



what teachers wish parents knew

Educators spend all day teaching your kids.
Turns out they have a few lessons for you too.

Did you ever stop to think that teachers' lounge conversations might be about you? To help your family start the school year off right, we asked veteran teachers to share their wish lists—the little things that parents do to make a big difference in their children's school success. Here's what we learned.

GET INVOLVED More parent involvement at school ranks at the top of many teachers' wish lists. Even busy parents can make easy moves to stay involved, says Amy Murphy, a first-grade teacher in Tampa, Florida. She recommends checking in with your children and their teachers, reading newsletters and attending school conferences.

Want to get more involved but aren't sure what to do? Just ask. "There are so many things that can be done that parents don't even think about, and sometimes teachers are afraid to ask for help," says Alison Wilbur, a seventh-grade social studies teacher in Kennesaw, Georgia.

STAY IN TOUCH To build a partnership, communicate often. Wilbur recommends emailing teachers at the beginning of the school year to introduce yourself. "If there are any child-specific needs to be addressed, that's a good way to let teachers know," Wilbur says. "Or just say hello and let them know what your child's interests are. If a teacher can make a personal connection with kids at the beginning, that's good for the teacher and the student."

And check in periodically. Sherry Ballard of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, mother of two sons ages 7 and 12, says she checks in with her sons' teachers by emailing and making weekly visits to their classrooms.

"Even for the child who gets all A's and sails through school, it's very important to communicate," Wilbur says. And although teachers want to know when you have concerns, they appreciate when you convey the positive too.

SERVE BREAKFAST Kids (and adults) do better when they start the day with breakfast. Research shows that kids who eat a breakfast high in protein and low in sugar and fat score better on standardized tests, have fewer health issues and behave better in class.

READ, READ, READ Try less television and a lot more reading. Your child's teacher will thank you. "Read to your children every night or have them read to you," Wilbur says. "And let them see you reading too. You have to practice what you preach."

ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENCE As much as teachers want parents involved, they warn against going overboard when helping with schoolwork. It's fine to assist kids who are struggling with a difficult math problem or brainstorming ideas for a project. But know when to let kids go it alone. "Parents may not understand the difference between helping kids with homework and doing it for them,"

Murphy says. "Let go a little bit to help them become independent."

MONITOR YOUR CHILD'S INVOLVEMENT Teachers love to hear that kids are involved in activities. But don't overdo it. "Talk to your child and find out what your child wants," Wilbur suggests. "Usually, if kids are overinvolved, it's not because the kids want it but because parents want it, and kids want to please parents." (Learn more about finding the right balance on page 20.)

SHOW THAT YOU CARE Perhaps the most important recommendation is one even the busiest parents can handle. "Show love and affection," Wilbur says. "The most centered, settled, respectful, well-adjusted kids are the ones who still hug their parents and hear 'I love you.'" ●

