

12 Ways

TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER

by Heidi Smith Luedtke

Parents everywhere are breathing a collective sigh of relief as the kids go back to school, but don't relax too soon. Kids of involved parents have better attendance, better attitudes toward learning, higher grades, and they're more likely to go to college.

To help kids get the most out of school, share responsibility for your child's learning by partnering with teachers.

- 1.** Share your expertise. Early on, fill in the teacher about your child's strengths and interests, personality patterns, and specific learning challenges. When you help the teacher connect with your child, you set up everyone for success.
- 2.** Expect great things. Research shows parents' and teachers' expectations have a huge impact on kids' development. Set high but realistic expectations for your child, consistent with his age and ability. Share your expectations with educators; their expectations are likely to rise in response.
- 3.** Confront problems early. Contact the child's teacher at the first sign of falling grades, changes in behavior, or increasing school-related complaints. Together, you may avert problems before they grow more complicated.
- 4.** Respect teachers' limits. Your teacher has a responsibility to ensure everyone gets the attention they deserve. Ask the teacher to point you toward additional resources and provide extra tutoring at home.
- 5.** Spend time in the classroom. Volunteering gives you the opportunity to see first-hand how the teacher works with your child, and how relationships with other kids affect her learning.
- 6.** Volunteer time outside the school day. Offer to prepare project materials, do research, or provide supplies.
- 7.** Establish a family routine. Designate a distraction-free location and a regular time for homework instead of on-the-fly between soccer and piano lessons.
- 8.** Plan regular face time with teachers. Stay in contact frequently, but don't monopolize teachers' time.
- 9.** Reinforce learning in real life. Find teachable moments in your everyday routine, such as testing math skills at the grocery store. Kids need to see learning and problem-solving as everyday activities.
- 10.** Run interference. If the demands of class work are overwhelming your child, or family issues are disrupting his ability to concentrate, advocate for and collaborate in your child's best interest.
- 11.** Watch your tone. Use specific examples and ask for the teacher's ideas about what can be done when you disagree. Your child is likely to lose if you get adversarial or aggressive.
- 12.** Show your appreciation. Teachers don't go into education for the money; their reward is in seeing children grow, learn, and achieve. Send an e-mail to say how much your child enjoyed last week's science experiment. Partnerships flourish when people feel appreciated.

