





Barriers to Family Involvement In Education Kindergarten Teacher Tip #1

Many barriers to parent involvement have been cited in research and professional journals. Some of the most commonly mentioned barriers can be lessened if educators take into account the reason the parent isn't participating and then focusing on how best to address the specific needs of the parents/families they serve.

 **Time.** Time may be the most precious commodity that families need to support their children (*Families and Schools*, p. 15). With the rise of two-breadwinner families, single-parent families, and the need for family members to hold more than one job, many families are experiencing a time crunch. According to a national survey commissioned by Hand in Hand, approximately 69% of parents say it is "extremely important" for parents to spend time at home encouraging their children in schoolwork; however, 30% of parents report feeling frustrated because there often is not enough time to help children with schoolwork. Another 23% cite the difficulties created by the demands of raising other children as a barrier to parental involvement.

In terms of lack of time, work conflicts seem to pose a greater barrier for less affluent families than more affluent ones.

Approximately 24% of parents earning less than \$30,000 report that work demands make it more difficult to be involved in their children's education, whereas only 7% of parents earning more than \$75,000 report such difficulties.

 **Uncertainty about what to do.** Lack of knowledge about how to help cannot be equated with lack of interest. In general, most parents and family members are interested in their children's education and want to help them succeed. Unfortunately, many parents do not know how to translate their care and concern into positive involvement (White-Clark & Decker, 1996).

Other parents may have had bad experiences themselves with school and are reluctant to return to the school—even as a parent. More than 30% of parents say they find it difficult to help their children

with schoolwork because “they teach things a lot differently from when I was in school.” One out of five parents (21%) say they would be more involved if they knew what to do.




Cultural barriers. Increasingly, families in the United States are becoming more culturally and linguistically diverse. In many instances, English often is not spoken or understood in the homes of immigrant families. As a result, family members may be reluctant to meet and talk with school officials. Those family members who do speak English, but have limited education, may have difficulty communicating with school personnel because their life experiences and beliefs are very different from those in the school community. (PREL, 1998, p. 2)

However, language is not the only barrier to family involvement among culturally diverse populations. Salend and Taylor (1993) found that a prior history of discrimination also is a barrier to involvement. For example, many families may not attend activities or meetings at the school if they experienced discrimination or disrespect there in the past. (PREL, p. 5).



Lack of a supportive environment. From time to time, most families with children will need some form of outside support, whether it is advice on child rearing, help in improving family relationships, or assistance during an emergency situation. Traditionally, this support has been provided by a variety of sources including family members, friends, neighbors, religious and civic organizations, schools, and government or nonprofit agencies (*Strengthening and Supporting Families*, 1993).

However, in recent years, dramatic social and economic changes have heightened the levels of daily stress that many families must endure. At the same time, the number of families living near extended family members has declined. These changes include the increase in single-parent households, the growing numbers of mothers in the workforce, and the long hours that many parents must work outside the home simply to make ends meet. All of these changes have contributed to the need for all sectors of the community to become more involved and provide support to children and families.

 **Teacher attitude.** Another factor that may contribute to poor parental involvement is teacher attitude. Teachers who have low expectations for poor children, or who believe that poor parents don't care about their children and don't want to be involved in their education, may consciously or unconsciously convey the attitude to parents that they have little to contribute when they do participate (Liontos, 1991). When this happens, it is important that educators take a close look at their own misperceptions and attempt to discard these stereotypes.

When parents and families aren't as involved in their child's education as you hoped they would be, think about the barriers mentioned above. Reflect on what could be making it hard for the families to be involved. For example, if lack of time might be a barrier, be flexible about when to meet with families. It may be particularly difficult for parents to meet if it is during their regularly scheduled work time.