

Encourage parents to volunteer in the classroom year round as an important positive step in improving their child's education. New teachers, who are trying to build solid relationships with parents, will find this resource particularly valuable.

Getting Parents Involved

You can use a wide range of projects and activities to get—and keep—[parents](#) involved in the affairs of the classroom. Consider some of the following.

Reaching Out

It's Elementary

I used a technique I called “the 2-minute note.” Each morning, I would write a short (two- to four-sentences) note about a positive event or accomplishment for a single student and invite the student to take the note home. I started alphabetically with a student at the top of my grade book and then, each day, selected the next student on my class list until I got to the bottom. Then, I would start again at the top. That way, every student would take home one two-minute note each month.

Develop and design a series of orientation programs for parents new to the school or district. It would be valuable to develop a slide program, a series of brochures, family guides, or other appropriate orientation materials to assist new families in learning as much as they can about your academic program.

Work with a group of parents to prepare a notebook of home or community activities for use during vacations. Include games, reading activities, places to visit, and sites to see in the community. Distribute these notebooks to all families prior to a vacation period, especially summer. Send parents a periodic newsletter updating them on classroom activities and projects.

Make a regular effort to [communicate with parents](#) through brief phone calls or short notes. Don't use the telephone to always relay bad news, but use it to celebrate academic accomplishments, too. Call one parent each week to relay some good news about what his or her child is doing.

Sharing Resources

Periodically provide parents with lists of recommended children's literature. Work with the school librarian in distributing lists such as “The Principal's Top Ten Hits” throughout the year. Consider disseminating a list of books on child-rearing practices. If possible, plan a few share-and-discuss sessions with groups of parents to talk over selected books.

Provide parents with a calendar of upcoming classroom events. Many schools and districts send out a periodic newsletter; consider one specifically for your classroom. Include

information on books you will read in the coming weeks, [field trips](#), science projects, videos you will see, guest speakers, etc. Publish this on a frequent basis, and distribute it to all families.

Raise Your Hand: "Do I Have Any Volunteers?"

Expert Opinion

Use the telephone as an instrument of good news. Often parents associate the telephone as something used to convey bad news (missed homework, tardiness, behavior problem). Call parents frequently to convey good news about a youngster's academic progress or to thank them for their help on a project.

Recruit classroom volunteers. Use the telephone, informal surveys, questionnaires, and [face-to-face contacts](#) to solicit parent volunteers. Schedule a special orientation meeting providing potential volunteers with a set of responsibilities and expectations. Allow parents to observe the actual skills you would like them to perform, including marking papers, creating art materials, arranging field trips, supervising small-group work, carrying out remedial tasks, creating bulletin boards, or duplicating classroom materials.

Be sure to create a support system for parent volunteers. They need to feel that they are working under a trained professional. Plan frequent round-table conferences. Be sure all volunteers have an information packet of school schedules, school and classroom rules, a map of the school, procedures for student absences and tardiness, discipline procedures, dress code, etc.