

Parental Involvement Is The Key

MPC-15

Raising children and preparing them to become adults is one of the most difficult and exciting challenges parents will face. Parents hope to raise their children to become responsible, confident and considerate adults. Different families might express this hope in different ways, depending on their cultural and personal values. Some parents might think of it as passing down skills and knowledge that will help their children carry on the family name with pride. Other parents may focus more on what their children are doing for the community. Still others will see the children's individual achievement as the most important factor. Despite these differences, all families share a responsibility to help their children grow into the best people they can be.

Another word for this responsibility is *education*. As a parent, you watch your children go to school every day, and you hope that they are learning what they will need to know to become successful adults. But what goes on at home is also very important to your children's education. You are your children's first and best teacher. You have experiences and memories to share that will help your children understand who they are and how they fit into their communities. The more involved you are in your children's education — both in school and at home, the more you will be able to help them reach these goals.

In order to take a more active role in your children's education, you must first understand:

- ◆ your hopes for your children,
- ◆ your children's development, and
- ◆ your strengths as a parent.

Some examples have been listed below, but you will probably want to write down your own thoughts on a separate sheet of paper.

Your hopes:

You may hope that your children will:

- ◆ be reliable resources for the family and for others,
- ◆ maintain their own identities and their family and cultural values, and
- ◆ be good role models for the next generation.

Your children's development:

Your children may:

- ◆ want to be close to you when they are young (especially before they begin school),
- ◆ face two different cultures, name school and home,
- ◆ feel pressure from their peers, teachers, others in the outside world, and you,
- ◆ change their beliefs and behaviors as they grow older,
- ◆ face greater educational, social and environmental challenges than you did as a child.

Your strengths as a parent:

Your strengths may include:

- ◆ knowing your children's personalities, attitudes, and behaviors,
- ◆ setting clear family rules and consequences for disobeying the rules,
- ◆ knowing how to help your children become good learners,
- ◆ talking with your children about your family's rich culture and values,
- ◆ having a good relationship with your children,
- ◆ valuing education for your children and yourself,
- ◆ setting life goals and working to achieve them,
- ◆ providing life-long family support, and
- ◆ knowing your legal rights as a parent.

No parent can be strong in all areas. Start from your own strengths, and look to others for help when you need it.

How to Become More Involved

There may be barriers to your participation in your children's education. Some of these may include: language, a low level of comfort at the school, lack of time, and the feeling that you don't have the skills to tell the teachers how they can improve your children's education. Sometimes you may feel that parenting is too stressful and difficult, or that you do not have the energy to continue.

Even so, as a parent, you have the greatest influence on your children's lives, including what they learn. You will want to enjoy the time you spend with your children, so try to find fun ways to teach them what you want them to know. Below are some ideas of how you can make the best use of your time with your children. Make your own list on a separate sheet of paper.

- ◆ Tell your children your family's history;
- ◆ Visit the library together;
- ◆ Participate in and encourage your children's hobbies;
- ◆ Listen to your children talk about their homework, and offer your own comments and suggestions;
- ◆ Visit parks, museums and cultural events, and have your children write stories or draw pictures of what they saw and learned;
- ◆ Supervise after-school activities and TV-viewing — just being at home with your children is important;
- ◆ Set daily routines and schedules, and assign chores to give your children a sense of responsibility;
- ◆ Visit the school, and tell the teachers what you think would help your children learn better;
- ◆ Let your children know that you expect them to be successful, however you define success.

Remember: No one can help your children learn as you can. Of all the teachers your children will have, it will be your lessons they will remember best and longest.