



SECTION I:

Why Parent and Family Involvement?



The "Why's" of Parent Involvement

What Research Has To Say

Are parents an absolutely vital part of the educational process and of the educational experiences of their children? Will our schools improve when parents become more involved in their children's education? Research is confirming the importance of the involvement of parents in their child's education. Anne Henderson published a report, *The Family Is Critical To Student Achievement*, in which she said: "The evidence is now beyond dispute. When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life. In fact, the most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status, but the extent to which that student's family is able to:

1. create a home environment, that encourages learning
2. express high (but not unrealistic) expectations for their children's achievement and future careers
3. become involved in their children's education at school and in the community

Taken together, the studies summarized in this report strongly suggest that when schools support families to develop these three conditions, children from low-income families and diverse cultural backgrounds approach the grades and test scores expected for middle-class children."

According to Joyce Epstein in an article, *School Policy and Parent Involvement: Research Results*, "Both parents and educators must realize their overlapping responsibility as an important way of improving the home/school partnership." She and Anne Henderson believe the benefits of parent involvement are threefold - those benefiting students, parents and the school.

Benefits of Parent Involvement

For Students

More positive attitudes toward school
Higher achievement in reading
Higher quality and more grade-appropriate homework
Completion of more homework on weekends
Observing more similarities between family and schools

For Parents

Receiving ideas from school on how to help their children
Learning more about educational programs and how the school works
Becoming more supportive of children
Becoming more confident about ways to help children learn
Gaining more positive views of teachers and the school

For Teachers & Schools

Improved teacher morale
Higher ratings of teachers by parents
Teacher's rating of parents as more helpful improve student achievement
Parents support schools and bond issues

Family Meetings



The Family Meeting is a great opportunity for the family to get together at a designated time to make plans for the coming week, discuss the positives and the negatives of the family life, and make other decisions. The Family Meeting is a wonderful way for the family to have a meaningful form of communication.

The Family Meeting should have the following:

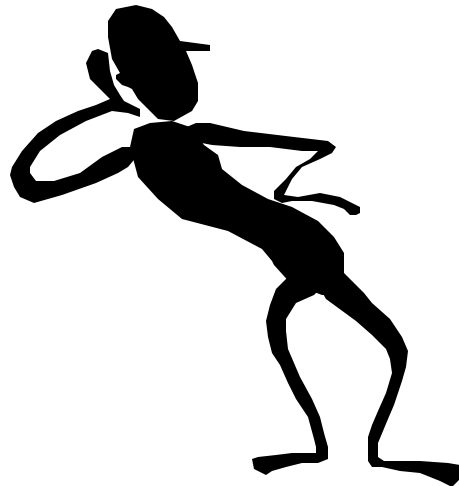
1. The time of the Family Meeting should be agreeable to all of the family.
2. The time set for the Family Meeting should be honored; the time should not be changed nor set aside for other things which seem more important. It should be the most important thing for that time.
3. A time limit should be set and upheld at each meeting.
4. All family members should be treated equally and all members given a chance to be heard.
5. Have different family members be the leader at each Family Meeting.
6. Use the form of a "round table" discussion to run the meeting; that way everyone will be able to share.
7. Use the "I" form of communication to encourage the family members to express themselves, freely.
8. Don't use the meeting as a "gripe" session; use it to solve problems.
9. Remember the good things that have happened in the family.
10. If there is disagreement, no one should leave the meeting until the disagreement has been solved to the satisfaction of all members.
 - Try to see others' point of view; focus on communicating fairly.
 - The real enemy of communication is silence.
11. Include in the planning for the coming week: work schedules, extra curricular activities such as lessons, practices, television viewing, chores, menus, car pooling.
12. Record plans and decisions that are made.
13. Plan for family fun!
 - Remember the goal of the Family Meeting is good communication. It can help a family to function as a nurturing unit.

Parents Check List

To Help Avoid the Listening Gap

Place a checkmark by each communication skill.

- _____ 1. I listen attentively and hear my child's feelings.
- _____ 2. I stop what I am doing and I look at my child.
- _____ 3. I try to avoid nagging, threatening, criticizing and ridiculing.
- _____ 4. I treat my child the way I would treat my best friend.
- _____ 5. I respect my child's feelings.
- _____ 6. I give clear and concise answers to questions my child asks.
- _____ 7. I don't use unkind words to my child.



Watch Your Language

Warm Up Activity: This activity can be done in several ways.

1. Cut into strips and have parents match the negative expressions with the positive way of saying it. Let the parents share their ideas.
2. Put on chalkboard and let the parents respond with their own expressions.

Negative Expressions

Positive Expressions

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| You are so lazy. | You can do a lot when you try. |
| You cheated on the test. | Did you not understand the test? |
| You are so stupid! | I don't think you tried to do your best. |
| You never do the right thing. | You can learn to do it correctly. |
| What a dumbbell! | Hey, I know you can do better. |
| You are not interested in anything. | You need to be challenged. |
| You are so stubborn. | You do insist on having your own way; Why don't you listen to others? |
| You waste all of your time. | You could make better use of your time. |
| You are so sloppy. What a mess! | You could be neater. |
| What a terrible grade! How could you? | This grade is below your usual work. What happened? |

101 WAYS PARENTS CAN HELP

STUDENTS ACHIEVE

American Association of School Administrators, 1992
(Excerpts)

(These tips involve a commitment of time and attention.)

- Set limits on how much, television your child can watch. At a minimum, turn off the television during study time. Consider making a rule that there will be no television until all schoolwork is finished.
- Use newspaper information to make charts and graphs. A sports fan can track batting averages. A future financial analyst can chart fluctuations in the stock market.
- Help your child learn letters and numbers. Using crayons, make colorful posters of the "Letter of the Week" or the "Number of the Month."
- Help your child to recognize shapes. Show her that her door is a rectangle, and that an orange is round. Besides teaching shapes, you'll also be making your child a better observer of the world around her.
- Count with your child. Make counting a game. Count the steps between your front door and the bus stop. Count the number of socks in your child's drawer. Count the number of cats you see on the way to the park.
- Turn your child into the teacher. You play the part of the student. As he reaches you, he'll be absorbing important information.
- Ask your child to describe her life as an adult. Then have her research what she needs to do now to prepare for that career. A student who wants to become a doctor, for example, needs to take challenging science courses in high school.
- If your child has a job, suggest that some of the money she/he earns be saved for college or other training, a large purchase ... or a trip to see a friend. Teach her/him how to balance a checking or savings account.
- Do your own "homework" while your kids are studying. If possible, pay bills, write letters, or balance your checkbook. When the kids see that study time applies to everyone, they'll be more likely to take it seriously.



HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN SCIENCE

Excerpts from

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Intergovernmental and Interagency Affairs
Helping Your Child Learn Science
Washington, D.C., 2002

As a parent, you are preparing your child for a world vastly different from the one in which you grew up. Our increasingly technological society will need citizens who have received far more advanced instruction in science and technology than most of us received when we were in school. Even children who don't want to become physicists, chemists, engineers or computer technicians will need some knowledge of science and technology just to conduct their everyday lives. Every citizen needs to be scientifically literate in order to make informed decisions about health, safety and citizenship. Our children need our help and guidance to prepare for the world that awaits them.

Curiosity is natural to children, but they need help understanding how to make sense of what they see and to relate their observations to their existing ideas and understandings. This is why parental involvement is so important in children's science education. When we encourage children to ask questions, make predictions, offer explanations and explore in a safe environment, we lend them the kind of support that they need to become successful science students and scientific thinkers.

As a parent, you don't have to be a scientist or have a college degree to help your child learn science. What's far more important than being able to give a technical explanation of how a telescope works is your willingness to nurture your child's natural curiosity by taking the time to observe and learn together.

Science "happens" all around us every day, and you have endless opportunities to invite your child into the wonders of science. Without expensive chemistry sets, equipment or kits, a child can be introduced easily to the natural world and encouraged to observe what goes on in that world. When you least expect it, a moment for learning will occur: A bit of ice cream drops on the sidewalk and ants appear; some cups float and some sink when you're washing dishes; static electricity makes your hair stand on end when you put on a sweater.

Scientific knowledge is cumulative: To learn new things, you must build on what you already know. So, it's important that your child start learning early—and at home. A good way for you to begin the learning process is by sharing your own interest in science. How you view and talk about science can influence your child's attitudes toward science—and how she (or he) approaches learning science. It's easy to undermine a child's interest and attitudes by saying things such as, "I was lousy in science, and I've done OK," or "I always hated science when I was in school. It's boring." Although you can't *make* your child like science, you can encourage her to do so, and you can help her to appreciate its value both in her everyday life and in preparing for her future.

In everyday interactions with your child, you can do many things—and do them without lecturing or applying pressure—to help her learn science. Here are a few ideas:

- See how long it takes for a dandelion or a rose to burst into full bloom.
- Watch the moon as it appears to change shape over the course of a month and record the changes.
- Look for constellations in the night sky.
- Bake a cake.
- Solve the problem of a drooping plant.
- Figure out how the spin cycle of the washing machine gets the water out of the clothes.
- Take apart an old clock or mechanical toy—you don't need to put it back together!
- Observe pigeons, squirrels, butterflies, ants or spider webs.
- Go for a walk and talk about how the dogs (or birds or cats) that you see are alike and different.

Learning to observe carefully is an important step leading to scientific explanations. Experiencing the world with your child and exchanging information with him about what you see are important, too.

Finally, encourage your child to ask questions. If you can't answer all of her questions, that's all right—no one has all the answers, not even scientists. For example, point out that there's no known cure for a cold, but that we do know how diseases are passed from person to person—through germs. Some of the best answers you can give are, "What do you think?" and "Let's find out together." Together, you and your child can propose possible answers, test them out and check them by using reference books, the Internet, or by asking someone who is likely to know the correct answers.



Science is everywhere. From your kitchen to the local park to the river banks across the country, you and your child can talk about science in everyday experiences.

HOW YOU CAN HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN MATH

Here are some tips for parents and care-givers on how to help children with math. They were suggested in 2002 by the Mathematics Learning Study Committee of the National Research Council, a non-profit organization associated with the National Academy of Sciences:

BEFORE CHILDREN ENTER SCHOOL:

- Play games such as dominoes and board games
- Find natural opportunities to count, to sort object to match collections or objects, to identify shapes.
- Count a collection of objects and use number words to identify very small collections,
- Talk with your child about simple math problems and ideas (How many spoons do we need to set the table?)

AFTER CHILDREN ENTER SCHOOL:

- Have high expectations. “Children’s math achievement is shaped – and limited – by what is expected of them,” the committee says.
- Expect some confusion to be part of the learning process, but emphasize that effort not ability is what counts.
- Avoid conveying negative attitudes about math.
- Ask what your child what he/she did in math class today.
- Expect your child’s homework to include more than simple computational work sheets.
- Give your child meaningful problems that use numbers or shapes while you are going about everyday life.
- Advocate using a regular time each school day for math.
- Support professional development such as in-service education for teachers.

Source: Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, Oct. 5, 2003
MEH 10/03

Computers!

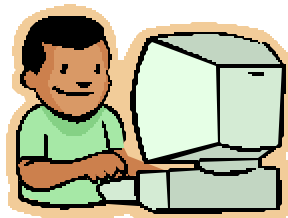
Teaching and Learning Aides



Shopping for a Home Computer

Shopping for a computer is unlike any experience most of us has ever had. Most first-time buyers know very little about why they want a computer. They are not familiar with its technology, its applications or the specific products available. We feel very vulnerable when we walk into a computer store. So you are not alone in your uneasiness. For that reason, shopping guidelines have been established to help increase the comfort level in this tension-producing situation. As far as recommending a certain brand, that would be very difficult. There are many excellent products available. You will have to establish your wants and needs and then proceed from there.

1. Figure out who will be using the computer and for what purposes. Meet with computer groups or ask questions at your children's school.
2. After deciding why you want a computer, check out the software. The greatest computer in the world is not much use without the software you will need to meet your objectives.
3. Ask plenty of questions. Don't be afraid of appearing "dumb" because there is no reason you should know anything about a computer. Beware of the salesman's jargon.
4. Be sure you know what you are getting for your money. Again, ask questions. Don't take it for granted that you will be getting all the equipment that is set up for display.
5. Be sure to get a demonstration! Pretend you are buying a new car. Find out all you can concerning the operation of the computer and the set-up.
6. Check on repair of the computer. Sending the computer to Timbuktu for repairs would be senseless.
7. Don't rush things. Take time to comparison shop. As you learn more, your ideas about what you want will probably change.
8. Don't give up. There are numerous reasonably priced computers on the market that will keep you and your children entertained and challenged for years to come.



Using Your Computer at Home

The suggestions below should help you, as well as your children, with the computer. Use of a computer will very likely have a positive impact on your children's education.

1. Know the operations of the computer yourself.
2. Set an example by using the computer for your own personal needs; writing letters, keeping records, doing the household budget, etc.
3. Participate with your children; give them help and support.
4. Find quality software; check with your children's teachers.
5. Make using the computer fun and rewarding. Don't make it a chore and don't insist that they use it. They will use it when they have a purpose.
6. Check with local school systems, the parks and recreation department, or your local computer store to see if there are any computer camps going on.

Computer Literacy

"Computer literacy" is a term which you hear frequently. It refers to the mastery of basic computer skills. It is difficult to go anywhere today without seeing a computer being utilized to conduct business or increase work output. Most future jobs will require some knowledge of computers. Many states are requiring students to master basic computer skills in order to graduate from a public school system. Students are using the computer more and more to complete school assignments in all subject areas. Students who have computer skills will use computers to solve problems and complete tasks that would take much longer or would be impossible without the computer. This includes elementary students. Visit your child's school and see what computer opportunities exist.

Computers are here to stay. They are the future. Support and encourage your children's efforts. Let them know you are interested in their future!