

Seven Things Teachers Wish Parents Knew

By Lisa Collier Cool for [Good Housekeeping](#)

Parents, pull up a chair: Here's how to help your kids do their very best at school

Good Housekeeping went into classrooms at schools around the country and talked to the teachers who spend their days with your children. Here's what they said about how you can help them help your kids:

1. Don't be a stranger!

Talk to your child's teacher early and often. Back-to-school night shouldn't be the only time you connect, but it's a great time to introduce yourself and find out the best way to contact her in the future. Then stay in touch with updates on how things are going at home, questions about your child and his work, or to schedule conferences to head off trouble (should you worry about that string of C's?). Most teachers have e-mail at school, which is a great way to check in.

2. Learning doesn't stop at 3:15.

You can help the teacher do a better job by encouraging your child to show you something he's working on at school, suggests Ron Martucci, who teaches fourth grade in Pelham, New York. It doesn't have to be a big deal: "Ask him to demonstrate how he does long division or to read his book report out loud," says Martucci. "Every time your child gets a chance to show off what he knows, it builds confidence."

3. Keep your child organized.

That means helping teachers with the paper chase. "I spend way too much time tracking down tests or forms I've sent home for a parent's signature," says Judy Powell, a fifth-grade teacher from Richmond, Virginia. Usually, the missing items are crumpled up in the bottom of the kid's backpack, along with lunch leftovers and other clutter. Powell's solution: Have your child empty his backpack every day as part of a regular after-school routine. Set up a special place, such as a box in the kitchen, where he can put the day's papers, and provide another spot, such as a desk drawer, for old assignments that you want to save. A bright-colored folder is a good idea, too, for toting homework — and signed papers — to and from school. And about those supplies: Keep plenty on hand. "Kids run out of pencils and paper, and it'll be three weeks before they'll remember to tell you," says Powell.

4. Let your child make mistakes.

Don't forget, he's learning. Teachers don't want perfect students, they want students who try hard. "Sometimes parents get caught up in thinking every assignment has to be done exactly right, and they put too much pressure on their child," says Brian Freeman, a second-grade teacher from Red Spring, North Carolina. "But it's OK for kids to get some problems wrong. It's important for us to see what students don't know, so we can go over the material again."

Is your child struggling with an assignment? Help him brainstorm possible solutions. If he's still stuck, resist the temptation to write a note. Instead, encourage your child to take charge by asking the teacher for help the next day.

Hands off bigger assignments, too, says Marty Kaminsky, a fourth-grade teacher in Ithaca, New York. "I assigned a project on inventors, and several kids brought in amazingly detailed reports with slide-shows. They looked great, but they clearly weren't the work of a nine-year-old," he says. "I was much happier with the posters with the pictures glued on crooked, because I knew those children did the work themselves. What matters isn't the final result; it's letting a child have ownership of the project."

5. If the teacher deserves a good grade, give her one.

Teaching isn't easy, and there are days when a kid has a tantrum, or a teacher feels like crying because a parent speaks to her harshly. So why not e-mail or call when your child enjoys a class event or says something nice about the instructor? And if you feel the teacher is doing a good job, let the principal know. Volunteering is another way to demonstrate your enthusiasm and support, even if you only have time to help out once a year. It shows your child — and his teacher — that you really care about his education.

6. Stay involved — even when you don't know the material.

You can provide moral support and be your child's cheerleader no matter how well (or poorly) you did in a certain subject. "Parents tell me they didn't take trigonometry or flunked chemistry, so how can they check the homework?" says Tim Devine, a high school social science teacher in Chicago. "But we don't expect you to be an expert on every subject." Just knowing a parent is paying attention can be very motivating for a student.

7. The teacher's on your side — give her the benefit of the doubt.

Rachel James, a third-grade teacher in Reson, Florida, was having a terrible time with one of her students. For days, the boy had been disruptive, rolling his eyes and sighing dramatically whenever anyone spoke to him. Naturally, she had to reprimand him. "His mom called and accused me of picking on her son," says James. "When I told her what was going on, she was shocked." After the mom had calmed down, they worked out some ways to change the boy's behavior. "A lot of parents go into attack mode when their child complains about a teacher," says James. "Or they take the problem to the principal, so the teacher feels blindsided. But parents need to get all the facts before they react."