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Almost a third of your child's life is spent in school. Other than family, school is the most important influence on your child's life.

One of the best indicators of teens' school success is whether they feel connected to their schools. Feeling connected means that students have a sense that they belong and feel close to people, including teachers and other adults. Connection to school is associated with lower rates of sexual activity, fewer thoughts about or attempts at suicide, lower levels of violent behavior, and reduced alcohol, cigarette, and marijuana use.

Children do better in school and have more positive attitudes about it when their parents are involved in their school. Many parents become less involved with school activities as their children move from elementary to middle school and on to high school. Yet teenagers clearly benefit when their parents show interest. There are many ways to be involved in your child's school.

Here are some ways to start:

Communicate with the school: One of the more important types of parent involvement is communication with your teen's teachers and other school staff such as principals or counselors. Make the family-teacher connection early in the school year and before any problems arise. Take advantage of school open houses or parent-teacher conferences. Build a partnership with teachers so your teen sees you working with teachers, not against them.

Extracurricular activities: One way that students become connected and committed to school is through extracurricular activities. Encourage your child to join school activities. If your teen is already involved, show your support by attending school concerts, games, theater performances, or other events.

Expect success: When parents set high expectations for their children's school performance, teens are more likely to meet those expectations. And when teens work toward their personal best in school, they are less likely to become depressed or involved in harmful violent, sexual, or drug-related behaviors.

Volunteer: For some parents, volunteering in school is a way to stay connected. Before volunteering, ask your teen how he or she feels about your presence in the classroom or an extracurricular event. Don't be surprised if your teen is not as receptive as he or she was in elementary school. Volunteer roles for parents include: chaperone field trips or activities/events, tutor students, timekeeper, ticket-taker, concession stand worker, driver, serve on a committee, or help select educational materials. Other opportunities exist in parent groups such as PTA/PTO, music, or athletic boosters.

Encourage involvement in leadership opportunities: Mentoring programs or tutoring younger children are other opportunities for teens to connect with school. Being a "big buddy" to an elementary student may be just the role some youth need to feel valued.

Remember to set high expectations for school success: Help your teen set reasonable goals and work towards them. Tell teens that you believe in their abilities and that is why you expect success.