

# PORTLAND

*lifestyle & family*

EDUCATION / PARENTING / OCTOBER 1, 2015

## Ask Ariel: Student Teacher Problems



Dear Ariel,

My son was so excited to start fourth grade, but it's only a few weeks in and he is miserable! He does not get along with his teacher at all, and comes home furious and frustrated. I don't think the teacher is singling him out deliberately, but they just do not like one another. I asked if he could change classrooms but was told it's not possible. What can I do?

It's Gonna be a Long Year

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Dear IGBALY,

The relationship between a teacher and a student is a delicate balance of caring, power and good faith. We hope that all teachers treat all students with respect. We hope that all students are respectful to their teachers. Your son may not like his teacher and his teacher may not like your son, but they both have to be respectful of each other. The personality clash will be less disruptive if there is an underlying layer of respect in both directions.

I would start by talking to your son about how to be kind and respectful to everyone in general and specifically with his teacher. This might be challenging for your fourth-grader; understanding nuance in relationships is not an expected part of his emotional development yet. However, even though it will be hard, it is an important skill to treat everyone with kindness and respect, especially people whom we find difficult. This will likely be an ongoing conversation all year long.

In terms of working with your son’s school, you have already been denied the nuclear option of switching teachers. Early in the school year, principals often deny this request. Some schools have strict rules about never allowing students to change teachers. Other schools are more flexible but need piles of evidence documenting the adverse impact of your son’s current teacher on his education. Personality clashes usually don’t qualify. Make an appointment to speak with your son’s teacher. Hear what he/she has to say about the class and your son’s role as part of the classroom community. This information will help you sort out how to support your child. If further support or an alternative perspective would be useful, contact the school counselor and ask him/her for advice. Finally, if the negative relationship continues, set up a formal meeting with the principal and the teacher and express your concerns. Hopefully, it won’t come to that and your son will learn a valuable lesson in how to get along with someone he finds challenging.

0 SHARES

Ariel Frager

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Ariel Frager is a school counselor and has a private therapy practice that specializes in treating children, adolescents and families. She lives in Portland with her husband, son, dog and kitty cat.



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