



Factsheet for parents

Talking with children about school

Talking with your children about school is important for their all round motivation and attainment. Research shows that discussion at home about their education is one of the most important factors determining how well children eventually do.

▶ Through conversations and discussions, parents can affect what children believe they can do in the future and how children see themselves at school. The form of the discussions will change as your child grows older. With younger children parents can encourage a positive attitude to learning; for older children parents can help with aspirations to learn and boosting self-confidence.

▶ Many parents think that education is the school's business and that parents have nothing to do with it. Research at the Family and Parenting Institute (FPI), which involved listening to parents, children and teachers in five schools, showed that many parents think education is not their business and they shouldn't meddle in it. They think their duties end with caring for their children, seeing that they get to school on time and perhaps supervising their homework.

▶ Many children also want home and school to be separate and don't want their parents to interfere. FPI research also suggests that many children, especially those attending secondary school, think that school and learning are not their parents' business. They like to be different people at school and at home.

Subject knowledge

Many parents don't discuss education and school issues with their children because they think they lack the knowledge. But you don't need to be knowledgeable about the detail of the subjects your children study to discuss, encourage and motivate. If you show an interest in what your child does at school, or create a more relaxed atmosphere to talk together at home, that in itself gives a clear message to your child.

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Providing encouragement

Encourage your child to talk rather than ask direct questions about school. Questioning often makes children feel they are being attacked and then they clam up or deflect discussion by giving short or unhelpful answers. Try to find ways to encourage your children to speak about their learning, or make sure that you spend five or 10 minutes wind-down time together at the end of the day.

Getting involved

Getting involved in your child's school or taking courses yourself may lead to more discussion with your children. Research at the Family and Parenting Institute suggests that many parents who studied or took courses as adults, engaged in programmes involving activities with their children, or got involved with the school as governors or through the parents association, found they could talk about school with their children more easily.