

Parent Involvement - Health Education For Children

Thursday, 15 September 2011

Parents are partners with schools in the effort to educate healthy children who have the skills they need to become competent and productive adults. There is no area of the curriculum where this is more true than in health education. Children acquire their basic health attitudes and behaviors within the family home. Involving parents in their children's education takes time and effort. The energy you put into involving parents will have a big reward, however, both in your classroom this year and in your students' lives now and in the years to come.

Parents are partners with schools in the effort to educate healthy children who have the skills they need to become competent and productive adults. There is no area of the curriculum where this is more true than in health education. Children acquire their basic health attitudes and behaviors within the family home. Parents purchase and prepare nutritious (or otherwise) food for children, regulate their sleeping patterns, enforce rules for how family members treat each other, and model positive or negative behaviors with regard to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Even as children approach adolescence and their peers become a more significant influence on their lives, parents continue to be important role models for good health. If health education is to be effective in promoting healthy behaviors, it must actively enlist parents as partners in the process.

The research is clear on the value of parent involvement. Children who grow up in families who are involved in their education in positive ways achieve higher grades and test scores, attend school more regularly, complete more homework, display more positive attitudes and behaviors, graduate from high school at higher rates, and are more likely to go on to higher education (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Some of the positive ways that parents can be involved in their

telephone number and time where you can be reached, and an invitation to parents to share their concerns with you. Use simple language and avoid educational jargon. Address your letter to "Dear Parent" or "Dear Family," rather than "Dear Parents" (since some children will live in single parent households). You may wish to have your letter translated into other languages for parents who do not speak English.

- Open House If your school holds a "Back to School" night, plan carefully to make parents feel comfortable in your classroom. Have your students create invitations for their parents. Call parents personally—or ask a parent that you know to call others—to remind them of the event. At the open house, explain your plans for the year and allow enough time for parents to ask questions. Describe the kind of help you would like to have from parents throughout the year, both in the classroom and at home.

- Home Visits Visiting families at home can show parents that you are sincerely committed to their children's education and are willing to go more than halfway to involve them. Visits should be short (no more than 15-30 minutes) and should be scheduled at a time which is convenient for parents. Send a letter home first that explains your purpose is just to introduce yourself and that no special preparations are necessary. Give parents the opportunity to decline, if they so desire. If you do not speak the language in the child's home, you will need to invite someone who does to help translate.

- Positive Phone Calls Call each child's parents two or three times a year to let them know how well their child is doing or ask if they need any additional information. The tone of your call should be positive and may include just introducing yourself, describing what the child is learning in school, telling the parent about special strengths that the child has, and/or inviting the parent to an open house or conference. Establishing positive contact with the parents will make it easier to communicate if and when a problem with the child arises later.

- Teacher Letters Send a letter home to parents on a regular basis, such as monthly or each time you start a new unit. In your letter, inform parents of what their children are learning and what the parent can do to reinforce that learning at home. Again, you may need to translate the letter into another language(s) if parents are not English-speaking.

- Homework Communicate to parents your expectations about the homework you assign, e.g., how much homework can be expected and that all homework should be completed promptly. In addition, give students some homework assignments that involve their parents. By giving parents specific guidance on what they can do, you can help them become involved in their children's education.

- Parent Volunteers Encourage parents to volunteer (classroom help, field trips, etc.)