

Nine ways to become involved in your children's schools From: The Eagle-Tribune

1. Volunteer in class, even if it's only on a part-time basis. Every busy teacher will welcome a parent's help, even if it's only for an hour or two.

If you can't commit to daytime activities in the classroom, there are things you can do outside to help out, like calling parents to remind them about an upcoming event or gathering materials for a class project.

For those parents with a little more time, you can offer to be a room mother or father who helps plan class activities and parties.

2. Greet your child's teacher and develop rapport with him.

Your child spends six or more hours a day at school; that's why it's important to know who he spends that time with. Introduce yourself to his teacher and attend events like back-to-school night. Tell the teacher about your child's hobbies and talents, both socially and academically.

By meeting the teacher and having a few discussions, you'll feel more comfortable calling him or her if you ever have any concerns about your child.

3. Talk about your child's future with a teacher or counselor. Help your child prepare for his academic future by meeting with his teacher or counselor periodically.

Discuss your child's progress and what courses he should be taking to fulfill his academic and career goals.

4. Visit your child's classroom. Being there is the only way to see what's going on.

You'll observe how the teacher interacts and how your child interacts with peers. Just be sure to consult with the teacher a week or two before stopping by so she can plan for your visit.

5. Join a parents' organization. Parent-teacher organizations, such as the Parent Teacher Association (PTA), give you the opportunity to meet other parents and help raise money for the school. Plus, you can play an active role in helping the school reach its goals.

6. Be informed. Keep yourself abreast of school rules and regulations, schedules, upcoming events and activities by reading the school newspaper (if they have one), your local newspaper, and the notices your child brings home. Many schools also have their own Web site full of information, so be sure to visit it often for updates.

7. Meet other parents. Befriending fellow parents will keep you informed about what's happening at your child's school and in his academic and social life.

It's also a good way to compare notes about what's going on in and outside the classroom, such as if the teacher is giving too much homework or if Tommy is being a bully. Just picking your child up from a play date won't get you acquainted enough with other parents. Invite Mr. and Mrs. Smith and their daughter Jill over for dinner, or make a weekend play date when you'll have more time to chat.

8. Share your talents with the students. Ask the teacher or parent-teacher organization members how you can best use your skills to benefit the students. If you work with computers, volunteer at the library's computer station. If you cook, offer to give the kids a cooking lesson or bring in one of your creations and explain how you made it. If you are an artist, offer to design banners for the school play. A marketing whiz can help promote the school's book fair.

9. Pick one activity and make it yours. You don't have to participate in every field trip or picnic. Feel free to choose only one activity that you can personalize. For example, you can chair the school dance, setting meetings and overseeing your budget. That way you can devote all your attention to one cause and not be sidetracked by another.

No matter how much or how little time you have to dedicate to your child's education and school activities, any time that you contribute will benefit all involved.