**Tips for a successful school year**

Studies show that a child’s academic achievement is directly influenced by their parents’ involvement in their education. Learn how you can bolster your student for success. Your child goes off to school every day, and you probably see your primary role in this routine as getting your child to school well groomed, well fed, and on time. If you’re leaving educating up to the school, however, you’re overlooking the most important role you can play. Your involvement in your child’s school experience could mean the difference between success and failure for your child. This Tips for Parents will help you understand what is expected of us as parents from the teachers point of view, how to have open dialogue with our children regarding their day at school, how to help with homework, and just how important your involvement in your child's life really is.

**A Teacher’s Expectation of Parents**

Students, teachers, and parents all share responsibility in the education of a child. As a parent, here’s a minimum level of involvement most teachers expect:

* Help your student by developing a routine or specific time for homework where you are available to help or listen if needed. You are vital to their success.
* Ensure your child is at school, on time, every day possible. Arrange for vacations, trips, etc. during days off school.
* Make sure your child eats a healthy breakfast each morning so they can function in class.
* Make sure your student is getting adequate sleep at night to support their growing body and mind.
* Be a positive role model in your child’s eyes who shows interest in reading and learning new things.
* Notify the teacher of any concerns or questions you have regarding their learning or treatment in school.

**Questions to Ask Your Child about Their Day**

Get a sense of your child’s life at school by asking questions that elicit more than a one-word response. Try one of these conversation starters:

* Tell me about the best part of your day.
* What was the hardest thing you had to do today?
* Did any of your classmates do anything funny? Tell me about what you read in class.
* Who did you play with/hang out with today? What did you do? Do you think \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(insert subject here) is too hard?
* What’s the biggest difference between this year and last year?
* What rules are different at school than at home? Do you think they’re fair?
* Who did you sit with at lunch?
* Can you show me something you learned or did today?

**Your involvement is important because of who you are, not what you know.**

Parents have more influence on a child’s academic success than teachers do. No matter how excellent the school program, parents remain the primary educators of their children. What your child “knows” about school has a lot to do with the example you set. If you show an interest in school, your child “learns” that school is important. This could be the most important “lesson” of your child’s school career.

**Parents know best.**

Many parents regard teachers and school administrators as the professionals, and are hesitant to interfere with the education process, preferring to “leave it up to the experts.” But in fact, you are the expert on your child—and because you know your child better than anyone else, you are in the best position to motivate, challenge, and support your child in his or her learning experience. Most of all, you can make school subjects more meaningful by relating them to your child’s personal life. Teachers and principals are not in a position to make that kind of connection for your child.

Getting involved not only helps children—it helps parents.  You may not be aware of all the things your child works on at school. Getting involved gives you a good look at your child’s responsibilities and a better understanding of your child’s life. You’ll be surprised how much your increased understanding will add to your child’s self-esteem and willingness to work.

**Busy, busy? It’s okay—home is the best place for you to make a difference.**

Sit with your child while he or she does homework. Just your physical presence helps your child fight restlessness and concentrate better. Being able to discuss the work with you makes homework less frustrating when your child is doing something difficult and even more exciting when your child is working on something interesting.

Let your child see you reading, and read to young children whenever possible. This one activity can be essential to your child’s academic success. Achievement in all subjects improves with good reading skills.

Talk about school. It sounds simple, but it’s an important part of getting involved with your child’s education. Find out what subjects your child likes and dislikes. Find out what’s difficult in class, and talk about ways to make school easier and more interesting. Ask your child to bring home school bulletins. Reading pamphlets, newsletters, and flyers not only keeps you up to date on school events, it gives you a chance to talk to your child about what goes on at school.

Use your telephone. A lot of parents are simply too busy to participate in school activities as much as they would like. If you’re one of these busy parents, don’t forget that a call to a teacher or principal goes a long way in demonstrating your concern about your child’s school experience. School staff will take notice of your interest.

**If you’re a parent with a little more time to spare…**

Help the school make good decisions. Don’t forget organizations like the PTA and PTO are there to provide you with decision-making power. Such groups give you a chance to discover how school administrators view the goals of the school and to express your view of what the school’s goals should be. One of the best ways for you to affect your child’s education is by helping to determine school policies.

Volunteer in the classroom. The presence of parents in the classroom is credited with many positive effects, including giving students more individualized attention, exposing students to a broader base of expertise, and providing powerful role models.

Be in the audience. Don’t underestimate the value of attending school functions such as plays, sports events, and field trips. Just putting in an appearance makes a strong statement about your commitment.

**Visiting your child at school, whether to help with regular classroom activities, or to chaperone on field trips, is a great way to show your support. Here are some great Tips for Parents on how to be involved.**

You'll learn things you would probably miss if your only insight into the classroom is from your child's perspective and what you learn at Parent Teacher Conferences:

**•**    The ways they interact with teachers and classmates--do they seem to be fitting in well?
**•**    What they are studying
**•**    Areas they might be struggling in
**•**    The effectiveness of the teacher's methods with your student
**•**   The general feel of the classroom--Is it set up to get kids excited about learning?  Is the teacher helpful?  Are the kids behaved so that everyone can concentrate?

**Don't Underestimate the Importance of Visiting Your Child at School**

With busy work schedules and the hectic pace of life, it can be tough to find the time, but a little participation can give kids the big message that you believe school and their education is important.  Here are a few suggestions for ways to get involved if you're limited on time:
**•**    Participate in reading time once or twice a month
**•**   Volunteer to help with a field trip or a class party
**•**    Come to Career Day and share what you do with the class
**•**    If you're an artist, scientist, chef, writer or have another talent you can share, offer to lead a related activity once a month.
**•**    Be your child's Show and Tell
**•**    Then, at home, be sure to ask the kids how school is going--and don't let "fine" be their only answer.  Check on their homework, keep track of important events, and read those newsletters the principal keeps sending home.
**•**  Show a bit of interest in your child's classroom, and in return, they'll show a bigger interest in learning.

## Purposes of Homework

Practice. Assignments are made to increase speed, obtain mastery, or maintain skills. Examples include reviewing multiplication tables, studying spelling words, or practicing a foreign language.

Preparation. Assignments are made to prepare students for future classroom activities. Students, for example, might be asked to read two chapters on a social studies topic and be prepared to participate in a class debate.

Extension. Assignments are made to extend and enrich a student’s classroom learning. Students would be asked to apply knowledge and skills learned during class to related project-like activities.

## Tips for Parents: The Homework Test

Is your child’s homework being checked for accuracy or quality on a daily basis? If students don’t get regular feedback, the message is that homework isn’t all that important. If students view homework as just “busy work,” there really is no incentive to do it well.

Does your child’s homework assignments reflect what students know and is it directly related to in-class learning? If a teacher just sends home miscellaneous worksheets for the sake of giving homework, a child would be better off reading a book, participating in extra curricular activities, or just being with their family.

How much of your child’s homework are you actually doing? If your child is having a problem with an assignment, work through an example, but don’t do the assignment. This really is a form of cheating. It may stop the complaining momentarily, but won’t help in the long run. You’re also sending a subtle message that you think your child isn’t smart enough to do the homework alone.

The big question: “Should children be given homework assignments every night?” Homework, for teachers, has become a “darned if you do” and “darned if you don’t” dilemma. Parents worry when their children come home and say they don’t have any homework. But, there are also times when parents resent homework because it may intrude on their family’s quality time. Ironically, it is often public pressure that causes teachers to send home a ton of homework.

Frankly, this homework controversy has become an almost vicious cycle. It’s hard to tell which comes first—the homework or the demand for it. Children probably shouldn’t be given homework every night, but…

Homework assignments should reflect what students know--and be directly related to in class learning. Homework is supposed to help children learn. Busy work—repetitive work such as copying spelling words ten times each, or doing 75 multiplication problems every night—doesn’t really contribute toward learning. In fact, it can turn kids off to learning.

The emphasis for homework should be on quality rather than quantity. Homework doesn’t have to be given every night. When homework is assigned, it should be directly related to in-class learning, and be checked for accuracy and quality on a daily basis. If students don’t get regular feedback, the message is clear: homework isn’t all that important.

**The Do’s and Don’t of Homework**

Follow these Do’s and Don’ts of homework with your kids to make the most of their learning time at home:

**Do:**

* Provide quiet study time in a well-lit place.
* Be available to encourage, praise, advise, and supervise.
* Monitor your child’s understanding of concepts and skills.
* Check work for accuracy, neatness, and completeness.
* Provide related home-learning experiences to reinforce concepts learned at school.
* Cooperate with and be supportive of the child’s teacher.
* Help your child make education a top priority during his/her school years. Show by example that learning can be exciting and fulfilling.

**Don’t:**

* Do the child’s homework for him/her.
* Make excuses or allow the child to make excuses for incomplete or sloppy work.
* Change, criticize, or belittle a teacher’s assignments. If there’s a problem, talk to the teacher.
* Allow the child to skip an assignment he/she doesn’t like.
* Fill the child’s life with so many non-school activities there is no time left for homework or play. Relieve the child of responsibility for getting homework back to school on time