

Being more involved in your kids' schooling

Getting involved with their your kids' schooling can be one of the best ways to stay close to them and help them be happy

By Chris Barnardo

Whether you're a divorced or separated dad, and your children don't live with you, or a hard working dad that feels you don't see enough of your children, then one of the best ways to connect with your child is to take a greater interest in their schooling. I'm not talking about a technical interest that stops with being satisfied that you got them into the right school, or that at last, you seem to be winning the on-going campaign to get the school to send you a copy of your child's report (or those elusive "letters home"). No, I

mean taking and developing a real interest in your child's entire school experience.

After all, during term time your children are spending more waking hours at school with their friends in the care of their teachers than they are with their mother or you. Taking a real interest in this enormous part of their lives will show them that you care; it will show them that you recognise and value the range of their experiences outside your own relationship with them, and will demonstrate how important you

think their studies are, in a way that transcends merely lecturing them about it.

In the longer term an understanding, knowledge and involvement of their wider lives will reap much wider benefits as well, as to some degree, it ameliorates the mid-teen alienation which inevitably occurs when your children reach the age when school and its extended social network start to become THE most important thing in their lives.

Know the names of your children's best friends and key classmates

As a child, who you are friends with is the most important thing about school. As a parent, make it your duty to know those names, write them down if you have to. Remember friendships and alliances can change back and forth quite rapidly when you are young, so keep up with the changing times. If possible, build up a collection of friends' mother's or father's phone numbers, which can be very useful in a minor school related emergency (forgotten homework books, or ambiguous information about a school trip for example) or arranging an impromptu weekend day out.

Know your kid's teachers' names

Think back to when you were a child. Just as it was for you, your child's interaction with their teachers will rank as the second most important aspect of their day to day school experience and a rich source of tea time discussion.

Know the dates and times of their school functions, and make time to attend them

As well as sports day and the mandatory school play, many schools have other little functions throughout the year. Find out about these (look on the school's website, or phone up and ask), and if possible make time to attend them. You don't need to make a big thing about it, just be there.

Help out at a school activity

Why not give up just one day of your annual leave to go into your child's school and help out. Many schools run activities throughout the year that require extra adult helpers. Find out when these events are going to happen and put your name down to help. You will get to meet a new circle of adults as well. If you can't afford one day of your holiday, then offer to help out at the school fair / fate, or even run a stall. These events are usually at the weekend and are always desperate for helpers.

If you collect them from, or drop them off at school never be late

Leave plenty of time. If you have them to stay on a school night, get up a little early and try to be as relaxed as possible in the morning. It's not nice to start the day in a complete panic, so always be the pilot of a good day, by being relaxed and on time.

Say hi to or chat to the other parents / mothers at the gate

Mothers work together by networking the school gate, so don't be shy. This is where you are going to find out tips about what's on and what to avoid, or hear snippets about teachers or other general useful gossip. Nevertheless, avoid confiding in other parents or mothers about your ex-partner or any separation issues you might have, however tempting it might be to try and put your side of the story. The jungle telegraph can easily work against you, and you say so more by just being there and saying nothing about that part of your life.

Let your children invite friends over for tea after to school

Children often have friends over to play and for tea on a weekday, after school, but it also happens at the weekend too. As your children grow up, it is important for them, and you, that you are involved in as many aspects of their normal life as possible. This won't happen, if when they come to stay with you, you treat that time as exclusively your time together. If you do that, then, as your children get older, visits to dad will eventually be seen as another separate item on their social calendar, competing with all the other things that can be done during the week or at the weekend.

Instead, treat the time they spend with you as normally as possible and make every effort to integrate it with their lives, then as they grow up they will see being with you and staying at your place as home from home, and as a natural extension of the things they do from week to week.

Help them with their homework and make it fun

Be prepared with pencils, paper (print out dadcando lined and squared paper here), an eraser, some coloured pens and a glue-stick. It doesn't cost much to be set up and you can buy this stuff at most supermarkets with your weekly shop.

Be prepared to spend some time with your children over their homework. This will show them how important you think their studies are. But don't do their homework for them, let them work things out as much as possible, giving them only as much help as they need to do a job that you are both proud of (which can be quite a lot of help when they are young).

Don't just show an interest in the most exciting homework assignments. You can make almost any homework interesting if you try. Your children really need to learn this trick off you, because most of life is made up of doing routine things, and if your child can learn how to find interest and excitement these things, then they will grow up to be happy.

However, there will be some landmark homeworks, that have the potential to be really exciting (building something, making a model or completing an involved project for example). Make sure you make the most of these, you never know, it might be that start of a life's passion. [Click here to see a landmark homework project that we really enjoyed.](#)

Don't take it personally if you are not told about functions at school

The school has a lot on its plate and getting angry that you are not informed about things is not very helpful.

Make it your business to find out what is going on at the school. Send a stamped addressed envelope to ask to duplicates of any very important forms. Remember that children are just given letters to take home and the school doesn't send out letters and forms to parents and in any case quite often letters don't make it home to the child's mother because they get accidentally lost en route.

Most schools these days send out information and newsletters by email. Make sure your children's school has your email address and you are registered for any automated parent email schemes that they have. Put important dates for school functions in your work diary so that you know when to book annual leave to attend the school.

Don't over do it

Don't pry. Give your children space and their privacy when they need it. If you are involved and they know you care, they will come to if they have any problems.