



## To go up to the school, or not? That is the question.

By Michael Hawton, Child Psychologist (MAPS) and [ParentsShop](#) founder.

If you've had a child at school for more than a few years, chances are that there have been times when you have considered whether to go up to the school about an issue that is affecting your child. Working out what requires your intervention can be tricky. Sometimes your child's passionate pleas for you to do something can be persuasive. It might be that your child has been moved from one class to another or that your son has been denied permission to go on a much-anticipated excursion or there has been an incident on the playground.

Parents can sometimes feel like they are not parenting properly unless they go to the school to address the problem.

In recent years, Australian schools have been dealing with an increasing number of parents coming to the school. I say this as a result of speaking with hundreds of school leaders across Australia and internationally.

So, what is causing this?

- 1/ Many parents are less trusting of institutions in charge of the care of their children, including schools. They are therefore less willing to give school staff the benefit of the doubt when it comes to making decisions that involve their children.
- 2/ There are an increasing number of parents who have become more anxious about their children and tend to intervene in smaller and smaller issues.
- 3/ Many of these parents have lost the ability to see that frequent interventions ultimately undermine a child's sense of competency and confidence.

So, how do you decide if an issue warrants your intervention?

First, if your child is in physical or psychological danger then you should intervene.

However, if the issue is not of this magnitude, ask yourself this; what would happen if I didn't go to the school about this issue?

An important part of being a parent is helping children learn to deal with disappointments and difficulties. We can help our children learn to cope emotionally with uncomfortable feelings by being there and listening to them. We can acknowledge that sometimes life is challenging or unfair but that we can learn to cope with this. Helping our children recognise emotions and deal with them, without being crushed by them, teaches our children emotional resilience.

We can help our children feel more competent by helping them think of some alternative ways to deal with a problem, which empowers them by giving a sense of agency and control.

With this in mind, some issues are worth recognising before you come to the school in search of a remedy on your child's behalf.

Firstly, the school must make 'system' decisions. While all schools try to follow principles of fairness and equity, it is not always possible to decide matters fairly. There will always be cases where some children will not get the teacher they wanted or be seated close to their friends.

Secondly, all school staff aspire towards providing an environment where the best interests of the child are held paramount. While teachers may not have the same attachment to a child that a parent does, the majority of school staff care personally for the children in the school.

Thirdly, each time a parent jumps in where a problem could be resolved by their child, they may be robbing them of an opportunity to develop resilience skills.

Making a decision about whether or not to go up to the school is about assessing the problem and seeing if it can be an opportunity to help your child to learn to manage their emotions, increase resilience and become an independent problem solver.

Who said parenting is easy? In this upcoming series of articles we will explore issues that young people face and how as a parent you can support or, just as importantly, know when to step away.

Michael Hawton is founder of Parentshop, providing education and resources for parents and industry professionals working with children. He has authored two books on child behaviour management: *Talk Less Listen More* and *Engaging Adolescents*. You can find more information, including his books and self-paced online parenting courses at <https://www.parentshop.com.au/parent-courses/>