

# Parental Involvement in School

Studies have indicated that children whose parents and/or other significant adults share in their formal education tend to do better in school. Some benefits that have been identified that measure parental involvement in education include:

- Higher grades and test scores
- Long term academic achievement
- Positive attitudes and behavior
- More successful programs
- More effective schools

## Instill a Love in Learning

1. Parents have the privilege and responsibility to share the world with their children.
2. Talking with your child about life's everyday experiences will help each of you understand the others' viewpoints, values, dreams, and interests. Parents need not only talk, but also listen to their children. Answering questions, or helping children find the answers, will help your child develop a sense of value and self-respect.
3. Here are a few suggestions for activities to enjoy with your child:

- Watch news and documentaries on TV.
- Rent or buy educational videos.
- Visit natural history museums, science museums, art museums, children's museums, zoos, botanical gardens, and historical sites.
- Experience national or state parks and forests. Sign up for a tour.
- Read articles in the newspaper, news, and magazines together.
- Go to the public library.
- Make vacations learning experiences.
- Plan "theme" parties that involve some research. For example, an American Revolution costume party, a play, or a display of inventions of the time.

Parents are the most important teachers in their child's life. Children are born eager to learn, but parents need to help them channel that learning.

## Study Habits and Homework

Success in school revolve around developing good study habits and expectations regarding homework. Parents should provide encouragement, environment, and materials necessary for successful studying to take place. Some general things adults can do, include:

- Establish a routine for meals, bedtime and study/homework
- Provide books, supplies, and a special place for studying
- Encourage the child to "ready" himself for studying (refocus attention and relax)
- Offer to study with the child periodically (call out spelling words or do flash cards)

An established study routine is very important, especially for younger school age children. If a child knows, for example, that he is expected to do homework immediately after supper prior to watching television, he will be better able to adjust and ready himself than if he is allowed to do homework any time he pleases.

# Learning Styles

Learning is reflected in the way we respond to environmental, social, emotional and physical stimuli, to understand new information. Learning style is defined as the way that information is processed. It focuses on strengths, not weaknesses. There is no right or wrong learning style. Most children show a preference for one of the following basic learning styles: visual, auditory, kinesthetic/ manipulative. It is not uncommon to combine the primary and secondary learning styles.

Parents also show a preference for one of these learning styles. It is not unusual for parents to prefer a different style of learning than their child. In order to work effectively with your child it is important to understand your own learning style. (Take inventory at this point)

Visual learners learn by watching. They call up images from the past when trying to remember. They picture the way things look in their heads. Forty percent of secondary students fall into this category.

Auditory learners tend to spell phonetically. They can sometimes have trouble reading, because they don't visualize well. These students learn by listening and remember facts when they are presented in the form of a poem, song or melody.

Kinesthetic learners learn best through movement and manipulation. They like to find out how things work and are often successful in the practical in the arts, such as carpentry or design. These students make up 50 percent of secondary students and have difficulty learning in a traditional setting.

Knowing your child's preferred learning style can help you interest a child in new material. With this information you can also learn which style your child needs to strengthen because of the way most information is presented in school. Only 10 percent of secondary students learn best auditorily, but 80 percent of instructional delivery is auditory.

You may have found that you use different learning styles in different situations. Your child does the same. If your child is having difficulty in school you might want to explore the way that information is being presented in school and approach the subject with your child at home using a different learning. It may also be advisable to discuss this with his/her teacher.

Another consideration is the environment in which people learn best. While tradition tells us to have a quiet room, well lit with a straight back chair, some children learn best in a more chaotic environment. Loud music, laying on the bed, and a dimly lit environment may be the best study situation for others.

Trying different methods of learning may prevent the children from feeling frustrated and inadequate when they are not able to work up to their potential. Experimenting with different learning styles and environments may improve the child's accomplishments and feelings of achievement.

## Parent-Teacher Communication

Research shows that children do better in school when parents talk often with teachers and become involved in the school. There are number of ways that parents and teachers can communicate with each other, rather than relying on the scheduled parent-teacher conferences. Close communications between parents and teachers can help the student.

Parents who participate in school activities and events will have added opportunities to communicate with teachers. Becoming involved with parent-teacher organizations (PTO, PTA, and Booster Clubs) gives the teacher and parent the possibility to interact outside the classroom. In addition, the parent also will have input into decisions that may affect their child's education.

Teachers usually welcome meeting their students' parents early in the school year. Making an effort to do this will help the teacher better understand you, your child, and how you will support the education of your child. Teachers appreciate knowing that parents are concerned and interested in their child's progress. And, this helps open the lines of communication.

Another good investment in your child's education is to volunteer. Depending upon parent's availability, interests, and the needs of the school, the opportunities are endless. Some suggestions include: lunchroom monitor, tutoring, library aid, classroom speaker on a specific topic of interest, and concession worker at school events. Parents should take stock of their skills and interests to volunteer. School personnel may not know what parents want to do as a volunteer.

Phone calls and visits to the classroom are also good ways to cooperate with teachers and keep informed about your child's progress. Discuss appropriate times and means of contact with the teacher.

Parent-teacher conferences are often scheduled at the time of the first report card for the school year. For parents and teachers, this is a chance to talk one-on-one about the student. The parent-teacher conference is a good opportunity to launch a partnership between parent and teacher that will function during the school year.

## Test Taking

Tests are used to measure a student's knowledge and skills. Often the results of a test do not give a clear picture of the student's knowledge because of test anxiety. Children who become very anxious at the thought of taking a test often convince themselves they will fail. They panic because the questions on the test don't look reasonably close to what was studied!

There are several common reasons for test anxiety, sometimes it is due to poor preparation or poor skills. Sometimes it is due to negative test taking experience, a negative attitude about school, low self-confidence or a combination of all these.

The study skills we've talked about earlier can help in the situation of test anxiety. Skills such as taking good notes, identifying important information and developing ways to remember important information can be a big help.

Let's deal with the first reason for test anxiety and poor test performance—**lack of preparation**. More times than not the child knows about the test in advance. Some teachers, especially in the elementary grades, inform parents when tests will be given. Knowing when the test will be given and what material will be covered can help you and your child establish a study schedule for preparing for the test.

Schedule studying nightly, for several evenings before the test. Know how long you can expect your child to concentrate at one time. Research shows that first and second grade children can work no longer than 15 minutes without a break. Third and fourth grade children can study a little longer, about 20 minutes, while fifth and sixth graders can work productively for closer to half an hour. Know your child, don't expect too much, and schedule breaks.

During the scheduled study time, ask your child what material he or she thinks might be on the test. Go over questions at the end of each section or the end of the chapter. Look at words that are in bold, refer to class notes. Pay special attention to diagrams, charts, and maps.

Together with the child develop a sample test. Each of you can then take the test together. This can be an important strategy especially for young children, because it makes studying more fun. When learning spelling words, for example, it can be very helpful to have the child read the words to you while you take the test.

All of these strategies can be used to prepare and build confidence, but what about overcoming fear? Use the time before you take the sample test as an opportunity to practice some relaxation techniques that can help get rid of some of the anxiety of test taking.

Have the child take a few deep breaths. Suggest he closes his eyes and "visualizes" himself doing well on the test. Then look at the test to know what's being covered. If anxiety strikes during the test do the deep breathing and visualizing again.

Practicing test taking and relaxation techniques can help children be prepared, overcome test anxiety, and give a clearer picture of the child's actual knowledge and skills.

## **Getting Extra Help**

There are times when parents may consider seeking extra help for their children. Specific behavior happening regularly indicates extra help is needed. Everyone has those days when it is difficult to concentrate so look for the behavior to show consistent patterns.

Some kids are easily distracted by other things going on around them. It is difficult for them to remain focused. Noise, movement and scenery demand their attention. They are more interested in what is going on around them. They may not be able to resist day dreaming. At break time, schedule a day dreaming break.

Little Joey may like to talk to anyone and everyone around him. His report card always says he talks to others too much. It is often easy to spot the disruptive child. This is the one who talks to their friends, teases everyone, squirms in their seat, or finds every excuse to get up and walk around. Cory also has a short attention span but moves a little slower. He quietly watches the bird build a nest out the window, or daydreams about the ball game later in the day.

Memorization, reading slowly, and not doing well on tests are other indicators that extra help may be beneficial. This child may be able to discuss the material and may know the topic but can't retain the information.

If the child regularly complains of stomach aches before going to school or is easily frustrated when it is time to do homework, parents will want to look for the cause.

Children learn social skills while in school as well as academic skills. While not every child needs dozens of close friends, every child does need to learn how to get along with their peers.

When you have questions about getting extra help, talk with the teacher. Parents and teachers teaming together creates an environment for the child to learn best. Sometimes a tutor can provide the individual help that a child needs.

Difficulties may be caused by physical reasons. Vision and hearing problems may be causing the child to be restless or distracted. There are many other reasons that the physician might diagnose for school difficulties.

In other cases, parents can find activities that the child can excel in to build self-confidence in their ability. It isn't necessary for every child to turn in a perfect spelling paper, but it is important for every child to believe in himself.

Understand your child's learning style. You can then provide learning experiences in the method that is best for your child.

Finally, be patient. Improvement is a process. Develop a team attitude between your child, their teacher, and you.

## **Grades—To Bribe or Not to Bribe**

Every parent has the age-old question: "Should you bribe your child to do homework?" "Should you pay your child for good grades?" And the answer is yes—and no.

Everyone responds to some form of bribery in life. Bribery is the promise of something in return for doing something. But bribery has a negative implication, whereas reward is a positive influence. Rewards may be personal (feeling good about ourselves), social (being thanked or praised by others), or material (receiving a concrete reward).

Most children are not mature enough to accept personal rewards, so they may need material rewards. Material rewards can be effective to motivate a child to improve a behavior, grade card, or practice, but should not be used as the only means for improvement. The material rewards need to be phased out when no longer needed and replaced with personal or social rewards. Rewards for children need to be frequent, consistent and appropriate.

As well, consequences should be spelled out ahead of time. Parents who set consequences with children also need to be sure they can live with the consequences. By developing consequences, parents are actually giving children a choice. If the child chooses the consequence for not following through on the expectation, a suitable consequence should be given.

Appropriate consequences do not include buying expensive toys for completing homework or receiving acceptable grades; on the other hand, grounding your child for a month for failing to live up to an expectation is not appropriate either.

Goals need to be short term and rewards small for young children. As children mature, the goals can be more long-term and the rewards or consequences should be equivalent to their maturity.