Ways to Participate in Your Child’s Education

**Talk to your children about their school day.**General questions such as "How was school today?" can break the ice, but rarely prompt more than a one-word response. Ask specific questions. With younger children, you might ask about special activities or whom they played with on the playground. It helps if you're familiar with your child's basic school-day routine. For instance, if you know that classroom jobs change daily, ask which task your child performed today. Find out how an [art](http://www.bhg.com/shop/art-b4244.html) project is progressing. The conversation doesn't have to be long or detailed. Your interest is what's most important.

**Monitoring schoolwork.** Younger children typically bring home bags full of papers and projects. Don't ignore them, and don't wait for your child to show them to you. Take time to look through what comes home, either directly with your child or in your child's presence. Make specific, encouraging comments. Ask questions about the work. Express high expectations for their success in the classroom.

**Help with homework.** Helping your child with his or her homework not only helps them understand the content better, but also shows them that you value their education. Ask questions to make sure they understand the work, and make sure they are doing the bulk of the work. You are there to support, not take over.

**Establish supportive household routines.** This remains crucial throughout your child's school years, from elementary through high school. It begins with making time to read together, every day. Monitoring TV-watching habits is critical. Be sure your children are physically active during the day, eat healthy meals, and sleep well at night. As children get older, schedule daily homework times, and be sure that they have a quiet, comfortable workspace.

Most parents do not maintain close relationships with teachers, according to a survey by The Institute for Educational Leadership/Mattel Foundation. In the survey, 57 percent of parents reported that they had spoken with teachers five or fewer times during the previous school year. Yet experts emphasize the importance of in-school participation by parents.

At the elementary school level, if the teacher doesn't take the first step, you should. The goal is to begin a personal relationship. Here are a few suggestions for maintaining a relationship with your child's teacher:

**Write notes.**A note is an easy, effective way to communicate information about your child and about minor changes going on at home. With younger children, you may want to pin the note onto the outside of the backpack to be sure the teacher receives it.

**Talk on the phone.** Some teachers will volunteer their home phone number at the beginning of the year. Others won't, but all teachers are available on the telephone through the school office, and some may even have e-mail access. Periodic chats are a good way to touch base, particularly when you have praise to offer regarding a program or school event.

**Visit the classroom.** Busy parents tend to overlook this, but experts urge parents to take the time to observe the class in action. In a short time, you can learn what goes on during the school day, which should improve communication efforts with your child. Always arrange visits with the teacher, and follow the school's visitor policy.

**Make conferences a priority.** Most schools have two official parent-teacher conferences per year. They offer the teacher an opportunity to report on your child's progress.

Before the conference, review your child's schoolwork. Think of specific questions you want to ask, but allow the teacher to do the talking at first. Listen carefully to what the teacher has to say. Most teachers are skilled observers of child behavior, and those insights into your child can be enlightening.

**Volunteer in the classroom.** This is a rewarding step. Some parents may not have the time or the inclination. But often hesitation stems more from lack of confidence.