

# Getting Involved at Your Child's School

Whether their kids are kindergarteners or high school seniors, parents have many good reasons to volunteer at school.

## What Are the Benefits of Getting Involved?

Getting involved is a great way to show your kids that you take an interest in their education. It also sends a positive message that you consider school a worthwhile cause.

Many schools now have to raise their own funds for activities and supplies that once were considered basic necessities. Parent volunteers are essential to organizing and chaperoning these fundraising events and other school activities.

Parent volunteers offer a huge resource and support base for the school community. They also show their kids the importance of participating in the [larger community](#).

Working with teachers, administrators, and other parents will help you understand 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 get "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

## How Do I Get Started?

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. They're a great opportunity to talk to your child's teachers or the principal about volunteer involvement.

If you have something to offer or just want to help out in whatever way you can, talk about it with teachers. They 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 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 help with other administrative needs
- 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 one-on-one
- 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 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 few activities before you find something that feels right. If you need ideas, ask your child's teacher, who will likely be glad to help you think of something!

## Questions to Ask

When you offer to help out, find out how much of a time commitment is expected and if it will be ongoing. Are you going to repair the costumes for the spring musical or keep the drama department's supplies in good condition year-round? Are you chaperoning a track meet or coaching the whole season?

Be sure to ask if any financial costs are involved with your volunteer activities. If you're chaperoning a field trip, for example, find out if you'll pay for transportation and admissions costs. Ask if you'll transport students in your own vehicle or ride with them on a school bus.

If you organize or help out with an activity that takes place off the school grounds, find out if there are any specific school regulations you need to keep in mind or any liability issues you should consider.

## What Else Should I Know?

Here are a few tips to keep in mind when signing up to volunteer:

- Be clear about how much time you're willing to volunteer. Don't be afraid to say no if you're asked to do more than you feel comfortable with – but try to say it early enough so that someone else can take your place. Many trips and activities can't happen unless the school has enough chaperones or supervisors.
- Start small. Don't offer to coordinate the holiday bake sale, the band recital, and a swim meet all at once. If you've taken on too much, find out if you can pass some duties to other parents.
- Don't give your child special treatment when you're volunteering at the school. Follow your child's cues to find out how much interaction works for both of you. Most kids enjoy having their parents involved, but if yours seems uncomfortable, consider taking a more behind-the-scenes approach. Make it clear that you aren't there to spy – you're only trying to help out the school.
- Get feedback from the teachers and students. Find out what's most and least helpful to them, and ask what you can do to make the most of the time you spend on school activities. It's important to communicate openly with teachers, administrators, students, and volunteers. Be flexible and responsive as the needs of the students and the school change.

Remember that volunteering not only benefits your kids. It helps the classroom, the whole school, and the community by giving students positive interaction, support, and encouragement.

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