

PARENT PARENT Involvement

Parents are a child's first teacher.

Parent involvement in children's lives means having a continuous relationship. When parents understand their child's individual temperament and they sense and read the needs of their children, parents are said to be in tune with their child.

Being accepting, supportive, and loving may be the most important gift parents can give their children. An involved parent pays attention to a child's needs, builds good relationships, and loves and supports him/her consistently. Parents can be involved at home and at school.

They can spend time with their children and find time to have fun, talk about special things, plan family events, and listen to the child when he or she speaks. Involvement should not stop with parents. Family involvement may include activities with grandparents, aunts, uncles, older siblings, and other caring adults who have responsibility for the child. Involvement represents a partnership among families and all community agencies that serve and support children.

Shawn Browning was ready for kindergarten. His parents had worked

hard during his preschool years to instill a love of learning to be sure he was ready for school. He was eager to go to "big" school. On the first day of school he proudly brought home a note from the teacher that said he was a "Perfect Student." On the second day, he received a warning note. Thinking it was serious, his mother talked to him about it. On the third day, he brought home another

warning note saying that he was not being a "good friend." On the next day, his note said he was "being silly."

His mother and father wondered if they should take away a precious toy or punish him in some way. This was not the way to start the school year.

They wondered what was going on. Was he failing kindergarten?

Mrs. Browning made an appointment to meet the teacher. The teacher showed her a check sheet with 10 smiley faces, saying she would begin to reward his good behavior. Shawn's mother wondered: What if he doesn't get all 10 smiley faces? How will that make him feel? What will happen to his love of learning?

Knowing that she was Shawn's representative and voice with the teacher, Mrs. Browning asked more questions in order

Every child needs to spend time with someone who thinks they are more important than other people's kids, someone who's in love with him or her, and whom he or she loves in return.

Bronfenbrenner, 1989

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to understand the school policy and to seek an explanation of the comments on the daily notes. Together they discussed the Browning family personality and routines. Mrs. Browning noted to the teacher that Shawn had a lot of energy and that he really liked puzzles and blocks. She suggested that these were two good ways to redirect his energy. Also she wondered if, given his high energy level, the teacher could be sure he had a chance to run and play outside. Together, the teacher and Mrs. Browning decided on some different strategies. Mrs. Browning visited the class often, read favorite books to the class, and talked with the teacher about Shawn's progress regularly. At home, Mr. and Mrs. Browning asked Shawn about school and kept in tune with what was happening during his day.

Today Shawn is in 6th grade and on the A-B honor roll. A caring parent who works as a team player with the teacher can have a positive effect on the child and the child in turn will feel supported in his/her learning.

(Based on a true story from a parent)

Parent involvement is an ongoing process that emphasizes guiding and connecting with children. According to research, when parents are involved in their child's schooling and learning, the child does better in school and has a more positive attitude about learning. The child's attendance at school is better, and there are fewer discipline problems.

When parents are involved

1. Children do better in school and in life. They are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, graduate from high school, and go to college.
2. Parents develop confidence by helping their children learn at home. Many parents go on to further their own education and become active in the community.
3. Teacher morale improves. Teachers who work with families expect more from students and feel a stronger connection to and support from the community.
4. The quality of the schools improves. When parents are involved at home and at school,

the performance of all children in the school tends to improve.

5. Communities grow stronger. Families feel more invested in the school system, and the school system becomes more responsive to parent and community needs.

Speaking up for your child

Speaking up for or on behalf of one's child is a critical parenting role. This means parents are advocates for children—they stand up for and protect children in their school and community. Effective parents use community resources to get their children's and family's needs met.

As an advocate, parents represent their children's needs. When parents feel that activities or policies do not serve to develop a child's growth or make it hard for a family to function, parents can speak up and take action to change those policies. Children whose parents speak up for the needs of their child are more likely to feel this support and feel more secure; this in turn enhances learning by the child.

When to be involved

Parents have the right and the responsibility to be involved in any aspect of their child's education or child care. Research says that some parents may feel distrustful of people in authority or may not know that they can speak up and ask questions of teachers or other community

leaders. Some parents do not know what to say, and others lack English language skills and cannot communicate with teachers.

These difficulties may make it seem that parents do not care about their child's learning, but generally that is not the case. Some parents believe that they should not interfere with the teacher's teaching. But once parents become aware of the need to help their children at home and are given a set of strategies to follow, many are quite willing to help.

Parent involvement is a combination of being an advocate for one's child while knowing his or her needs at home and at school. Being involved is more than cutting stencils for the teacher or going to parent-teacher conferences. Although this can be part of it, there is more.

Students who drop out of school report that their parents rarely attended school events or helped with homework. These parents were more likely to respond to poor grades with punishment.

Rumberger, Ghatak, Poulos, Ritter, and Dornbusch, 1990

Parents who are involved spend time with their children outside of school work and find time to have fun, talk about special things, plan family events, speak up for their children, and listen to a child when he/she speaks.

Consider your thoughts and views on parental involvement

1. What are your hopes and dreams for your child when you are together?
2. What are your hopes for your child in school?
3. What are your hopes for your child as a friend with other children?
4. How are you involved in your child's learning?
5. Do you regularly talk with your child's school or child care teachers?
6. How do you communicate with your child's teacher to determine how best to support your child's development and learning?
7. How do you show love for your child?
8. How do you enjoy spending time together with your child?

Here are some ways parents can be involved in their child's life in a caring way

1. Take time to get to know your child's teacher.
2. Send notes to school when there is a change at home or you will be out of town. If the child is not feeling well, alert the teacher to possible behavioral changes associated with his/her ailment.
3. Plan to attend any conferences with teachers. Ask questions and listen.
4. Be sure there is a quiet study space for school-agers to do homework. Check backpacks for announcements and assignments.
5. Be a voice for your child. Be tactful, but be sure your child is getting the best service or education possible.
6. Monitor your child's activities to be sure you know where he or she is and something about whom he or she is spending time with.
7. Let your child see you reading. Read together. Limit TV.
8. Play together inside and outside. Enjoy one-on-one time.

9. Visit your child's classroom. Take something to share—an unusual item to show, your guitar, a favorite book to read—or tell a story.

Resources and references

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