

Summary

Many parents feel that teachers should be left to get on with the job of educating children. However, because every child is different, the teaching role is much easier when parents work in partnership with the school.

Introduction

Being interested and involved in your child's schooling will give your child a better chance of success for many reasons; they will know that you value education and that you want them to succeed, school staff will understand your child better and know that your family makes a positive contribution to the school. Having a structure at home will help to give your child a good attitude to and the ability to do well at school.

Getting Involved

There are many ways to get involved in your child's education and in the life of the school. Some of these are detailed below.

In Your Child's Education

Learn all you can about your child's school and how it works. You can find information in the school prospectus, handbook and on the school website. You are entitled to copies of the school's policies, just ask at reception (there may be a small charge for printing). The more you know, the easier your job as a parent will be.

Make sure you attend parent consultations. It is the perfect forum for learning about how your child is doing and picking up on any problems. Your child will also feel pleased that you are interested in their education.

Spend time thinking about your child's individual needs and whether they are being met by their school. Gather your thoughts, collect reports, documents and examples of work. You are the primary gatherer of information about your child. Keep a notebook, file folder or other method of storing this information so you have it at your fingertips when you need it.

Sometimes the teachers and other staff feel all of the responsibility for educating the children rests on their shoulders. Helping them feel that they are not alone when it comes to your child will ease some of this pressure and they will realise that everyone needs each other. Present yourself as an ally who wants to work with the school to ensure your child's needs are met.

Asking what you can do at home to support your child's learning will show that you are interested in your child's education and that you want to underpin the work undertaken in school.

In School Life

Getting involved in the life of the school builds positive relationships and you can contribute to your child's education experience. To be a positive contributor to the life of the school, you could offer to help in school as a volunteer; this could be in any of the following ways:

- sharing your talents by offering them to help the school, for example by making costumes for a play
- sharing your knowledge by offering to talk to students about a particular theme
- helping out at a charity event
- making suggestions and offering to help them become a reality.

You could also become part of the Parent Teacher Association, the Governing Body, Parent Focus Group or a group put together to support a specific project, such as an environmental project. If you don't have time to volunteer you could offer a monetary contribution to a specific project or buy items for fundraising events. Attending events is also a way of being involved.

Being a good advocate for the school in other contexts is also important as it can raise its profile in the community. Be careful about criticising the school or members of staff to other people.

Communication

Communicating with your child's teacher regularly forms the basis of good relations. This could be done verbally, by report card, by telephone or email. Don't wait until things haven't been going well for a while before talking to the people who have daily contact with your child.

It is important to share what you know about your child. In particular, share your knowledge of their talents, interests and strengths. Let them know what your child finds rewarding to keep them motivated. Detail what you consider their needs to be and any difficulties you are having at home. Successful strategies that work at home may work at school as well.

Dealing with Problems

When problems arise, you can ask for a meeting with your child's teacher or other relevant person. It's a good idea to prepare for the meeting by writing down details about the issue. It's best to stick to the facts and focus on your child's needs. You could ask your partner or a friend to attend the meeting with you and discuss the points you are going to make with them beforehand. Make sure you keep notes of meetings and points that were agreed at them.

Getting help for your child can be a complicated and emotional process. Because of this, there will inevitably be misunderstandings in communication between you and the other adults working with your child. As frustrated as you may become, remember there are many good reasons to set aside emotions and try again.

- Focus on your child's best interest
- Ensure the views you are advocating are accurate, valid, and reasonable
- Emphasise *what* is right rather than *who* is right
- Begin with areas of agreement and work from there; and
- Separate people from the problem, and avoid personal criticism.

Be personable – treating staff members with respect and monitoring your words, tone and emotions will get you off on the right foot. Working with the school throughout the process will be likely to get the best result for your child.

Be patient – it will take time to implement changes and things may not be right the first time. Give yourself a deadline of a few weeks for things to improve.

Be persistent – if matters don't improve, go and speak to the school again. If you get nowhere with your child's teacher, you can speak to the gifted and talented lead teacher if the school has one or the year group leader. If you still get no joy, speak to the next in line.

Structure and Values at Home

A child who is both cooperative and independent has the best chance of functioning well at school and in society as a whole. Teaching these skills starts in the home and providing a good structure and definite boundaries will give them a springboard for adult life. There are seven guidelines below:

1. Encourage your child to **respect teaching staff** and other adults in school and in the community. It is important to demonstrate this to your child in your own dealings with the school and when talking about the school.
2. Set clear **rules and limits** in your home and explain them firmly and respectfully. Stick to the limits you set.
3. Guide your child to **keep commitments** made at school or with friends; don't be quick to let them quit when the going gets rough. Show them that it is important to follow through and do what they've agreed to. A child who knows dropping out isn't an option is more likely to make future decisions carefully.
4. Encourage your child to be **open and honest** with you about any problems or concerns at school. This way you can pick up on any potential crisis early on.
5. Set aside **time for homework** to be completed so you are not always on their back about doing it. Make it clear that you expect homework to be completed and handed in in good time.
6. Give your child **responsibilities at home** but don't be surprised if you have to keep reminding them. Expect them to complete chores and help them to break these down into simple steps, showing how to manage a job that seems overwhelming.
7. Make sure older children have an **alarm clock** to help them meet their own responsibilities. This will also help to avoid early morning struggles.

Further Information Books can be ordered from our website shop: www.potentialplusuk.org

PA301 Gifted and Talented Provision in Schools	Potential Plus Advice Sheet on the provision made for gifted and talented children in schools
www.aworkingmum.co.uk/how-attend-school-meetings.html	Useful document on attending school meetings
www.school-info4u.com/	Information on all aspects of dealing with schools
http://www.familyandparenting.org/Resources/FPI/Documents/School-Parent%20Partnerships.pdf	Guidance on communicating with schools
<i>Parents' and Carers' Guide to Able and Talented Children</i> by Barry Teare	Excellent, practical book for parents and carers of high learning potential children. It includes a section split into subjects giving ideas for extension in these areas.
<i>Stand Up for Your Gifted Child</i> by Joan Franklin Smutney	Book giving practical advice on being an advocate for your high learning potential child

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