

10 Frequently Asked Questions Parents Have About Getting Involved In Their Child's Education

1. *I did not do well in school. Can I really help my child succeed?*

All parents can help their children succeed in school. Where do you begin? At home. Try these three simple things. Let your child know that you expect that she/he will do well in school. Your expectations are powerful. Praise your child's effort in school and let her/him know you support her/him when school is difficult. Tell your child that her/his education is important to her/his future. And finally, have fun learning with your child at home.

2. *I only have 15 minutes. What can I do?*

Most parents are busy, so busy that at the end of the day they may have just fifteen minutes with their children. If this is your experience, don't worry. You can support your child's education in fifteen minutes whether your child is in high school or kindergarten by:

- Asking your child something specific about her/his day and listening to her/his stories. "What did you make in art today?", "How did your history test go?", "What did you do during recess?", or "What was the best thing that happened to you today?"
- Saying to your child, "Tell me about something you learned today."
- Reading to your young child, or listening to your child practice her/his new-found reading skills.
- Telling your young child a story about your childhood or a story from your family's past.
- Asking your child about their homework. Is it done? How difficult was it? Did it take very long? Was there anything that they could not do?
- Asking your teenager about their friends, who is hanging out together, what did she/he do with their friends that day?
- Asking your teenager about what is going on at school. Are there any new clubs, sports, or activities starting that they would like to join?
- Reading your child's progress reports and report cards. If your child's school posts student's progress on-line (i.e. Progress Book), check it frequently.
- Writing your child's teacher a note, e-mail, or leaving a voicemail telling him or her any of your concerns. Or tell the teacher what you would like to know and ask for him or her to contact you about it.

3. *I'm not a teacher, how can I help with my child's education?*

Many parents wonder if they can really help their child succeed in school. After all, school is very different now than it was when we were kids. Some parents think that learning happens at school and ends when the school bell rings at the end of the day. The fact is there is no one more important than you when it comes to your child's success in school. Research has shown that when parents get involved in supporting their child's learning:

- Children complete their homework more often
- Children do better in school
- Children have better attendance
- Children behave better in school
- Children have better relationships with kids at school
- Children are more likely to graduate
- Children are less likely to use drugs or alcohol

4. *I never studied this! How do I help my child with homework?*

Beginning in kindergarten, parents realize that school is not the same as it was when they were in school. Children study subjects and learn skills in school that their parents have never heard of. So what is a parent to do? How can a parent help with homework? There are four basic things that any parent can do to help their child with homework.

- Let your child be in control. Let your child pick her/his own topics for her/his project and solve her/his own problems. Let her/him take the initiative to decide when her/his homework is complete and if she/he has done it correctly. If your child has a problem ask him what she/he can do to solve it. Support your child if she/he needs an adult to step in. Having control is especially important as your child gets older and will give your child confidence.
- Praise your child for her/his effort and for the progress she/he is making in school. Focus less on the grade and more on how diligent your child is. Instead of saying "You're just naturally good at math so you'll do well." Say, "You didn't give up on that homework and gave it your best, so I think you will do well."
- Keep it positive. When your child is stressed or frustrated and wants to give up, take the time to listen. Be encouraging and help your child figure out how to work through her/his frustrations. Focus on the things your child is learning.
- Have great expectations. What you believe about your child's abilities affects what your child believes she/he can do.

5. *How can I be involved in my child's education in middle school?*

Middle school is a whole new world. Gone are the days of reading picture books together and class parties. Keep up your involvement in your child's education in new ways. Give your child more control over what she/he studies and when she/he does her/his homework. Encourage your child to join clubs and other activities at school or in your community. Join a parent group at the school, or offer to help

on a building leadership team. Believe it or not, some of the most important things you can do to help your child in school are to regularly tell your child that you expect her/him to do well in school and to try hard. Finally, it is important to your child's success in school for her/him to know that you will listen to her/him and that you care about her/him.

6. *How can I be involved in my teenager's education?*

Start here. Tell your child about your expectations for her/his effort and behavior in school. Your expectations are powerful. Students whose parents set high expectations are more likely to complete their homework, have higher grades and graduate. You can also help your child by helping her/him plan for her/his future and to be prepared. Talk with your child about what she/he would like to do after high school. Ask your school guidance counselor what classes your child can take to prepare her/him for the future she/he dreams of. Finally, don't underestimate the power of showing your interest in your child by talking with her/him, knowing her/his friends, and telling her/him how you expect her/him to behave. You are still a powerful influence in your child's life.

7. *What can I do if my child's needs are not being met at school?*

Every family faces times when their child has a problem at school. Maybe your child is falling behind, or your child is bored, or maybe your child is being bullied. When your child has an issue at school, it is important for your family and the school to work together. Don't wait too long. Contact your child's teacher as soon as you have a concern. Try the following steps to support your child and come to the best solution.

- Think about the problem in terms of home and school. What is happening at home? What is your concern about school?
- What are possible ways of solving the problem at school and at home? Try to think of more than one solution.
- Talk about the problem and your ideas for solving it with your child's teacher.
- Keep your emotions under control. Angry parents are threatening to teachers. Anger can hurt your effort to help your child.
- Talk about what you, your child or the teacher will need to do to help.
- Take action.
- Talk with your child about the problem and any changes.
- Follow up with the teacher to talk about how the problem was solved. If the problem doesn't improve, discuss a new plan. Talk with the teacher about who else could help solve the problem.
- Most importantly, keep working on your child's behalf until the problem is solved.

From: Ohio Department of Education (2008). Getting Problems Solved. Retrieved February 12, 2009, from Ohio Department of Education Web site: <http://www.ode.state.oh.us/> Click on "Just for Families."

8. *I don't feel welcome in my child's school. How can I be involved?*

Start with your child's teacher or the school principal. Ask about opportunities to be involved in the school. Let them know what you would like to do and when. Tell them about the things that make you feel unwelcome. Is it a lack of respect for families? Do you feel that your culture is not valued in the school? If there is a parent group, attend the meeting and see what projects they do. If it doesn't fit your interests, offer to do something different. Every school should have many opportunities for you once a year or once a week. Finally, if you don't feel welcome in the school, chances are other parents feel the same way. Talk with other parents and the school principal about making the school more family-friendly.

9. *Do fathers make a difference?*

Fathers make a big difference in their child's success in school. It does not matter where you live. Non-resident fathers, single fathers, and married fathers all can help their children succeed in school. Research has shown that when fathers get involved in their child's education the child is more likely to get higher grades and to enjoy school. When fathers are involved children are less likely to be suspended or expelled from school.

10. *Do I have to go to the school building to be involved in my child's education?*

No, but it can help. You will have the greatest impact on your child's education right in your own home, doing things together. Most parents are extremely busy balancing work, family, and all of the pressures of life. If you only have 15 minutes, we have some suggestions above (see #2) for what you can do at home. But, there are a few critical times in the school year when it will help your child if you are in the school building. At the beginning of the school year, most schools have an event when families can meet teachers and see the classrooms. This is an important time for you to help your child make a good transition to her/his new grade. Another important time of year is parent teacher conferences. If you really don't want to go to the school, let your child's teacher know that you can talk on the phone, write a note, or meet somewhere like a coffee shop. One of the easiest times to come to the school building for your child is for performances. Make sure there is someone in the audience who is there just for your child. Finally, there are important meetings for Individualized Education Plans, or to discuss issues like bullying. It is important to attend these meetings because you will always be your child's best supporter.

