Teachers' Tips for Keeping in Touch

Connect to your child’s classroom

Want to give your child the best experience possible? Team up with her teacher! Don’t be discouraged from coming into class because "you're not educated enough" or because you don't feel you have anything to contribute — your child's teacher would love to strengthen the bond between school and home. How do you strengthen that bond? Read on for teachers' tips.

- **Talk to your child every day about school** — it's a great way to find out what he's learning and to identify potential problems that you might need to discuss with his teacher. Start a conversation with "What was your favorite activity today?" instead of "How was school today?" to avoid vague answers.

- **Read everything that comes home.** Most teachers send daily or weekly newsletters with info about class projects and field trips and requests for parent volunteers. But it's easy for your child to forget to pass them on to you, so check her backpack regularly, and find out if there's a particular day of the week when your teacher sends flyers home.

- **Communicate.** Send a note or schedule a conference at the beginning of the year, and let your child's teacher know about anything unusual that's going on in your child's life that might affect him at school — from crises like illness and divorce to less drastic changes, like a grandmother moving in or a mother getting a new job. Mention any medication your child uses, even if he doesn't take it at school. But don't take problems to the principal unless you've already talked to your child's teacher.

- **Be a cheerleader!** Don't just focus on problem areas — let your child's teacher know about his strengths too. You'll help her to think of new ways to engage him.

- **Respect the schedule.** When there's an emergency, don't hesitate to call the school at any time. For more routine matters, it's smart to find out early in the year when the best times are to contact teachers. Ask at back-to-school night, or send a note or email in the first week.

- **Spend time in the classroom.** Not only are parent volunteers "worth their weight in gold" to teachers, paying regular visits to the classroom is also a great way for you to learn about your child's experience firsthand. Offer to tutor individual students or help with special projects. You can also chaperone on field trips, give a talk on your career or your cultural background, or teach the class how to make a special dish or art project.

- **Bring learning home.** Find ways to relate everyday activities at home to concepts your child is learning in school. For instance, explain percentages at breakfast using the nutritional info on the back of cereal boxes, or talk about the fat content of skim versus two-percent milk.

- **Don't be afraid.** Your child's teacher wants to hear from you. Of all people, teachers understand that there's no such thing as a stupid question, so ask away!