

Don't Parents Care? What Teachers Can Do To Encourage Parent Involvement

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"Don't parents care?" As abrupt, harsh, and rude as this question may sound, it is actually a question that is popping up quite regularly among professionals working with children and their families. Sadly, all professionals experience some sort of frustration when trying to involve parents with their children's lives, especially teachers. Because of this, some teachers jump to the conclusion that parents do not care about their children's education. (Brown, 2009) But is this really true?

While some parents really do have emotional problems that prevent them from becoming involved with their children's education, *most* parents actually care a great deal. (Wright, Stegelin, & Hartle, 2007) However, it becomes really hard for teachers to see evidence of this when parent attendance at school events remains drastically low.

The reality, though, is that there are a number of valid reasons why parents are not involved with their children's education. In fact, for many parents, a major impediment to becoming involved is lack of time. Most parents work, and therefore are unable to attend school events during the day. Furthermore, since most parents work during the day, evenings may be the only time they have to spend with their families. (Brown, 2009) Why then, would they choose to spend the only free time they have attending meetings at school?

It is also possible that many uninvolved parents might not have had a positive experience when they were in school, or they might feel inadequate in a school setting. Some parents may feel uneasy when their cultural style or socioeconomic level differs from those of teachers, and other parents may not even understand the importance of parent involvement. (Wright, Stegelin, & Hartle, 2007)

It is even possible that some parents may not believe they have the necessary skills to help. Furthermore, even parents who are confident and willing to help may hesitate to become involved because they fear overstepping their bounds. Nevertheless, whatever parents' reasons may be for remaining uninvolved, it is the teachers and administrators who can encourage them to become involved. (Wright, Stegelin, & Hartle, 2007)

In order to do this, teachers and administrators can get creative in the ways they plan to reach out to parents who do not usually participate in their children's education. For example, teachers and administrators can provide flexible scheduling for school events and parent-teacher conferences, inform parents about what their children are learning, and help parents create a supportive environment for children's learning at home.



(Brown, 2009) Moreover, teachers and administrators can begin scheduling conferences in both the evening and the day, and begin scheduling school events at different times of the day throughout the year. In effect, more parents would have the opportunity to attend at least one or two events throughout the year. Even though one or two events does not seem like a lot, the difference a parent can make by showing up at one or two of his/her child's events is huge. In fact, several studies have shown that even the smallest bit of parent involvement can enhance a child's self-esteem, improve a child's academic performance, improve a parent's relationship with his/her child, and help a parent develop a positive attitude toward school. (Brown, 2009)

Additional ideas for teachers and administrators to use include keeping the lines of communication open and considering families' lifestyles and cultural backgrounds when planning home activities. (Wright, Stegelin, & Hartle, 2007)

It is vital that parents hear from their children's teachers consistently, but it is just as vital for parents to give teachers information about their children too. Examples of effective communication sources are regular newsletters, letters, and phone calls made just to keep in touch. If teachers accustom parents to receiving regular calls just for keeping in touch, it will be easier to discuss problems about their child when, and if, they ever occur. (Brown, 2009)

Finally, when considering families' lifestyles and cultural backgrounds, teachers can actually adapt home activities to activities parents and children engage in on a day-to-day basis. For example, teachers can suggest appropriate television programs for parents and their children to watch together and send home questions for them to discuss together. Then, this discussion can be carried over into class. (Family Involvement Partnership for Learning, 1998)

For more ideas on how to support families and encourage parent involvement, visit the following website: http://www.educationworld.com/a_special/parent_involvement.shtml.

Works Sited:

- Wright, K., Stegelin, D.A., & Hartle, L. (2007). *Building family, school, and community partnerships third edition*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.
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