

Improving Your Child's Classroom Participation

Students must do a variety of things to learn and get good grades. What it takes to learn is not a mystery. Learning requires repetition across time. The key words in this statement are repetition and time. For example, we learn phone numbers by repeating the numbers to ourselves many times and across many occasions. Students have chances to repeat information they are trying to learn in three key activities: classroom participation, homework, and studying for tests. Problems in one or more of these areas can lessen the amount of repetition and decrease learning.

To get good grades, students need to discipline themselves to participate in class and spend regular time in doing homework and studying for tests.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

Participating in classroom activities provides a critical opportunity for learning new skills. Participation helps students make deep, meaningful connections in the mind that are important in learning. Participating in class involves several types of behavior as listed in the table at the right. Signs of problems with classroom participation can include low grades, incomplete work coming home as homework, and low grades on classroom papers. If your child often does not know how to do homework, this could be a sign that he or she is not participating well in class. Teachers typically assign homework as a drill or repetition of skills already taught in class. Teachers are the best judge of your child's level of class participation.

Class Participation Behaviors

- Paying attention
- Being on-task
- Responding to questions
- Participating in group discussions
- Asking questions
- Seeking help
- Making good use of class time

There are many possible reasons why a child does not participate, including a withdrawn personality style, problems in learning and attention, low motivation, and bad experiences from past participation.

TIPS FOR INCREASING YOUR CHILD'S CLASS PARTICIPATION

Below are some tips to help improve your child's level of classroom participation.

1. Talk With Your Child's Teacher(s)

If you have concerns about your child's level of classroom participation, the first step is to talk with your child's teacher(s). Listed below are some questions you can use when talking with the teacher.

- Does my child pay attention during lectures and class discussions?
- Is my child on-task during independent seatwork?
- Does my child participate in large group discussions?
- Does my child participate in small group discussions?
- When you ask the class a question, does my child sometimes raise his/her hand to answer?
- Does my child ask you questions during large group instruction?
- Does my child ask you questions during individual seatwork?

- Does my child seek help when he/she needs it?
- Does my child make good use of class time, such as during individual seatwork or during other free study times?

2. Set And Communicate High Expectations For Your Child's Class Participation

You communicate expectations through what you consistently say to and require from your child over time. Your child will come to believe what you believe about his or her school, learning and work. Children need to learn that as they grow older the amount of play time decreases and the amount of work time increases. They need to learn that when it is time to work they need to work hard and when it is time to play they can play hard. Since school is the primary work of children, participating in class is one of the ways they work hard. You want to let your child know that you expect him or her to participate more in class.

Encouragement and praise are clear ways of expressing your expectations. Statements like these for example:

"I know that it is hard sometimes to ask a question in class. But I know you can do it!"

"I like how you have been asking your teacher for help when you don't understand something."

It is also helpful to have you and your child set some specific goals for increasing class participation. For example: *"I want you to ask three questions related to what the class is talking about this week."*

3. Teach Your Child What It Means To Participate In Class

You will need to talk with your child about the different ways he or she can participate in class. You may need to show your child how to participate. If your child is having a hard time participating, discuss the reasons why. Some children that are shy and timid may need lots of strong encouragement to help them overcome their worries about participating more.

4. Monitor Your Child's Level Of Class Participation

Let your child know that you will be talking with the teacher about his or her level of participation for the week. Let your child know that you will be looking for improvement. Talk with the teacher at the end of the day and week (through a phone call, note, or in person). You can use the questions shown above as a guide.

As your child's class participation improves, you want to make sure you connect any improvements in work with increased participation. This will help your child see the value in participating.

5. Reward Your Child For Class Participation

Use lots of praise for any behaviors that indicate class participation and for meeting the class participation goals that you set. You can reward your child with small physical rewards for meeting daily class participation goals. You can provide a bit larger reward for meeting weekly class participation goals and getting a good report from the teacher. A behavior chart is a convenient way of keeping track of performance and rewards.



Center for Effective Parenting/ AR State PIRC



Center for Effective Parenting

Little Rock Center: (501) 364-7580

NW Arkansas Center: (479) 751-6166

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