

Primary Advice

By Helene J. Uchida

Q

What advice do you have for English teachers about “monster parents”? I get one or two of them a year. They threaten to have their children quit if I do not meet their unrealistic demands. They also believe their children are superior to other students.

G. H., teacher
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A: No simple solutions on dealing with ‘monster parents,’ despite best efforts

The emergence of the term “monster parent” is a rather recent phenomenon in Japan. Prior to that we had terms with slightly different nuances, such as “education mama” in Japan or “tiger mother” from China.

“Monster parent” means an overbearing parent who makes unreasonable requests or demands on teachers or administrators. This social issue is expanding partly due to families having fewer children. In the past, visiting schools to question or criticize teachers was not a top priority for Japanese parents as they were busy taking care of several children. But today, as a result of many families having fewer children, with the current fertility rate being less than 1.46, parents tend to focus all their attention on the one or two children they have, sometimes to the point of being overbearing. Visits to schools to question teachers’ actions or policies have increased as a result.

What to do? I do not have a simple solution, because each situation is unique. But I can share with you the procedure we use at Little America, which sometimes works and sometimes doesn’t. I will focus on mothers because we see more of them than the fathers. The first step is to listen to the mother’s concerns. Since all mothers naturally want what is best for their children, they deserve the courtesy of you listening to them, which accomplishes two things: First, it gives you insight into their thinking. Secondly, it provides you with insight into your student because you can understand better how he/she is influenced at home. The next step is to let the mother know you understand her concerns. Make it a point to assure her that you and she are on the same team in that you both want what is best for the child. Then you can address the issues at hand to see if you can solve them; sometimes you can and sometimes you cannot. I always make it clear to mothers that they are the “supreme commanders” in their homes, but for the one hour a week I have their child, the child is in my zone and I am the one best-suited to

determine what is most appropriate for the child. Of course, I will consider their input, but the classroom is my domain as the home is theirs.

It is important to keep in mind that the values the family promotes at home may be different from the ones you adhere to in your classroom. You cannot change their values.

At one of my seminars in Fukushima, the topic of “monster mothers” was addressed. The head teacher explained the school’s policy of listening to the mother and trying to solve the problem. If and when over a number of exchanges it could not be solved, the head teacher had no other recourse but to “fire” the mother. Since they could not work as a team, the school returned the last month’s tuition and introduced the mother to another school.

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Readers are encouraged to send questions to Helene J. Uchida on any themes related to teaching English to younger learners — particularly those at the elementary school level — to jn-edu@yomiuri.com with “Primary Advice” in the subject line. Questions to Uchida are also accepted via postcard at “Primary Advice,” The Japan News, 1-7-1 Otemachi, Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo 100-8055. Questions should preferably be written in English, accompanied by your name, occupation and the area in which you live.



Uchida is the director of Little America, a Fukuoka-based company that trains teachers of English.

The next installment will appear on March 5.