

How To Connect With Kids By Volunteering At School/Daycare

Schools, daycares and youth organizations all desperately plead for parent involvement to help enhance academics, activities, enrichment, and quality of care. Parents are a kid's first and most important teacher, and parent involvement is closely linked to a academic achievement and self-confidence. So, what are you waiting for? Say "yes" the next time parent involvement is requested, or better yet, volunteer your time today. Here are ways to become involved.

Difficulty: Easy

Time Required: Any Amount Is Appreciated!

Here's How:

1. **Familiarize yourself with your kid's school** or care program. Ask the teacher or caregiver about the curriculum and expectations, and complement themes or center-activities taught during the day with what you can reinforce at home.
2. **Visit your kid's classroom** or daycare program; and observe teaching styles and learning approaches. Watch and see how your own child interacts with others or areas of comfort/discomfort. You might be surprised to learn more about your own kid's personality when in social settings and away from home, and determine ways to build strength and character.
3. **Volunteer to help...**and if possible, on a regular basis! Early elementary-aged students often need volunteers for reading groups, handwriting practice, and math drills. Pre-school groups really need additional parent involvement on special outings or enrichment activities such as cooking or crafts. There is a place for you!
4. **Determine what is required** from your kid's school or care setting in order to volunteer, and take the time to do it. Many schools, daycares, and organizations are now requiring criminal background checks or additional paperwork if you will be volunteering with kids other than your own. Keep in mind that these policies are for the well-being and safety of ALL children, and parents should support these extra security measures.
5. **Attend student events** and performances, and participate in open-houses, parent nights, and other parent involvement activities. Teachers and care providers lament that parents say they want to know what is going on in their kid's life, but then are too busy to attend these important communication opportunities.
6. If you work outside the home on a full-time basis, **ask if there are tasks or projects you can do at home** as a way to be an involved parent. Cutting projects, computer research, and a host of easy-but-time-consuming activities could really help the teacher or provider to spend more quality time with kids.

7. **Be interested in your kid's activities** and projects, and take time when you greet each other at the end of the day to ask about what they did and accomplished. Be sure to check folders or backpacks daily, and encourage conversations about highlights and low points. Parents should KNOW what is occurring in their kid's life and their emotions that go along with events.
8. **Be actively involved with your child's learning** and homework (this does not mean doing it). For younger kids, read to them every night. Encourage older kids to read to you or to show their newly-learned skills.
9. **Establish a routine at home** where show-and-tell and sharing occurs nightly, so parent and child feel connected with one another.
10. **Participate in parent-teacher-provider conference** opportunities. After all, those meetings are truly designed for the parents; the teachers/providers already know what your kid can do and is interested in.
11. **Build a network with other parents** in your kid's class, youth group, or daycare. Share information and consider carpooling or even kid-watching of younger siblings so that each of you can have active parent involvement on occasion.
12. **Bring supplies or pre-approved refreshments** on occasion, and ask caregivers or teachers if there is something in short supply that you can assist with (as long as you are financially able). The adults will be very appreciative and kids will benefit from your generosity.
13. **Join your child's PTA/PTSA/PTO.** This parent-child-teacher organization is truly dedicated to connecting parents with their child's school and life. PTA meetings often include informative parent education topics, such as helping a child who hates school, dealing with a bully, building a child's self-esteem, and more. The meetings also provide a great way to connect with occurrences at the school and decisions and events under consideration.

Tips:

1. Think of ways to volunteer together as a family. Show your child how to value involvement and participation.
2. Ask your child how he or she would like you to be involved as a parent. If you have limited time, ask whether he prefers you to lead the reading group or go on the field trip. It's okay not to be able to do everything.
3. Be sure to fulfill your obligations. If you say you will do something, then do it! Someone is counting on you, and if you don't fulfill your agreement, your kid and her class will miss out on something.
4. Develop a positive relationship with your kid's provider or teacher. Even if you're busy (and who isn't), take a few moments to ask about their day or if there is anything you should know.
5. Remember to thank your provider or teacher "for a job well done" or for special activities, programs, or skills learned involving your child.

What You Need:

- An interest in volunteering with your child in a school or daycare.
- Time that you can give on occasion.
- Enjoyment of working with kids other than your own.
- Patience and sense of humor.
- Willingness to work on simple projects and take direction from others.
- Ability to attend special events or chaperone at outings.
- A talent that you are willing to share.
- Reliability and commitment to being there when you say you will.

Courtesy: <http://childcare.about.com/od/volunteerism/ht/parentvolunteer.htm>