

Parent-to-Parent Tips for Successful Volunteering

Volunteers give their valuable time and expertise, but they also gain a powerful sense of how the school and teachers work. Volunteers often become the teacher's strongest supporters. Arlington parents offer these tips to make your volunteering experience a good one for you, the teacher, and the children.

- Your role is to support the teacher's work with the children in the classroom. The children's education is the reason you are there. Try to leave your own opinions about education at the door.
- **Confidentiality is critical!** Even stories or situations you think are "cute" about your own or any other child should not be repeated outside of the classroom to other parents or teachers. Children are entitled to have their school experiences remain private, and others may not interpret your stories in the way you intended.
- The classroom teacher is relying on you to arrive as scheduled to do the task you agreed to do. Treat your volunteer commitment as you would a part-time job.
- Let the teacher know as soon as possible when you must be absent from your volunteering commitment. Ask if he or she would like you to find a substitute. (Some teachers prefer to work only with certain parents for certain tasks.)
- Arrive ready to work. Find out ahead of time, if possible, what materials you'll need and where to find them.
- *Do not* bring any other children with you.
- The teacher is in charge of disciplining or correcting children, including yours! Learn class rules and expectations, to enable behavioral issues to be handled consistently.
- Respect the teachers' time and expertise. Be aware that her or his style of interacting with children might differ from yours.
- Keep in mind that what might work well at home with your child might not work so well in a classroom full of children who have a wide range of abilities and skills. Follow the teacher's lead.
- Your child may act differently with you in the room. Check with the teacher for the best way to handle any situation that you feel is becoming uncomfortable. You might consider volunteering for a different teacher in the same or next grade or doing tasks scheduled before or after school.
- Be very clear what the task is. What are the teacher's expectations for the student(s) you'll be working with?

- Ask the teacher for a class list and learn each child's name.
- If you see or hear something that troubles you, speak with the teacher to learn what procedures are in place to address the problem.
- When signing up for volunteer tasks, do not underestimate the need for or the value of doing simple but time-consuming tasks. Many parents have found photocopying, collating and stapling, or cutting paper to be very relaxing! In addition, you will gain a sense of the kind of curriculum materials your child will be using.
- Above all, have fun! Know that you are doing something very valuable with your time and talents. You are providing a great role model for your child, who gets to see you "work" in a different way. Your presence in the classroom reinforces a wonderful lesson for all the children about sharing and being helpful!