

# Parents Make the Difference!



## Mid-year is the perfect time to check in with teachers

The school year is already almost half over. How is your child doing so far? This is an ideal time to communicate with her teachers. Try email first, unless there are serious concerns.

Here are some things to find out:

- How is your child handling the curriculum so far?
- What are her strengths?
- What are the areas in which she needs improvement?
- What part of each class does she most enjoy?
- Does she have difficulty with any part of each class?
- Are there behavior concerns? If so, what?
- Does she pay attention in class?
- Has she been turning in homework consistently?
- Is she missing any assignments?
- Are there any social problems that should be noted?
- What can you do, as a parent, to help your child?

Remember that your involvement in your child's education remains as important as ever. This is true even if it seems that your child does not want you to be involved. Do not listen to your child's protests that "No one else's parents email the teacher," or "You don't have to go to that parents' meeting." Much research shows that children have fewer problems, and more success in school and beyond, when parents are involved.

### Improve critical thinking skills by analyzing and evaluating

To sharpen your child's critical-thinking skills, choose a current event that involves a two-sided dilemma. Outline the details of the story, or just hand him an article to read. Then ask your child to:

- Analyze the "whys" of the issue. He knows what happened. Now get him to consider why it happened. Why does he think the people in the story said or did what they did? What motivated them? The better able he is to mull over the "whys" of this story, the more likely he may be to think critically about other things, too.
- Evaluate the data. Does he believe one side of the argument is stronger than the other? Why? What, if anything, could improve the weaker side?
- Suggest a solution. Now that he's carefully considered the issue, what would he do to solve it? Which details or facts from the story support his proposed solution? Give him time to think of a response, and don't interrupt him as he explains himself. And don't settle for a mumbled, "I don't know," either! Nudge him a bit.

### How should you respond to your child's back talk?

Even the child who gave you no trouble in elementary school may develop a "smart mouth" in middle school. At this stage in life, one of your child's jobs is to question and challenge. As a parent, you bear the brunt of the sharp, dismissive and often disrespectful statements.

Here's a guide for you:

- Be a model. Your child hears rude and mocking language everywhere. But she shouldn't hear it from you. Treat your child with respect, even when her behavior doesn't earn it.
- Point out your child's language. "That is disrespectful." "Your tone is not appropriate."
- Use consequences. Calmly tell your child how you feel about the way she speaks to you. State the consequences: "You are allowed to be angry with me. But you are not allowed to speak disrespectfully. If you continue to do so, you will lose TV privileges for the week."
- Acknowledge improvement. If you notice that your child is making an effort to cut the back talk, say so.
- Consider your child's intent. What seems like back talk may be your child's attempt to show you that her opinion differs from yours. That is okay, but she needs to express it appropriately.