

10 Ways to Be a Great Parent

1. Make sure your children go to school ready to learn.

In the morning scramble to get out the door on time, your children may skip breakfast or leave homework behind. The day gets off to a much better start if they pack their backpacks the night before, get plenty of rest and have a good breakfast.

2. Make time for homework.

Set up a study area with good lighting and a dictionary, and limit television on weeknights to be certain homework gets done. Make reading an everyday habit. Children who have "no homework" can always review the day's lessons or read a book for fun.

You may also need to curtail extracurricular activities and, as your children grow older, limit part-time jobs. Children who take part in other nonacademic activities for 20 or more hours per week usually don't have enough energy to perform optimally in school.

3. Monitor your children's academic progress.

Don't wait until report cards come out to check up on how your children are doing. Attend scheduled parent-teacher conferences to get acquainted with their teachers, and don't hesitate to contact teachers at other times to find out whether your children are keeping up with assignments.

4. When there's a problem, work with the school on your child's behalf.

If your child starts to slip academically, make an appointment with the teacher to put together a plan for correcting the problem. Teachers appreciate parents who reinforce the importance of schoolwork, and your child will have a better chance of succeeding if you and the teacher agree on a strategy.

If your child has difficulties with a teacher, try to keep an open mind and find out all the facts before jumping to conclusions. It's always best to try to work out differences with teachers before going over their head and complaining to the principal.

5. Attend school functions.

Going to back-to-school night, the spring concert, school plays, talent shows and other school events shows your children that you value their schools. In a 10-year study of 20,000 teenagers, Laurence Steinberg found that only one-fifth of parents regularly attended school functions, and that those who did were much more likely to have high-achieving students.

In addition to communicating to children that school is important, Steinberg writes in *Beyond the Classroom*, "Attending school functions may be even more important for the message it communicates to teachers and other school personnel. Teachers cannot help but pay closer attention to students whose parents they encounter at school programs, for both positive and negative reasons. On the positive side, the added attention stems from a sort of halo effect—Susie's parents are interested in her education, so Susie must be, too. But the attention also stems from the teacher's knowledge that Susie's parents are the sort of parents who are more likely to take action if something in Susie's education is not going right."

6. Volunteer at the school.

In the early grades, some parents like to volunteer at school so they can observe how their children interact with other kids. As your children grow older, they may tell you they don't want to be seen in public with you, but they definitely get the message that school is important when they see you helping on school projects. Being involved pays added dividends for your child. Recent studies show that the children of parents who are involved in schools do better academically. See [A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement](#).

No matter what age your child is, there are many opportunities to help at school, whether it's in the classroom, library, computer lab or on the playground. Parents who spend their days at work or tending younger children can help in the evenings by making phone calls, drafting newsletters or writing letters on behalf of the school.

You can join the school's parent-teacher association or organization (PTA or PTO) or volunteer to assist an individual teacher. If you think PTA revolves around bake sales and other fund-raisers, think again. Today's parents are using their professional skills to bring substantive improvements to schools, such as upgrading computer labs, landscaping school grounds and introducing academic enrichment programs.

7. Take a leadership role at school.

There are plenty of opportunities for parents to become decision makers at schools. In addition to the PTA or PTO, you can offer to serve on the school site council or on a district-wide committee or task force. Taking on a leadership role will give you a better appreciation of the complexities of education and will help you be a more informed advocate for your child's school.

8. Evaluate your school's performance.

More and more data is becoming available to parents to help them understand how their schools are performing. On GreatSchools.net, you can find out test scores and lots of other facts. Depending on which state you live in, the data offered may include enrollment, teacher experience, the student-teacher ratio, socioeconomic status or the number of students per computer. You can also compare your children's schools to other schools using the [Compare Schools](#) tool. To learn about all the information available on GreatSchools.net, see the [Welcome page](#) for your state.

9. Help your school improve.

Once you know where your school stands, you can play a part in helping all children succeed. Parents around the U.S. are having a direct impact on school success by organizing after-school tutoring programs, bringing in speakers for parent education programs, starting academic enrichment workshops and introducing other school improvement projects.

10. Get involved in politics.

When budget cuts are threatened and valuable programs may be cut, you can help your school by writing to your local and state legislators.

Another important responsibility is understanding education issues and candidates on the ballot. If parents in your community don't understand the ballot measures, host a pre-election coffee to pool everyone's knowledge or schedule a debate for school board candidates. Make sure your voter registration is current by calling your county elections office. And don't forget to vote!