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## Getting Involved at Your Child's School

Whether your kids are just starting kindergarten or entering the final year of high school, there are many good reasons for parents to volunteer at school. It's a great way to show your kids that you take an interest in their education, and it sends a positive message that you consider school a worthwhile cause.

### Reasons to Get Involved

Parent volunteers offer a huge resource and support base for the school community while showing their kids the importance of participating in the larger community.

Not only will the school reap the benefits of your involvement — you will, too. By interacting with teachers, administrators, and other parents on a regular basis, you'll gain a firsthand understanding of your child's daily activities. You'll also tap into trends and fads of school life that can help you communicate with your kids as they grow and change (all without intruding on their privacy or personal space).

Even if you haven't been involved in the past, it's never too late to start. In fact, it may be more important than ever to get involved when kids reach secondary school. Some parents may experience "volunteer burnout" by the time their kids enter high school or decide that the schools don't need them as much then. Many parents who volunteered a lot of time during their kids' elementary years return to full-time careers by the time their kids are teens, so there's often a shortage in the secondary schools.

### Finding the Right Opportunity

One of the best starting points for getting involved is a parent-teacher conference or open house. These are usually scheduled early in each school year, and are a great opportunity to approach your child's teachers or principal about volunteer involvement.

If you have something to offer, or if you just want to help out in whatever way you can, discuss the possibilities with teachers, who might arrange something with you personally or direct you to a department head or administrator who can answer your questions and make suggestions. It's also a good idea to join the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) or parents' advisory council.

Here are just some of the ways a parent volunteer can help:

- act as a classroom helper
- mentor or tutor students
- help children with special needs
- volunteer in a school computer lab
- help organize, cater, or work at fundraising activities such as bake sales or car washes
- act as a lunchroom or playground monitor
- help to plan and chaperone field trips, track meets, and other events that take place away from the school
- help to plan and chaperone in-school events (dances, proms, or graduation ceremonies)
- organize or assist with a specific club or interest group (if you have an interest in an activity that isn't currently available to students, offer to help get a group started — for example, a chess club or cycling team)
- assist coaches and gym teachers with sports and fitness programs or work in the school concession stand at sporting events
- help the school administrators prepare grant proposals, letter-writing campaigns, or press releases or provide other administrative assistance
- attend school board meetings
- work as a library assistant or offer to help with story time or reading assistance in the school library
- sew costumes or build sets for theatrical and musical productions
- work with the school band or orchestra or coach music students individually
- help out with visual arts, crafts, and design courses and projects
- hold a workshop for students in trade or technical programs
- spend some time with a specific club or interest group (ask the the teacher who sponsors the group)
- volunteer to speak in the classroom or at a career day, if you have a field of expertise that you'd like to share
- supervise or judge experiments at a science fair

Remember that not everyone is suited for the same type of involvement — you may have to "try on" a number a few activities before you find something that feels right. If you're at a loss for how you can help, just ask your child's teacher, who will likely be glad to help you think of something!