



# PARENTING THROUGH THE SCHOOL YEARS

A Guide for Parents of  
K-12 Students





*When love and skill  
work together,  
expect a masterpiece.*

*Ruskin*

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# How can I help! my child do better in school?



*You have a lifetime to work,  
but children  
are only young once.*

*Polish proverb*

How can I help my child do better in school? Teachers and school administrators have been hearing this question from parents since schooling began.

Helping children do better in school starts with setting a **positive tone** about school. As a parent, you can do this by letting your son or daughter know how important and valuable you think school is. At any stage—elementary, junior high or senior high—children are more likely to succeed if they view school as a worthwhile experience.

This booklet is designed to help answer the many questions parents may have about their child's education. In it you'll find ways to help your child and, in the process, become **partners in learning** with the school. After all, you and your child's teacher share a common goal—to create a positive and successful learning experience for your child.



It is the supreme art  
of the teacher to  
**awaken joy**  
in creative expression  
and knowledge.

Albert Einstein



# ASSESSMENT:

## How is your child doing in school?

Teachers use multiple sources of information to **determine your child's progress.**

A shared understanding of the language of assessment and student reporting will help keep open the lines of communication between home and school.

- ✓ Assessment is the process of collecting information on student achievement and performance.
- ✓ Evaluation entails making decisions about the quality, value or worth of a response to provide descriptive feedback and marks.
- ✓ The teacher's professional judgment is the best indicator of

how your child is doing in school. Research clearly shows that this judgment of student progress is a much stronger predictor of future success than performance on single large-scale examinations, such as provincial achievement tests.

- ✓ Your child is more than a grade or a number. Assessments should reflect the variety of skills, knowledge and abilities that support the development of the whole child and help the child to become a creative and critical thinker and learner, to develop a love for learning and an

appreciation for the arts, and to learn healthy lifestyles.

- ✓ Your child has a unique learning style that cannot be captured by a single assessment.
- ✓ You have the right and responsibility to ask questions about how your child is doing in school. These questions can include the following: How is my child being assessed? Does my child know what is expected? Does my child understand how classroom work is assessed? How are test results used? What support can I provide at home or at school?

# creating great readers

*Today a reader, tomorrow a leader.*  
Margaret Fuller



Learning to read and becoming a great reader don't happen overnight.

A lot of hard work must come first.

While many things may have changed since you were in school, the one thing that has remained constant is that

**reading at home leads to greater success**

in reading at school.

- ★ Read to your preschooler regularly. Find a good children's book full of interesting stories and make a habit of reading a few pages aloud every night.
- ★ Encourage your child to ask questions and to take over the

reading. Discuss the pictures and ask questions about the story.

- ★ Read with your child. Find a quiet, cozy corner and invite your child to read a book while you are reading yours.
- ★ Have your child read to you. Encourage him or her to read a story alone first and then read it aloud to you. This fosters confidence and comprehension. It will also make the story more interesting to your child.
- ★ Help your beginning reader with new words so that the story moves along and remains interesting.
- ★ Provide reading materials in your

home. If you have a wide variety of books, magazines and newspapers readily available, your child, at any age, will see that reading is a source of entertainment and information.

- ★ Give your child books as birthday or holiday gifts. It shows that you value reading and books enough to make them special. Children who have books they can call their own are motivated to read.
- ★ Join and use the public library. Take your child to the library. Help your child get a card and select and take out books. Ask the librarian (or teacher) to suggest good, age-appropriate books.

# Discipline



**If we don't discipline ourselves, the world will do it for us.**

**William Feather**

Children who misbehave often do so because they're insecure—they need assurances of self-worth and acceptance, both at home and at school. Unless it's damaging, ignore attention-seeking behaviour. Reacting to it often reinforces the misguided behaviour.

- Build self-confidence through praise and encouragement. Give your child lots of attention when he or she is being cooperative.
- Spend time with your child every day. Talk or listen with complete attention, including physical closeness and eye contact.

- Set an example by respecting the law and the rights of others.
- Keep rules simple, few in number, reasonable and enforceable.
- Learn the school's regulations regarding student behaviour.
- Don't preach, nag or say, "I told you so." Never insult or laugh at your child. Use humour to lighten a confrontation. Instead of stressing how bad or wrong an action was, ask for information or clarification and turn the problem into a learning experience.
- Don't automatically side with your child against other adults, neighbours, teachers or police officers. Find out first, from

everyone involved, exactly what happened.

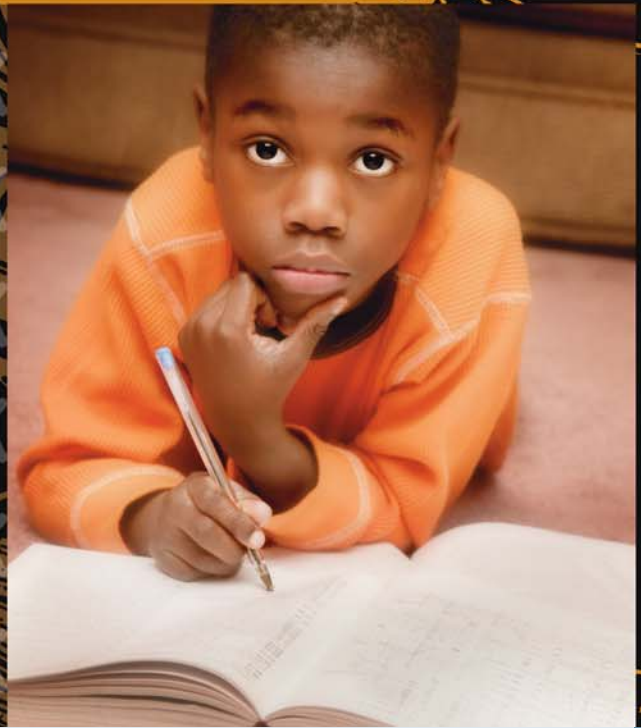
- Avoid power struggles. When emotional stress is evident, go to another room and cool down. Talk about the problem later.
- Match the punishment with the misdeed. Being sent to the bedroom, standing in the corner, having privileges curtailed or being made to apologize are all effective punishments.
- Always remember that assistance is close at hand—from professionals such as teachers, doctors and clergy members, or from provincial and municipal family services. Many communities have a distress line that one can call for advice and referrals.



Home computers are being called upon to perform many new functions, including the consumption of homework formerly eaten by the dog.

Doug Larson

# Homework



Homework is the part of school life that most affects home life. While the amount of homework that should be assigned is debatable, studies have shown that regularly assigned homework leads to immediate academic improvement, as well as to

## improved study skills and attitudes.

- ✎ Homework strengthens the learning started at school.
- ✎ Homework helps students learn to budget their time.
- ✎ Homework teaches good study and work habits and helps students develop self-reliance.
- ✎ Homework serves as a catch-up tool for students who have fallen behind.
- ✎ Homework helps teachers identify weaknesses that can then be addressed in classroom activities.
- ✎ Homework strengthens the ties between home and school, informing parents about what their children are studying and allowing parents to help.
- ✎ Agree on a set time for homework. This routine will help create security and will reinforce the idea that homework takes precedence over other activities.
- ✎ Provide an appropriate place to do homework. This should be a comfortable, adequately lit workspace that is free of distractions.
- ✎ Provide encouragement and assistance to your child, but be careful not to do the assignment yourself.
- ✎ Talk to your child's teacher if you feel that the quantity of homework is too great. This is yet another opportunity to communicate with your child's teacher.
- ✎ Junior and senior high students should consult their teacher or school counsellor for reference material on good study habits.

Learning is  
a treasure  
that will  
follow  
its owner  
everywhere.

Chinese proverb



## Learning at home

Learning doesn't stop when your child leaves school each day.

### You are your child's most important teacher.

- 🏠 Visit museums, farmers' markets, historic sites, airports, parks, libraries, educational events and local points of interest. Discuss these visits with your child and explain their importance.
- 🏠 Encourage creativity by providing paints, paper and other craft supplies, as well as a special place to display your child's works of art.
- 🏠 Bake and cook with your child. Allow him or her to do safe tasks like measuring and mixing

ingredients. You are teaching not only cooking skills but also cause and effect and numeric skills.

- 🏠 Give your child a piggy bank and encourage him or her to open a bank account and track savings.
- 🏠 Go hiking with your child. Alberta has many lovely hiking trails that provide countless opportunities to identify birds, animals, flowers and plants. Hiking is also a great way to promote physical fitness.
- 🏠 Consider establishing a stamp or coin collection, which can be both valuable and educational. New issues of stamps and coins often highlight current and historical events.

- 🏠 Play games with your child—especially those with educational value, such as number, guessing and word games.
- 🏠 Use summer activities and family trips as learning opportunities. Ask your child to record kilometrage and gas purchases, and to read maps. Explore with your child anything that is different from home (ocean, mountains, cities, farms). Play animal, geography, number and alphabet games in the car (A is for antelope, B is for bison).
- 🏠 Provide learning tools for your child, such as library cards, atlases, globes, the Internet, newspapers and reference books.










# parents as advocates

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.*  
Margaret Mead





Supporters of public education in Alberta need to **communicate effectively** at all levels to ensure that their voices are heard. The goal of effective advocacy is to instill a better understanding of and more support for public education. It's important to communicate with the groups who make the decisions, be they MLAs, school trustees or municipal councillors.

 Letters can be a very effective advocacy tool. They don't need to be fancy and should not be more than one page.

-  E-mail is a quick and effective tool if used properly. Follow the format used for a letter.
-  Telephoning decision-makers also has its advantages. Make a list of the points you want to cover before you phone. Expect to leave a message with the secretary or another staff member.
-  Remember to keep a record of all letters, e-mails and phone calls you make and any responses you receive.
-  Don't be afraid to request a meeting. You may also want to organize a delegation of

parents who have the same concerns to meet with the decision-maker. Make an appointment, create a list of your points or prepare a short presentation, and be on time.

 Town halls, forums, briefs and petitions are other methods of getting the attention of politicians. Advice on preparing for these types of advocacy can be found in the *Advocacy* booklet available from the Alberta Teachers' Association.

 In all of your dealings with others, be respectful, suggest solutions and never make threats.

# PARENT-TEACHER



*Experience is not what happens to a man.*

*It is what a man does with what happens to him.*

*Aldous Huxley*

## PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES

Report cards, notes and phone calls have their advantages, but parent-teacher conferences offer parents the **opportunity to meet teachers** and discuss, in person, their children's education, as well as learn about the school and the curriculum. It is also an opportunity for teachers to learn more about the students from their parents.

→ Talk to your child first. Find out what your child likes or dislikes about school. Explain that the conference is not a means of checking up on your child but, rather, a way of helping him or her.

- Make a list of things that will help the teacher understand your son or daughter better. This should include special health needs or problems, interests or hobbies, feelings about school and important information about what's happening outside of school.
- Ask the teacher for recommended activities and readings for your child.
- Before attending parent-teacher conference, make a checklist of the points you want to discuss. How much homework is expected? What testing methods are used? Have there been any incidents at

school involving your child? Does your child have any special skills or abilities?

- Keep a record of the discussion so you can judge your child's progress and help with any problems that might have been discovered.
- Even if your child was present during the conference, discuss it with him or her afterward. If improvement is required, make suggestions in a positive manner.
- Remember that the conference may be over, but your communication with the teacher is not. It's important to stay in contact with the teacher throughout the year.



*Lack of activity destroys the good condition of every human being, while movement and methodical physical exercise save it and preserve it.*

*Plato*

No one wants to see children grow into overweight, unfit and heart-diseased adults. According to Health Canada, **over half of Canada's children are not active enough** for healthy growth and development. Health Canada recommends increasing children's physical activity until they are doing at least 90 minutes per day.

- Benefits of regular physical activity include normal growth and development, stronger bones and muscles, healthy weight, improved posture, balance, flexibility and self-esteem.
- It has been clearly demonstrated that physically fit children learn faster and more easily than those whose fitness level is much below accepted standards.
- Physically fit children have better social skills and higher self-esteem than their less physically fit peers.
- Making physical activity a regular part of your child's day is fun and healthy. Encouraging children to build physical activity into their daily routine helps create a pattern that will stay with them for the rest of their lives.
- Make your child aware of the importance of physical activity, set goals for your child, get your child to agree to these goals, provide feedback and praise, and recognize and reward change.
- Set an example for your child by showing him or her that physical activity is important for you, too.
- Set aside some time for physical activities. Curb TV viewing, video game playing and other sedentary activities.
- Encourage your child to walk to and from school, walk the dog, help carry groceries and take the stairs.
- Encourage your teenager to try out for sports teams, set up a workout area at home or join a fitness club.



# SCHOOL COUNCILS

Your children  
need your presence  
more than your  
presents.

Jesse Jackson



Established in 1995, school councils are collective associations of parents, teachers, principals, students and community representatives who **work together** to promote the well-being and effectiveness of the entire school community and thereby enhance student learning. According to the *Alberta Education School Councils Handbook*, a school council is "a means to facilitate cooperation among all the concerned participants in the local school."

- Membership comprises parents of students attending the school (who must form the majority), the school principal, at least one teacher, at least one community representative who does not have a child in the school and, in high schools, at least one student.
- The role of school councils is to work with and advise the school principal and sometimes the school board on educational matters at the school level, including planning, school programs and community relations.
- Planning can include the school's mission, philosophy, policies, rules, objectives, education plan and budget.
- Community relations can include promotion of the school in the community and methods of communicating to the public.
- School programs can include cocurricular and extracurricular activities, and school programs and services.
- School councils are not responsible for the implementation of educational programs or the day-to-day management of the school. Councils provide input on the budget, but they are not responsible for the budget, policy directions, performance measures, or the hiring, evaluation and dismissal of teachers.
- Parents who want to become involved in their school council should contact the school principal.



# RESPONSIBILITIES, STUDENTILITIES

It is easy to dodge our responsibilities, but we cannot dodge the consequences of dodging our responsibilities.

Josiah Charles Stamp

Students, parents and teachers all play an important role in education.

Each partner needs to contribute **commitment and hard work** and each has

responsibilities under the law.

Student responsibilities are outlined in the Alberta *School Act*. If you wish to review the *School Act*, ask the school principal for a copy or get it from the ATA website ([www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca)).

- ✦ Students must conduct themselves responsibly.
- ✦ Students must attend school regularly and punctually. The

*School Act* requires attendance up to 16 years of age.

- ✦ Students owe it to themselves and to society to attend school and get the education freely provided.
- ✦ Students' absences are excusable for illness, unavoidable circumstances or religious holidays, or if they have been expelled or suspended from school.
- ✦ Students must comply with school rules and cooperate fully with school officials.
- ✦ Students must be accountable to their teachers.

- ✦ Students must respect the rights of others.
- ✦ Students must study diligently.
- ✦ Students have a responsibility to respect school property. They and their parents are liable for intentional or negligent destruction or loss of school property.
- ✦ Discuss with your child the consequences of not fulfilling these responsibilities.

Don't worry that  
children never  
listen to you.  
Worry that they  
are always  
watching you.

Robert Fulghum

# the teenage years



Adolescence is a difficult time. Teenagers are expected to act like adults, although in many ways they are still children. They are confronted with an enormous array of values, lifestyles, directions and pressures. Adolescents will try a variety of roles and experiences to figure out what's right for them. Teenagers make mistakes; your role is to **help turn mistakes into positive learning experiences.**

☉ Let your teen know that he or she has your love and respect. Social acceptance and independence are vitally important to teenagers. Your priorities may clash with those of your teen's peers, but

knowing that their parents love and respect them can go a long way in helping teens make the right decisions.

- ☉ Choose your battles. Teenagers assert their independence through dress, friends, music and activities. If your teen's choices will not harm anyone, try to respect his or her decisions. Gain your teen's trust by showing your confidence in his or her judgment.
- ☉ Teenagers are influenced by friends. The more you know about your teen's friends, the more you will learn about your teen.
- ☉ When setting rules, try to build in some flexibility. Some areas must be strictly governed, so explain

why adherence to those rules is necessary. The consequences of breaking them should be clear, logical and consistent.

- ☉ Respond calmly when confronted by behaviour that concerns you. Overreacting will make your teenager reluctant to confide in you again. When confronted with drug and alcohol abuse or inappropriate sexual behaviour, do some research first so you can discuss the situation in a credible way.
- ☉ Reward positive behaviour. Don't be afraid to praise your teen and tell him or her how proud you are.
- ☉ Set a good example. You are your child's most important role model.



# TUTORING

*One hundred years  
from now, it will not  
matter what kind of car  
I drove, what kind of  
house I lived in,  
or how much money  
I had in the bank.  
But the world may be  
a better place because  
I made a difference in  
a child's life.*

*Author unknown*

With today's emphasis on marks and testing, many parents are spending a lot of money on supplementary education. The cost of a tutor can range from \$10 per hour for a high school student to \$80 per hour for a special needs consultant. The variety of academic promises in the marketplace can be overwhelming—it may be wise to **consult with your child's teacher** prior to choosing supplementary education.

- ❖ The first step in addressing concerns about school work is to talk to your child's teacher or the school counsellor. Direction, advice or extra help from professional staff may solve the problem.
- ❖ Peer and cross-age tutoring, in and out of the classroom setting, allows for pacing that is tuned to the child's rate of learning, and benefits both the student who needs extra help and the tutor.
- ❖ Supplementary curriculum materials are available from the Learning Resources Centre ([www.lrc.education.gov.ab.ca/pro/default.html](http://www.lrc.education.gov.ab.ca/pro/default.html)). The LRC offers a wide variety of textbooks, curriculum guides, audiovisual material and software packages.
- ❖ Beware of skill-and-drill workbook programs. They can be boring and may intensify your child's learning difficulties.
- ❖ Some programs, without a proper assessment of your child's abilities, may lead to unrealistic expectations for both you and your child.
- ❖ If you choose to use a private consultant or service, keep in mind the warning "buyer beware."
- ❖ Check the qualifications of the tutor and ask for references.
- ❖ Watch out for programs that "teach to the test." These programs can give a false sense of achievement. Teaching to the test is simple, easy and cheap, and appeals to those who need something measurable.



Parents are interested in the education of their children and may become concerned about what is taught, how it is taught, why it is taught and what is happening in the school. The first step in addressing concerns is to

### **talk to the teacher.**

☞ The curriculum (what is taught) is determined provincially by the Ministry of Education. If you have concerns about the curriculum, speak with the teacher first. If the teacher is unable to answer your questions, you may be directed to the principal, the superintendent of schools or other

appropriate central office personnel.

- ☞ School policies and practices are established at the school level by the principal and staff, often in consultation with school councils. Once policies and practices have been approved, teachers are required to carry them out.
- ☞ If you have a concern about a policy or practice, speak with your child's teacher or with the principal.
- ☞ Only if you have not arrived at a solution by speaking with the teacher and principal should you seek resolution at a higher level.

Rarely does a parent need to contact a school district superintendent or school board trustee.


- ☞ If the complaint is about the teacher's performance, you should meet with the teacher. In most cases, discussing your concerns with the teacher will lead to a resolution. If you have met with the teacher and still have concerns, go to the principal.
- ☞ If your concern is with the professional conduct of the teacher, you should contact the superintendent or the Alberta Teachers' Association.

Everyone can be great because anyone can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't even have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love. Dr Martin Luther King, Jr



## VOLUNTEERING AT SCHOOL








One of the best gifts a parent can give is the **gift of time**. Parents can play a larger role in their children's education by becoming parent volunteers. Assisting teachers as a volunteer benefits your own child and other children, and it strengthens the ties between your school and the community. If you are unable to volunteer at the school, ask your child's teacher if there is something you can do at home.

 Volunteer duties are performed under the direction of a teacher and may include giving instructional support;

accompanying students on field trips; assisting with clerical tasks, audiovisual material and special projects; supervising a school dance or other social activity; or contributing your own special talents, such as offering information on your hobby or area of special knowledge that may interest students.

-  Some schools may require volunteers to undergo a security check.
-  Volunteers must observe all school policies and regulations and be aware that teachers have the ultimate responsibility in the classroom.

-  Volunteers must hold all matters connected with the school in confidence.
-  Volunteers must respect the professional role and judgment of the teachers and school administration.
-  Volunteers should try to meet their commitment on a regular basis. This is important if teachers are depending on the volunteers' help when planning activities.
-  Volunteers can expect interesting and rewarding experiences in their children's classrooms.
-  For more information about volunteering, contact your child's teacher.





# Working with teachers

The object of education is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives.

Robert Maynard Hutchins



Success in school is a goal that parents have for their children and teachers have for their students. This goal is more easily reached and children benefit when parents and teachers **work together**. Learning improves when parents are involved in their children's education.

- T Encourage your child to develop a positive outlook toward school. Be a model of this positive outlook.
- T Stay in contact with your child's teachers. Find out when and how the teachers would like to be contacted, and let them know the

best times and methods to contact you.

- T Keep school staff informed of issues that may affect your child's progress or behaviour.
- T Whenever possible, attend parent-teacher conferences, school plays and concerts, social events, exhibitions, fairs and sports events.
- T Whenever possible, inform the school in advance of your child's absence from school.
- T Schedule vacations to coincide with school holidays and try to schedule appointments outside of school hours.

- T Meet with teachers if your child is involved in a school incident. Work together with school staff to help solve the problem.
- T Review and sign your child's assignments, homework, report cards, journals and planners.
- T Read all newsletters and reports from your child's school.
- T Encourage your child to participate in school activities outside regular school hours (sports, drama, art and other clubs).
- T Spend time with your child each day reviewing lessons and homework and listening to your child's views and opinions.

# Resources

## **Alberta Teachers' Association**

11010 142 Street NW  
Edmonton AB T5N 2R1  
Phone: (780) 447-9400 (in Edmonton)  
or 1-800-232-7208 (toll free in Alberta)  
Fax: (780) 455-6481  
E-mail: [postmaster@ata.ab.ca](mailto:postmaster@ata.ab.ca)  
Website: [www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca)

## **Alberta Education**

Phone: (780) 427-7219 (in Edmonton)  
or 310-0000 (toll free in Alberta)  
E-mail: [comm.contact@learning.gov.ab.ca](mailto:comm.contact@learning.gov.ab.ca)  
Website: [www.education.gov.ab.ca](http://www.education.gov.ab.ca)

## **Alberta Learning Resources Centre**

Phone: (780) 427-2767, (780) 427-5775 (in Edmonton)  
or 310-0000 (toll free in Alberta)  
Fax: (780) 422-9750  
Website: [www.lrc.education.gov.ab.ca/pro/default.html](http://www.lrc.education.gov.ab.ca/pro/default.html)  
E-mail: [lrccustserv@gov.ab.ca](mailto:lrccustserv@gov.ab.ca)

## **Contacting Your MLA**

Contact your MLA by phoning 310-0000 or visiting [www.assembly.ab.ca](http://www.assembly.ab.ca).

## **Contacting Your School Trustee**

Contact your school trustee by phoning the Alberta School Boards Association at (780) 482-7311 or visiting [www.asba.ab.ca](http://www.asba.ab.ca).

To learn more about **Health Canada's** recommendations for healthy lifestyles, visit [www.hc-sc.gc.ca/index\\_e.html](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/index_e.html).

For professional help in dealing with personal problems, contact the **Child Care Help Line** for Parents at 1-866-714-KIDS (5437).

**Barbara Coloroso** is an internationally recognized speaker and author in the areas of parenting, teaching, school discipline, nonviolent conflict resolution, reconciliatory justice and grieving. Her bestselling books include *Kids Are Worth It!*; *Parenting Through Crisis*; *The Bully, the Bullied, and the Bystander*; and *Just Because It's Not Wrong Doesn't Make It Right*.

The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) serves over 33,000 teachers in Alberta's public and separate schools. As the professional organization of teachers, the ATA's mission is to promote and advance public education, safeguard standards of professional practice and serve as the advocate for its members.

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ISBN 978-1-897196-32-8



**The Alberta  
Teachers' Association**

Printed by the Alberta Teachers' Association, Fall 2006



**The Alberta  
Teachers' Association**