo, that was his nickname.

He was in a failing school. He was struggling really bad, and the school was an "F" school to the point where our district had shut the school down. I didn't work there at the time.

Opened the school back up as an IB school and they did a whole rigorous process of interviewing and training, bringing in IB teachers. So, when I first taught there, I opened my classroom to the meet the teacher day, and I was able to meet all of my students and the parents for the first time. And I'll tell you what, I will never forget the first time I met Jo Jo's mother.

She didn't look pleased to meet me. In fact, she asked me how old I was, how long I had been teaching. And from that moment on, I honestly made it a priority to make Jo Jo and his mother fall in love with education.

And I'll tell you, it was not, he was not a treat at first to do this. It was very difficult. And I wondered if I was ever going to bond with him, but I kept pushing forward.

I never stopped. This is what I would do. These are just a couple of nuggets that I would do.

And I'm sure I've done, I did so much more of it. These are the ones I could think of off the top of my head. I would literally hug him daily.

He was like, he struggled with like making those connections. So, I would hug him all the time. Give him a hug.

I would tell him jokes. I would sit him next to me just because I may have needed his assistance. If you know what I mean, teachers, like I need him to help me.

And he learned, he learned that I not only had his best interest in mind, but that I cared for him, and I wanted him to succeed. I also made it a point to call him, his mother and actually all of my students, parents weekly, I would call, like I had mentioned before, just to give a positive update on the children in any way, even if it's something that, you know, like it's something minute, just to say something positive. And I won't forget like this.

One of the first times I called Jo Jo's mother, she was not happy that I called. She was on the defense, and she was just waiting for me to tell her about a discipline issue that she needed to address. And I explained to her that I was only calling because I was so proud of him for something that I had found that he had did.

And she was so shocked. She was speechless. She didn't know what to say.

So really from that moment on, I kept it up. I ended up not only reaching him and bonding with Jo Jo and his mother, that he ended up actually bonding with students from my classroom, the parent volunteer so much so that even years later, after I was done teaching, the parent volunteers kept me in the loop, how he was doing with like text messages and pictures.

And honestly, it was probably, I want to say like seven years later though, all the parent volunteers, including Jo Jo's mother got ahold of me and had a graduation for when they left that IB school to go to an IB high school.

And they wanted me to be there to celebrate with them because they remembered me. And that's what I'm talking about. Those relationships, they remember, and they strive, and they can't, they know you care, somebody cares.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: So, Brooke, I was just smiling at that whole story because I, I 100% agree with that. And think that sometimes relationships get put on the back burner because we're trying to do standards, and we're trying to do objectives, and we're trying to do all of the things, our schools are pushing us to do, but we have to remember that the relationship is the number one thing.

Brooke Layton Speaker: Yeah.

So, as you leave today, what are three takeaways that you have for our listeners?

Brooke Layton Speaker: Oh, I would say help parents feel welcome. Always be transparent in your teaching style and beliefs. Uh, let parents know that your students' needs are your top priority.

And I would challenge my listeners do random phone calls. This is an excellent way to keep parents informed and consider doing those random phone calls to state something positive. Even if you want to tell them about something negative, don't do it and just talk about the positive and let them know that they have, you have their, their child's best interest in mind.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: I agree with you. Those phone calls are so important. Um, we appreciate you so much for being here.

Thank you so much. And we look forward to talking to you again.

Brooke Layton Speaker: Oh, thank you so much.

And if anybody's interested, um, I will be having my website launching brookelayton.com that I'm gonna have a ton of lesson plans and question and answers where we can, you know, teachers can find out more information that might help them.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Thank you for sharing that. Thank you.

Brooke Layton Speaker: Thank you.