

VERBATIM

“Parent-Child Communication: The Key to Success!” podcast

Host:

Hello, my name is Ariane Fiset, and I work with the Comité québécois pour les jeunes en difficulté de comportement. I'll be hosting this podcast episode, which is produced as part of the Violence and Bullying Prevention in Schools Week. More specifically, this episode is intended for parents and aims to promote a better understanding of civility in schools, to facilitate positive and effective communication with their child and to help them resolve a misunderstanding or conflict. In this episode, I'll be talking to three guests, namely Éric Morrisette, associate professor at the Faculté des sciences de l'éducation of Université de Montréal and collaborating researcher at the Unité mixte de recherche Synergia; Nathalie Parent, psychologist, author, instructor and clinical supervisor; and Corinne Payne, executive director of the Fédération des comités de parents du Québec. The discussion is organized around questions addressed to these specialists according to their fields of expertise. Moreover, before getting to the heart of the matter, it would be important to agree on a common definition of civility in schools. Civility is a set of behaviours and attitudes that demonstrate respect for the other people, rules and values of the community. It is a set of written or unwritten rules and social norms that aim to regulate life in society and facilitate group life so that everyone can live in a healthy, respectful and fair environment. We're therefore talking about social cohesion, good manners and community life. Lastly,

I should point out that this episode stems from the results of a survey conducted by the Fédération des comités de parents du Québec in January 2025 that focused on civility in schools. Almost 500 parents completed it. During the course of our discussion, Ms. Payne will provide us with more details regarding the results of the survey. Tell me, Ms. Payne, based on the data collected in the survey, what are the three main issues when it comes to civility in schools?

Ms. Corinne Payne:

The first thing I can tell you is that it looks positive: 80% of parents agree that the level of civility at their school is good or very, very good. Here are the things that were revealed, or the three major issues. The first is the societal issue of lack of respect. As a society, the situation has gotten a bit out of hand. So, that's the first thing. Second, there's the role of parents and their involvement. I think that 99% of parents have a good understanding of their role. They understand what it means to be involved, but some do not collaborate as they should with the school, even though it's important. Parents are their child's most important teacher. Sometimes, this role is overlooked. And third, is the lack of consistency in school rules. Each school has a code of conduct, but sometimes there's a lack of consistency in the application of sanctions in the codes of conduct, even though it's very important to respect them. These are the three issues that parents have identified.

Host:

Thank you, Ms. Payne. This brings me to Mr. Morissette. I would like to ask you, how do you think the role of parents can encourage students to behave in a civil manner?

Mr. Éric Morissette:

So, how can we develop and then work on our child's civility? By being a role model. As the first person to have an impact on a child's development, the parent is the child's most important teacher. And we must not lose sight of the fact that, in our interactions with other adults, with children, be it in the family, be it when we're at the shopping centre or during a sporting event, our children are watching us. So, when we talk about socialization, we know that human beings learn a lot through imitation. What I see as positive, I will, of course, imitate and replicate. And if I display civility, and if I'm flexible in my interpersonal relationships, then my child is exposed to a positive and effective model for forming relationships and maintaining good relationships with others. As a parent, I'm a role model, but when I carry out my interventions, it's about being aware of what I'm doing. So, when I'm aware, I go about my interventions with intention. I care that my child learns from me and develops so that they themselves are able to properly adapt and integrate, when they are in a community and when they are socializing.

Host:

Mr. Morissette, you mentioned socialization. What does that mean exactly?

Mr. Éric Morissette:

Socialization is the ability to function in society. It's also what we want, the good that we want for our child; for them to be loved, appreciated and happy with others. So, not only with us. And when we talk about socialization, it's that ability to maintain good relationships, learn to make friends and resolve social situations that are a little more complicated. So, it's about teaching them to get to know themselves and

self-evaluate. That's the first component of socialization. But, it's also being able to clearly identify the emotions they experience in order to be able to resolve them. So, how do I prepare myself to deal with and how can I face emotions that are sometimes negative? So, instead of breaking down or being paralyzed by a situation, I'm learning to ask questions, to name the emotions I'm experiencing and to learn to overcome them. This is how I'm going to build resilience. Socialization is also about understanding others and learning to interact with them. And that's how empathy develops. So, when I develop empathy, I become more skilled at maintaining effective relationships and I'm less prone to establishing relationships of power with others. We know that establishing a relationship of power with others can turn into a situation of either conflict or bullying. So, that's why developing my child's social skills is important, because the school's mission is to provide instruction, to socialize and to provide qualifications. Socializing is the link between instruction and qualification. So, we need to behave properly. It's called interpersonal skills. Especially when we're talking about socialization.

Host:

You talk about socialization and communication, but, specifically, how can we encourage communication?

Mr. Éric Morissette:

As a parent, you will find out or are currently finding out that teenagers can sometimes lead us down a dead end. It's easier when our child is in elementary school, but it becomes even more important to encourage communication when they're in secondary school. So, communicating means asking questions in order to listen. Therefore, it's not so much about talking. Communication is a two-way street. So, ask questions and then wait for the answer. The answer may not come immediately if we're talking with pre-teens or teenagers, but it means accepting the silence and perhaps coming back a little later the same day or the next. We too can use silence sometimes. It makes our children ask themselves, "Why is my mom or dad quiet right now when they

usually talk all the time?” So, communication is about listening. Why would I want to listen? It’s not because I want to just talk back, but it’s listening to give feedback, to help my child understand by asking them a second question. It also allows them to interpret situations where their point of view may not be quite right. They may be interpreting the situation more or less dramatically than they should. So, communication is also about giving them the opportunity to practise self-determination in their interpersonal relationships, but they should be able to practise in a space where they feel comfortable, and that’s usually with their parents. They learn because they’re taught what to do. We shouldn’t forget that when we teach something and want to see the behaviour repeated, we have to use positive reinforcement. So, we should commend them for what they’ve just achieved in terms of communication and sharing, to enable them to repeat it because they get a sense of achievement. When communicating, we have to validate what they say. Avoid invalidating them. So, if we ask them a question, it’s not so we can tell them they’re wrong, it’s to accept them. They’ll feel listened to, and we’ll try to show them both sides of the argument. If we listen to them to invalidate them, the next time we ask them a question they just won’t answer. So, we’ll make sure we do it right. We’ll avoid placing blame and using guilt. That will put them on the defensive. They’ll be careful next time and they’ll avoid answering our questions. We’ll work on the relationship with intention and bond with them in order to build and maintain their trust. So, that’s always an option. Is what I’m suggesting easy to do? No, it’s difficult and we have to be aware of that and we, as parents, also have to overcome adversity. And we must not lose hope. I mentioned silence, which is what you get when they get older. But don’t worry, dialogue and discussions will return as they get older. And that’s a little after Secondary IV, Secondary V, when teenagers reach a level of maturity where they open up. The important thing is to avoid judgment. So, if someone closes up and doesn’t want to answer, it means they’re afraid of your reaction. When I want to make sure that I establish and maintain this relationship of trust in order to foster communication, I’ll be careful about passing judgment, because

sometimes we feel like giving our opinion. But if I give my opinion all the time, it’s important to avoid telling them, “I wouldn’t have done it like that,” because when I do that, I invalidate them. Instead, ask them, “Why did you do it like that?” It’s about getting them to think. “Was it effective? Would you have another solution?” “Remember that I’m an adult and it’s not because I wouldn’t have done it that way, I am not in that situation.” It’s always easier to judge as an outsider. That’s how we end up in a situation that makes them feel guilty, and your children are bound to withdraw rather than open up. So, avoid judgment, stay open, be prepared for things that might ruffle your feathers if they aren’t already. But it’s by doing that that you’ll become more skilled at it. So, the first time, it won’t be easy. The second time, you’ll be a little better. The same goes for your children, but the important thing is to keep doing it and persevere.

Host:

Great, thank you very much, Mr. Morissette. It’s all very enlightening and reassuring. The strategies you’ve shared with us are very concrete ways of fostering good communication between parents and children. Now, Ms. Payne, in light of the results of the survey, do you think that the role of parents is important in fostering and encouraging students to behave in a civil manner?

Ms. Corinne Payne:

Yes. Here, 87% of parents know that their role is important and that they’re a role model for their children. I can tell you that being a parent is one of the hardest things you’ll ever do in your life. We’re not trained for it. The small gestures are as important as the big gestures that we are going to make, because our children are watching us all the time. It’s about encouraging respect. It’s about creating relationships and a good line of communication with the school, with the teacher, when things are going well, because when things go wrong, it’ll be difficult to establish relationships at that time. The key is to do it beforehand, to have those strong relationships. We also have parents who get involved in the school, on the governing board. Their role is also very important

in school governance, because that's where codes of conduct and action plans are adopted and approved. So, these parents are there to help all the other parents, and to help the school. So, their role is very important.

Host:

And that leads me to ask, Ms. Parent: I wonder, as a parent, how can I help my child resolve a misunderstanding or conflict at school?

Ms. Nathalie Parent:

Often, the child will arrive feeling emotional. It's therefore important to stay calm as a parent, so as not to carry all the emotion, the emotional load. So, taking a step back will allow us to try being a little more objective and to listen, to hear our child's pain and perhaps also to hear our own wounds from childhood. Because sometimes it echoes our wounds from childhood and we may feel like reacting. So, when we take a step back, we stay calm. We're there with the child, we listen to them, and we also give them the benefit of the doubt. In other words, when our child comes to us with information, we can tell ourselves that that is their perception. The other person with whom they had a conflict would have a different perception. So, we give them the benefit of the doubt in the sense that it may not have been exactly what was said, but the other person may have also had good intentions. So, we keep this in mind to try and avoid dichotomous thinking where one person is right and the other is wrong. One of them, my child, is nice, they are acting fine, and the other one is really mean. So, it's important to keep this in mind, because it's easy to fall into dichotomous thinking, rather than see the nuances. What is each person's responsibility, and what can we do with the child as parents? First, we can listen to them and recognize their emotions. What are they experiencing? Is it pain, jealousy, sadness, anger? We recognize it, we validate it because that is what is going to soothe them. "Yes, I understand that

you're angry, you're upset, it hurt your feelings, you feel rejected." So, we identify the emotion, recognize it, and then build on their strengths, their ability to resolve difficult situations. So, how do we do this? We move from a position of affirmation to one of questioning. So, instead of suggesting all kinds of behaviour, like what they should do or how they should solve it, we need to get them thinking. What do they think they could do that would help them? How do they feel about it? Why did it happen in this way? Why do they think the other person acted this way? So, we really get them to find their own solutions. What can they do when that happens? We work out different scenarios with them. You can even role play with them to get them thinking and develop their own skills. And speaking of skills, more and more children are finding it difficult to think before they act. There is a lot of impulsivity. So as parents, we want to develop their ability to reflect. That's becoming really important. We can do this, as I said, by asking questions rather than affirming things. So, we ask questions or we play games that'll get the child to think. I think of the "Yes, No" game. I don't know if anyone has heard of it, but the child can't say yes or no, but has to use other strategies and think before answering. This creates a way of properly supporting the child. Anyway, that's one strategy, but there are many more. And as parents, we should have the courage to show our vulnerabilities. Have the courage to show that, when a difficulty or conflict arises with our child, we should come back to the situation and explain: "Yes, I may have lost my patience a little then, because, well . . ." Then we explain, we try to say what we understood of the situation. So, the fact that we think about it also shows this ability to reflect with the child. This means giving feedback on situations and then having the courage to show that things aren't perfect, that we make mistakes too. We don't always know. But we do make the effort to look for answers, seek to improve and see how we can work together. I think that's an important element.

Host:

Thank you, Ms. Parent, for the many concrete and enlightening courses of action. We touched on the importance of collaboration between the various stakeholders earlier. Ms. Payne, in view of the results you obtained from the survey, how can the school involve parents more in teaching students about civility?

Ms. Corinne Payne:

This question was asked to all the parents. Two things were singled out as top priorities: regular communication with school staff, which the parents brought up, and better monitoring of civil behaviour. I can also tell you that the parents agree with the sanctions and restorative actions in the schools' code of conduct. So, there is coherence already. The school and the parents are ready to work together. For parents who sit on governing boards and parents' committees, what they want is to raise community awareness of civility and work in consultation with the school team and school administration. Examples of this are organizing training workshops for parents and encouraging the participation of parents in school and extracurricular activities. I am convinced that parents are willing to do their part. They even want to help those who need help in other areas. They want to do it in collaboration with the school system. As I often say, together we can go much further.

Host:

This is all very inspiring. Here again, there are lots of concrete ideas and we can sense the parents' desire to get involved and do more. In terms of raising awareness, we think that what we're doing right now, this podcast episode, is a step in the right direction. Now, I'm a parent and I'd like support. Ms. Payne, who can help us when we need it? What resources are available?

Ms. Corinne Payne:

Well, I'll follow up on with what Ms. Parent said at the beginning: "Take a step back, but also take a minute." Just take a breath, sometimes take five minutes to breathe, so as to not be in a reactive mode. It'll help. I encourage parents from all over Québec to call the Fédération des comités de parents du Québec, or you can chat online. We have resources in place to help you or refer you to the right resources. All the resources that Ms. Parent may mention are also in our directory. There are two series of videos that I think parents absolutely must watch. One is called **"Being a parent,"** and the other, my favorite video online, is **"On brasse les idées, pas les personnes."**

Host:

Thank you, Ms. Payne. I'd like to end by asking you the same question, Ms. Parent: who can we turn to when we need help?

Ms. Nathalie Parent:

Of course, when there's conflict or when something happens at the school, there's a whole system in place. First, there's our child's teacher, with whom we can get in touch. Then, there are the school psychologists, the psychoeducators, the special education teachers and the social workers. All these people can provide direct assistance at the school. Of course, if the problem is significant, and involves several people, perhaps the administration should be consulted. Otherwise, outside of school, as a parent, you can take a breather by calling the helpline for parents. It can really make a difference when you feel overwhelmed with emotion, and it can help. Otherwise, there are private psychologists, psychoeducators and social workers. Each has its own professional order. We can find a professional on the website of each of the orders. Other than that, there's also the CLSC; when things get more complicated, you can call there to find a resource.

Host:

Great, thank you, ladies. I'd like to sincerely thank our three guests for this very enlightening discussion. We had the opportunity to better understand what it means to have civility in schools, and to address different strategies to foster parent-child communication and help children resolve conflicts and misunderstandings. We also discussed the importance of encouraging children to behave in a civil manner and, lastly, discovered or rediscovered various resources that can support us as parents. I'd also invite listeners to consult the list of resources available in the description of this podcast episode. The Ministère de l'Éducation would like to thank its partners and collaborators for this podcast episode: Éric Morrissette, associate professor at the Faculté des sciences de l'éducation of the Université de Montréal and collaborating researcher at the Unité mixte de recherche Synergia; Nathalie Parent, psychologist, author, instructor and clinical supervisor; Corinne Payne, executive director of the Fédération des comités de parents du Québec; and lastly, the Comité québécois pour les jeunes en difficulté de comportement.