

# Kids Need Parents' Involvement

by Jill Noland

**You** know the scene. Mom scrambles to get home from work, prepare dinner and rush to the PTA meeting. Dad praises the children for their good grades and sometimes helps with homework.

Research shows parental involvement is key to school success—even more than income and education levels. A recent survey by Sylvan Learning Centers revealed that mothers and fathers agree they have equal responsibility to be involved.

Yet, the survey shows mothers tend to invest more when it comes to daily management of their children's education. Two-parent households, single parents, and parents who live away from their children agree that work can interfere with school participation. And most parents feel that meeting the educational responsibility is a stiff challenge. The good news is it can be done. Here are some tips to help you become more involved.

**Mom + Dad = co-plan:** Planning and cooperation are the keys to successful involvement in your child's education. Together, parents should discuss issues such as academic expectations, school activities, and work schedules.

**Check your calendar:** Before the school year begins, sit down with a school calendar, Mom and Dad's business calendars, and personal calendars. Compare schedules and use this information to plan for the months ahead.

**Great expectations:** Agree on what you want your child to accomplish this school year. It might be improving a specific skill, such as spelling. Or it could be reaching a goal, such as reading a certain number of books or getting an "A" in algebra. Then decide together how you will respond to successes or failures. This eliminates mixed messages.

**Ready, set for back to school:** Attend back-to-school night together, so Mom and Dad learn first-hand about curriculum and activities. If both of you can't attend, collect any handouts and take notes so you can correctly communicate key information to the absent parent.

**Divide and conquer:** Compare your skills, interests and schedules to determine how best to divide responsibilities equally. If Mom is better at math, she should be the child's "point-parent" in that subject. If Dad is a history buff, he becomes chief advisor in that area.

Another option is to split assignments according to time available. Mom checks homework on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays; Dad takes the helm Tuesdays, Thursdays, and weekends. Remember to let your child know who the "point-parent" is for each subject or project. You can even make a colorful chart for the refrigerator.

**Parents + teacher = academic partnership:** Most teachers work hard to be accessible to parents. It is ideal for both parents to cultivate a relationship and establish an open communication line with the teacher. Here are some ways you can do it:

- **First Contact:** Find out the best time for phone calls. Sending a note is also a quick and easy way to stay in touch with the teacher. Take turns with your partner being chief correspondent. And remember to share the good news as well as concerns. For example, “Ben and I both enjoyed the unit on volcanoes.” Be sure to let the teacher know how both parents can be reached as well. Provide an alternate way for Mom and Dad to be contacted if voice mail is reached.
- **Make Conference Room:** Schedule two to four teacher conferences during the year at times both parents can attend. Discuss objectives for each conference before hand so both Mom and Dad’s concerns will be raised.
- **Head to Class:** Each parent should volunteer to chaperone a field trip, share a skill in class, or help with a special project at least once a year. While you’re in the classroom, check out the children’s work posted on walls and observe how your child interacts with the teacher and other children. If you can’t participate in person, consider videotaping an educational aspect of your job or hobby for class viewing.

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