

In the Best Interest of the Child: What Parents Can Do Parent Involvement for Noncustodial Parents

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The goal of noncustodial parent involvement is to enhance and enrich the education and development of the child. In most cases, the opportunity for noncustodial parents to be involved in their children's education is a desirable, valuable, and precious experience for both the children and the parents.

A parent who is involved both at home and at school and who takes the time to read to his or her child, to monitor homework, and to attend parent-teacher conferences shows the child and the school that *this* parent cares enough to be involved.

Parents can take a variety of steps to communicate with their child's school, stay involved in their child's education, and lessen the risk of putting their child in the middle of parental conflict.

Sometimes, loving parents unwittingly create an unhealthy learning environment for their child due to unresolved conflict between each other. This may include gatekeeping—one parent trying to discourage the involvement of the other.

The following information and suggestions are designed to help **both** parents understand the importance of being active participants in their child's education and development.

COMMUNICATE

Noncustodial parents have the right to receive school-related documents; however, it is the responsibility of the **noncustodial parent** to request that information from the school. While schools are required to provide access to this information, they are not required to initiate this process or to pay for copying or mailing these documents. Each school handles such requests individually.

To facilitate this process and establish realistic expectations between the parents and the school, both custodial and noncustodial parents can make an appointment to meet with school administrators at the beginning of the school year to discuss:

- Any relevant court orders or other legal documents relating to the student.
- Their interests in and concerns about parent involvement opportunities.
- Their rights and responsibilities in requesting and receiving school-related documents and mailings.
- How and when they want the school to contact them.

BE INVOLVED AT SCHOOL AND AT HOME

- Explore ways to stay connected with the school via e-mail, school website, and automated message system.
- Partner with the school by understanding and enforcing school policies on homework, research projects, attendance, and behavior.
- Partner with the teacher to create and foster a learning environment at home that supports what is being taught at school.

Take advantage of the many school-related volunteer and involvement opportunities:

- Join the PTA, PTSA, or PTO.
- Read to your child's class or become a mentor or tutor.
- Be a guest speaker in your child's classroom. Talk about your job, hobbies, travels, etc.
- Attend Back-to-School Night, parent-teacher conferences, school productions, athletic events, and other school-related activities.
- Chaperone field trips or other school events, or offer to carpool.
- Visit the school to have lunch with your child.
- Coach a team, lead a scout troop, or sponsor a club or an activity.
- Read to your child when you are together, and let your child read to you.
- Help with playground construction and maintenance, or participate in fundraisers (car washes, bake sales, etc.).

WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US

The U.S. Department of Education indicates that while mothers' involvement is beneficial for the social and emotional adjustment of children to school, fathers' involvement may be key to academic success. Additionally, noncustodial parent involvement – especially the father's involvement – is shown to:

- Boost academic performance, even IQ.
- Contribute to raising achievement test scores.
- Improve competency in math and problem-solving.
- Improve reading skills, especially for girls.
- Strengthen verbal skills for boys and girls.
- Foster self-esteem by showing that school and education are important.
- Enhance social and emotional competencies.
- Increase the likelihood of postsecondary education.
- Contribute to lower absenteeism and dropout rates.

Sources:

1. National Fatherhood Initiative.
2. *Father Need*, by Kyle D. Pruett, M.D., Broadway Books, 2000. U.S.

3. Department of Education (Nord, Brimhall, and West, 1997).
4. *The Mediating Role of Fathers' School Involvement on Student Achievement*, by Brent McBride et al, Applied Developmental Psychology 26 (2005).
5. *Reaching All Families: Creating Family-Friendly Schools--August 1996*.
<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/ReachFam/sg.html>.

Remember, your children measure how important they are to you by the time you spend with them and the way you talk and interact with them. You send your children a powerful message about the value of education when you become involved in theirs.

Created by:
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