

Parental Involvement Helps Kids Learn

by Jill Noland

Parental involvement is key to children's success in school, the last column pointed out. Here are more tips to help you become more involved:

Students at Work: If you can't go to school, invite the class to work. Volunteer to arrange and host a field trip at your workplace.

Report Card Review: Use report cards as tools to understand how your child is doing and where she needs assistance, rather than reasons for rewards or punishments. Review report cards as a team to show your child both Mom and Dad are involved and interested in her education. Save report cards so you can chart your child's progress throughout the year.

School Participation—50 percent Mom, 50 percent Dad: Involved Moms and Dads feel more connected to school, which sets an example for the children. Volunteering helps you meet other families and provides resources your school and child otherwise might do without.

Join the Club: Join the school's parent association and get the meeting schedule. Coordinate your calendars so at least one parent—not always the same one—can attend.

Volunteers Needed: Identify volunteer opportunities and pick those that fit your schedules. If Mom's busiest work time is in the fall, she can help with spring fund-raising. If Dad can't leave work during the day, find out what jobs—making phone calls for the parent association or editing the school newsletter—can be done in the evenings or on weekends. Cyber-savvy parents might explore designing and maintaining a school web site and parents' "chat room." Also, look for an activity you can do as a family, such as weekend playground clean-up.

Read All About It: Make sure both Mom and Dad read all the newsletters, memos, permission forms, and other materials sent home from school. Initial each after you've read it so one parent doesn't throw away something before the other gets to see it.

In Touch Out of Town: If one parent lives elsewhere, give the school self-addressed, stamped envelopes to mail a second set of newsletters and other materials. Take photos or make videotapes of special events and projects so out-of-town parents can stay involved from a distance.

Make Your Case At Work: Check if your employer has policies that give workers time off to fulfill parental responsibilities. If not, schedule vacation when you're needed at school. Ask if you can take vacation time in small increments—two to three hours at a time—so you can attend a school performance or teacher conference. Or ask to arrive late, take a long lunch break or leave early, offering to make up the time in the evenings or on weekends.

Mom + Dad + Child = Family Learning: Make your child part of the academic equation by discussing your expectations with him. Parent-child communication is essential to a family's educational success.

Long Distance Learning: A parent who lives away can use phone, e-mail, or fax to keep updated on children's academic activities and even help with homework.

Grade Mom and Dad: Encourage your child to create a "parent report card." Let your child grade you both in categories like: attends school events I care most about, gives me the kind of homework help I need without doing the work for me, shows an interest in what we are studying at school, reads to me.

Story Time: Instilling a love of reading is one of the most important contributions parents can make to a child's education. For younger children, try acting out the stories or chapters in a book with Mom and Dad as characters. Even older children enjoy being read to. A family with adolescents can form a book club with other parents and children.

When both parents and children are dedicated to education, children earn better grades, score higher on tests, miss fewer classes, and complete more homework. Parental involvement also helps children develop positive attitudes toward learning and behave better. And studies show children with involved fathers develop higher self-esteem and are more likely to take initiative.

It's important for Mom and Dad to be equally involved in their child's education. That way, neither feels unfairly burdened. And both can experience the joy and gratification that come from doing their part in preparing their child for success.

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