

# The Parent and Family Engagement Connection

## Home & School



*"Together We Can Make a Difference"*

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Skip Forsyth

The beginning of a new school year generates an air of anticipation. Students are ready to reconnect with friends and peers. Parents and families are ready to resume a more normal routine. Educators are ready to implement some new approaches and activities to engage learners. For many the school year begins with renewed energy and high expectations.

Nevertheless, for some the new school year revives feelings of unease. Emotions are pulsing, questions arise but go unspoken, and the important conversations do not take place. I am still the youngest and littlest – what should I do when they pick on me? I don't want to play football or volleyball, but my parents want me to try out – what should I do? I am going to a new middle school or new high school, what if kids don't like me? I was bullied last year, what will happen this year? I try to keep my faith and do what my parents say, but the kids think I'm weird. I'm not good at math, what if I can't do algebra? I don't like sports – I like robotics and chess, how do I fit in? I still don't speak good English – what do I do when I don't understand? I don't want kids to know I'm homeless, what do I say?

The 2019-2020 school year can be an excellent year for your child, but it starts with conversations. Try to imagine the feelings of excitement and possibly of anxiety your child may be experiencing. Then, ask questions and listen. Listen to their tone of voice and the pace of the replies. Observe their facial expression and body language. Refrain from reminiscing, "When I was your age..." Try to avoid immediate advice, "Well, if I were you I would..." Rather, let me say it again, listen. First, seek to understand.

If your child is eager to get started and seems to exhibit a positive attitude, then continue to encourage. But, be there for them, because eventually they will stumble. When they do, they will look to you for positive reinforcement. Even the kids that appear to have it together need their parents and family to be there for them.

If your child seems anxious about the upcoming school year, talk, listen, and together try to identify the worry. When you work together a child can learn how to overcome obstacles and solve problems. Lectures rarely solve problems. Tender hugs are comforting but don't change a challenging situation. Affirming conversations can result in positive outcomes.

I hope 2019-2020 is a stellar year for your family and your school.



## Unity

**I dreamed I stood in a studio and  
watched two sculptors there.  
The clay they used was a young child's  
mind and they fashioned it with care.**

**One was a teacher  
the tools that were used  
were books, music, and art.**

**The other, a parent,  
worked with a guiding hand  
and a gentle, loving heart.**

**Day after day,  
the teacher toiled with touch  
that was deft and sure.  
While the parent labored close nearby  
and polished and smoothed it o'er.**

**And when their task was done,  
they were proud of  
what they had wrought,  
for the things they had molded into a child  
could neither be sold nor bought.**

**And each agree they would have failed  
if each had worked alone.  
For behind the parents stood the school  
and behind the teacher stood the home.**

Arthur Unknown



# 10 Good Study Habits to Help Your Child Succeed in the New School Year

BY SYLVAN LEARNING

Once the shiny, freshness of back to school wears off, students and parents know it's time to get down to business. Particularly for students heading to middle school or high school, the homework assignments become tougher, workloads get heavier and staying ahead of the curve becomes more of a challenge.

As a parent, you may ask, "What is the 'secret behind the A'?" While having effective study skills may be overlooked on the academic journey, we've seen this be the tipping point in making good students into great students. We've compiled a list of 10 good study habits for your tween or teen to help set him or her up for a productive school year.



**1. Get Organized.** Between homework, tests, and extracurricular activities, it's all too easy for things to slip through the cracks. A planner can help your child keep everything organized. Students should write down assignments, appointments and to-do lists, then review items in the planner at both the beginning and end of the day to stay on track.

**2. Know the Expectations.** Students shouldn't have any surprises when it comes to how and what they will be graded on. By middle school and high school, most teachers will provide a course outline or syllabus, which can serve as a guide for the semester. If expectations aren't clear, don't wait until a bad report card comes in the mail. Your student should feel comfortable approaching teachers with questions about grading and assignments at any time. If this is not the case, it may be time for you as a parent to step in.

**3. Designate a Study Area.** Yes, studying at the local coffee shop may seem like a good idea, but not if there are constantly people interrupting or other disruptions. Even at home, studying in front of the TV won't be the best use of your son or daughter's time. Help your child by providing a quiet, well-lit, low-traffic space for study time.

**4. Develop a Study Plan.** First things first: students need to know when a test will take place, the types of questions that will be included and the topics that will be covered. From there, your student should create a study plan and allow ample time to prepare – there's nothing worse than cramming the night before an exam.

You can help by buying a wall calendar and asking him or her to assign topics and tasks for each day leading up to a due date or exam. Setting goals for each session is also key to success.

**5. Think Positively.** Being in the right mindset can make all the difference. Encourage your child to think positively when studying or heading into an exam and by all means, avoid catastrophic thinking. Help your student turn negative statements like, "I'll never have enough time to get a good grade on this exam," into positive ones like, "I began preparing later than I should have but I put together a comprehensive study plan and will be able to get through the material prior to the exam."

**6. Create a Study Group.** Working in groups can help students when they're struggling to understand a concept and can enable them to complete assignments more quickly than when working alone. Keep groups small and structured to ensure the maximum benefit to participants and reduce distractions.

**7. Practice Active Listening.** It's important for students to concentrate and avoid distractions when an instructor is presenting. Some tips to share with your child include: try concentrating on the main points being made, think about what the speaker is saying and pay attention to how things are said (gestures, tone of voice, etc.). They should avoid talking or thinking about problems when listening. If a teacher says, "This is important" or "I'll write this on the board," there's a good chance students will see the concept on an exam.

**8. Review Test-Taking Strategies.** It is normal for your child to feel stressed when taking an exam. However, there are certain strategies that will help him or her manage the stress and do his or her best on the exam. First, make sure that your child arrives on time and tries to stay relaxed. Students should be sure to read all of the directions on the exam and pace themselves so as not to feel rushed. You can let your child know that it's OK to skip around on a test, if allowed, as he or she may be more comfortable with certain topics than others.

**9. Read Actively.** It's all too easy for students to skim over an assigned book chapter and not know the main points of what they just read. Help your student to practice active reading by asking him or her to note the main idea of each passage and look up unfamiliar words or concepts. Make an outline of the chapter or create flow charts and diagrams that help map out the concept at hand. After each section, have students write a summary in their own words and come up with possible exam questions.

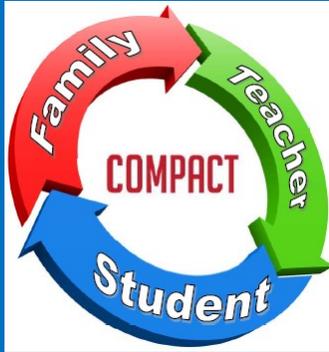
**10. Look to the Future.** For some students, college may seem like an intangible event in the very distant future, but in reality, it isn't so far off. Starting early can be an immense help in navigating the college admissions process. Be sure to get organized, set goals with your child and have regular check-ins to assess progress.

<http://www.sylvanlearning.com/blog/index.php/10-good-study-habits-new-school-year/>

## What is the telltale sign your kids need encouragement?

It's a simple sign. If they're breathing. Kids crave praise from their parents. When is the last time you sat down, looked your children in the eye, and told them why you're proud of them? Don't just assume they know. They won't get it by osmosis. Tell them specifically. And tell them often. You have a lot of negative cultural messages to combat. Start the encouragement counter-attack tonight at dinner.

# School-Parent Compact



The school-parent compact, along with the parent and family engagement policy, is a keystone document for a school to provide an effective family engagement program. The school-parent compact is passion in print. The school-parent compact is like a compass pointing toward the destination “student success.” It is a written agreement of shared responsibility for home

and school to work together to improve student achievement. The compact provides an opportunity to create new partnerships in the school community.

Research indicates when educators and families work together for student learning, children enjoy school more (improved morale), do better in school (improved achievement), and stay in school longer (improved attendance and graduation rate). If the compact is implemented with fidelity, it will assure there will be support for the academic success of the student by enhancing effective communications between home and school. When developed with the input of all concerned parties, the compact can serve as a valuable tool to meaningfully engage the school and the home in supporting the academic development and needs of the students.

## A SCHOOL-PARENT COMPACT SHOULD ADDRESS:

- The school’s responsibility to provide high-quality curriculum and instruction.
- Ways parents can support their child’s learning.
- Ways students will be responsible for learning.
- The importance of on-going two-way communication, including parent and teacher conferences and frequent reports to parents on their children’s progress.
- Activities to help build stronger home-school partnerships, including reasonable access to staff and opportunities to observe or volunteer in the child’s classroom.

Also, to the extent practicable, the compact should be provided in a format and language the families can understand.

All schools receiving Title I, Part A funds are required to develop a compact with the participation of parents and to distribute the compact to families. Look for your school’s 2019-20 school-parent compact in the student handbook or on the school website. Ask the school office or the child’s teacher for a copy of the compact. Frequently it is provided at registration or at the back-to-school night/annual meeting or a PTA/PTO meeting. In elementary schools “a parent-teacher conference is required, at least annually, where the compact is discussed as it relates to the individual child’s achievement.”

## 10 Questions to Ask Your Child About His Day at School

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

1. Tell me about the best part of your day.
2. What was the hardest thing you had to do today?
3. Did any of your classmates do anything funny?
4. Tell me about what you read in class.
5. Who did you play with today? What did you play?
6. Do you think math (or any subject) is too easy or too hard?
7. What’s the biggest difference between this year and last year?
8. What rules are different at school than our rules at home? Do you think they’re fair?
9. Who did you sit with at lunch?
10. Can you show me something you learned (or did) today?



What Children Need Most...

Dreams

Encouragement To PLAY

to have FUN A hero

Affection

Respect

Love

to be seen

Room to grow

To Sing

A fostered sense of wonder

To be trusted

The Chance to make mistakes

To try again

Guidance

Lots of Hugs

YOUR PRESENCE

To be told Yes!

to be listened to

Growing a Jeweled Rose.com

## 6 Rules for School Safety



Back-to-school doesn't have to mean back-to-worrying. Though safety *inside* your child's school is ultimately the responsibility of the principal and school staff, parents can take a few basic steps to ensure a safe school experience, too. These are recommended by the National Association of Elementary School Principals:

1. **Learn the school's emergency procedures.** Emergency plans and phone numbers are usually included in school handbooks and posted in classrooms. Taking a few extra minutes to familiarize yourself and your child with emergency information can give him the confidence he needs to act quickly in emergency situations.
2. **Know travel routes to and from the school.** Make sure you and your child know both primary and alternate routes. In an emergency, roads can be blocked and it's important to have a backup plan.
3. **Know and follow school security and safety measures.** These might include signing in when visiting the school, being escorted when walking through the building, or wearing a visitor pass. Following these procedures also sets a great example for your kids.
4. **Talk with your child about safety.** Be specific. Talk about instinct and paying attention to funny feelings of fear. Explain what to do if she doesn't feel safe (find a teacher, call 911, etc.). Make sure she knows how to contact you or a trusted neighbor who is likely to be at home.
5. **Inform school staff about health and emotional concerns.** Whether your child has a food allergy, a physical disability, or has been subject to bullying, make sure to keep your child's teachers and principal in the loop.
6. **Get involved.** Talk with the principal about what you can do to increase school safety, such as organizing parents to form a neighborhood watch before and after school. Sometimes parent groups are highly successful in making improvements in traffic safety during drop off and pick up times.

By Scholastic Parents Staff:  
<https://www.scholastic.com/parents/school-success/school-involvement/6-rules-school-safety.print.html>

### DID YOU KNOW?

According to data released in 2018, 55% of students reported feeling safe on school property grounds. However, fewer said they feel safe in hallways or recreational spaces.

**School safety is defined as schools and school-related activities where students are safe from violence, bullying, harassment, and substance use.**

Safe schools promotes the protection of students from violence, exposure to weapons and threats, theft, bullying, and the sale or use of illegal substances on school grounds. School safety is linked to improved student and school outcomes. In particular, emotional and physical safety in school are related to academic performance. At the same time, students who are victims of physical or emotional harassment or who are involved in the sale or use of illegal substances on school grounds are at risk for poor attendance, course failure and dropout.

**School safety affects all students.**

The levels of crime and substance abuse that a school experiences are strongly correlated to school-wide test scores, graduation rates, and attendance rates. In schools with higher levels of collective hostility—as measured by student reports of feeling unsafe, the presence of gangs, and fighting between different groups of students—student reading achievement suffers.

**School climate improvement efforts promote emotional safety.**

Programs to support character education and learning about social and emotional skills can substantially improve students' physical and emotional safety. This includes fostering emotional support between peers and staff, preventing hate speech, and implementing programs that teach social and emotional skills such as conflict resolution, anger management, and positive communication. Experimental research on these types of programs has shown that effective programs enhance social-emotional skills and attitudes, increase the frequency of positive social behavior, and reduce the frequency and severity of conduct issues and emotional problems.

**Bullying is an example of the lack of physical and emotional safety many students experience.**

In the 2008-09 school year, 28 percent of students ages 12-18 were bullied at school. The prevention of all forms of bullying, including threats, harassment, social isolation, or spreading rumors, particularly towards those groups at particular risk of being victimized by bullying, is typical of schools with a positive climate.

<https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/topic-research/safety>

# Back to School Checklist

Beat back-to-school stress. Don't wait until the last minute. Start in early August to prepare for the school year and start the school year with confidence.

## A Couple of Days Before School:

- ✓ Tour the school. Show your child the classrooms, student locker, cafeteria, and the bathrooms.
- ✓ Plan the outfit. Ask your child to help choose the outfits for the first week of school. Let your child pick out his or her favorite outfit for the first day.
- ✓ Pack the backpack. Together with your child, pack the backpack the night before, including treats.
- ✓ Choose a special object. For younger children who are nervous about separating, suggest taking a special object to school that reminds him or her of home. Put a reassuring note in a child's lunch can also help ease separation anxiety.



*Back to school  
we go running.  
We have our supplies and  
we're looking stunning!*

## Get Ready:

- ✓ Schedule any doctor or dental or vision appointments.
- ✓ Make sure your child has all required immunizations.
- ✓ Schedule kids' haircuts as needed.
- ✓ Make sure your child is properly registered for school, particularly if she or he is attending a new school.
- ✓ Notify the school office, the school nurse, and food service of any health problems, medications, or food allergies.

## Establish a Routine:

- ✓ Check the school website or call the school for a list of required supplies.
- ✓ Create a designated homework space, and agree with your child when he or she will complete homework (immediately after school or after dinner; with middle school and high school students this may need to be negotiated around extracurricular activities). Work out a plan to balance homework and play.
- ✓ Set rules for time spent on TV, video games, and social media.
- ✓ Set aside time for reading, at least 15 minutes per day.
- ✓ Return to a sleep schedule (about 2 weeks before the start of school try to resume your school routine) and meal schedule that aligns to the school schedule.

## Be Prepared:

- ✓ Review the school dress code.
- ✓ Talk with your child about the start of a new school year - any concerns or worries? Peer pressure or bullying? What are the hopes and expectations?
- ✓ Arrange child-care or after-school activities. Make sure your child knows where to go after school every day.
- ✓ Choose extracurricular activities carefully to avoid overscheduling.

## Be Involved:

- ✓ Get a copy of the school year calendar, and mark school events on the family calendar - in addition to athletics and arts programs, be sure to include important testing days.
- ✓ Find out the best way to communicate with the student's teacher (phone, email, note, etc.).
- ✓ Attend orientations, back-to-school programs, or meet-your-teacher events.
- ✓ Schedule and attend parent-teacher conferences.
- ✓ Volunteer at the school or participate in the school PTA/PTO.

## PARENT DECISION-MAKERS

Although educators are the experts in the schoolhouse, they are not all-knowing. Decision-making that impacts student performance always has consequences and sometimes unintended consequences. Educational leaders need to be cautious about decision-making in “silos.” Rather, forge partnerships with parents and family members. Include them in the site-based decision-making team and other working committees and advisory councils. Strive to have parents included in a manner that represents the demographic of your school community.

Joyce Epstein strongly advocates for parents to be decision-makers along with the school staff. Likewise, USDE, in its Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships, urges schools to develop parent leaders. The goal is to train parents so they have the confidence and the competence to serve as leaders and decision-makers.



Too often the role of parents is limited to fund-raising and assisting in the work room. Parents are needed to lead PTA/PTOs, serve on district-level councils, and participate on advocacy groups that work with schools for innovative improvements.

Nevertheless, recruiting parents to be partners in leadership faces challenges. Parents are busy and time is at a premium. Cultural barriers cause parents to be reluctant. Plus, the fear factor – the adults didn't like school as a student and some adults harbor those same feelings today.

Districts and schools need parent leaders today - men and women who will listen to and communicate with families. Districts and schools need parent decision-makers – women and men who value partnerships more than power struggles and will work toward a common goal.

As a parent and family member, get involved! Be an active advocate for your child. Speak with the parent and family engagement coordinator about opportunities for service that go beyond cupcakes and bake sales. Talk with your principal about serving on a school committee. Explain that you are keenly interested, ready to participate, and are eager to learn more about the school's priorities. Don't wait to be nominated, nominate yourself. One of your greatest abilities is your availability.

Schools that want to recruit and train parent leaders should do the following:

- Make the school inviting.
- Avoid educational jargon.
- Keep parents well informed and encourage two-way communication.
- Schedule meetings at times convenient for parents, even if those meetings aren't most convenient for educators.
- Show respect for parents' perspectives.
- Make parents equal partners with educators by allowing them a voice in school decisions.
- Celebrate parent participation.

Resources: Joyce Epstein, Center for the Social Organization of Schools, *Framework of Six Types of Involvement*  
Karen Rasmussen, ASCD: Education Update, *Making Parent Involvement Meaningful*

Mark your Calendar

DECEMBER 12-14  
**2019**  
Statewide Parental  
Involvement Conference

**San Marcos**  
Embassy Suites &  
Conference Center

1001 E. McCarty Ln  
San Marcos, TX 78666  
**512.392.6450**

When booking a room go to  
[tinyurl.com/y2nln8kg](http://tinyurl.com/y2nln8kg)  
and use group code **PIC**

## ONLINE REGISTRATION

available at:

<http://www.implanners.com/parents/register.php>

or download and complete the registration form, then fax to (888) 267-7913—or email to [implanners@sbcglobal.net](mailto:implanners@sbcglobal.net).

*If you're interested in attending, contact the school's principal or parent and family engagement liaison.*

# TIPS for Parent-Teacher Conferences

During the school year, teachers will invite you to come to parent-teacher meetings (also called conferences). This is very common in the United States. You can also ask for a conference any time.

## Getting Started

- ⇒ **What:** The conference is a meeting between you and your child's teacher.
- ⇒ **When:** Your child's teacher will contact you to set up a meeting time.
- ⇒ **Why:** The conference gives you a chance to talk with your child's teacher.

## Questions

### What if I work during the day?

Let the teacher know you can only go to conferences at night.

### What if I don't speak English?

You have the right to have an interpreter attend the conference. You can also bring a friend or relative to interpret. It is important that your child does not translate for you.

### What will we talk about?

Your child's teacher will probably talk about your child's grades, classwork, homework, and behavior.

### What will I learn?

You will learn more about your child's classes, and find out if your child is having any problems.

### What will the teacher ask me?

Teachers like to learn about students from their parents. No one knows your child better than you do. You can help the teacher by talking about:

- What your child likes to do
- Events that may affect your child (such as a new baby, divorce or death)
- Special medical or learning needs

## Things to Remember

If you are invited to a conference, it doesn't mean your child is in trouble! Teachers try to meet with all parents. You and the teacher both want the very best for your child. You can help your child by working together as a team.

# Teacher-Parent Checklists

## Before the conference

- ✓ Ask your child how she feels about school.
- ✓ Ask your child if there is anything that he wants you to talk about with his teacher.
- ✓ Tell your child that you and the teacher are meeting to help her.
- ✓ Make a list of topics that you want to talk about with the teacher.

## Prepare a list of questions such as:

- ✓ What are my child's strongest and weakest subjects?
- ✓ Does my child hand homework in on time?
- ✓ Does my child participate in class?
- ✓ Does my child seem happy at school?
- ✓ What can I do at home to help?

## During the conference

- ✓ Be on time (or early) for the meeting.
- ✓ End the meeting on time. Other parents will probably have a conference after yours.
- ✓ Relax and be yourself.
- ✓ Stay calm during the conference.
- ✓ Ask the most important questions first.
- ✓ If your child receives special services such as English classes, ask about your child's progress in those classes.
- ✓ Ask for explanations of anything you don't understand.
- ✓ Ask your child's teacher for ways that you can help your child at home.
- ✓ Thank the teacher

## After the conference

- ✓ Talk about the conference with your child.
- ✓ Talk about the positive points, and be direct about problems.
- ✓ Tell your child about any plans you and the teacher created.
- ✓ Keep in touch with the teacher during the school year.

[www.ColorinColorado.org](http://www.ColorinColorado.org)



## Co-Parenting Tips for Divorced Parents

The key to successful co-parenting is to separate the personal relationship with your ex from the co-parenting relationship. It may be helpful to start thinking of your relationship with your ex as a completely new one—one that is entirely about the well-being of your children, and not about either of you. Your marriage may be over, but your family is not; acting in your kids' best interest is your most important priority. The first step to being a mature, responsible co-parent is to always put your children's needs ahead of your own.



## Benefits for your children

Through your co-parenting partnership, your kids should recognize that they are more important than the conflict that ended your marriage—and understand that your love for them will prevail despite changing circumstances. Kids whose divorced parents have a cooperative relationship:

- **Feel secure.** When confident of the love of both parents, kids adjust more quickly and easily to divorce and new living situations, and have better self-esteem.
- **Benefit from consistency.** Co-parenting fosters similar rules, discipline, and rewards between households, so children know what to expect, and what's expected of them.
- **Better understand problem solving.** Children who see their parents continuing to work together are more likely to learn how to effectively and peacefully solve problems themselves.
- **Have a healthy example to follow.** By cooperating with the other parent, you are establishing a life pattern your children can carry into the future to build and maintain stronger relationships.
- **Are mentally and emotionally healthier.** Children exposed to conflict between co-parents are more likely to develop issues such as depression, anxiety, or ADHD.



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*"Together We Can Make a Difference"*

The Parent and Family Engagement Connection is posted on our website four times a year for parents and educators of Texas. This newsletter is available in Spanish, Vietnamese, German and Korean.



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