

Tips for Becoming a Classroom Volunteer

Adapted from an article by Doreen Nagle

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Here's how to get involved in your child's **classroom**, with hints from teachers as well as successful volunteers.

Before you start

- ❖ **Ask the teacher questions.** What days and times does the teacher need help? How many other volunteers will be in the **classroom** at the same time? What will you be doing to help? Are you expected to make a commitment for the entire school year or just occasionally? Is there any prep work at home you need to do for specific in-class projects?
- ❖ **Meetings.** Are there meetings or training sessions for **classroom** volunteers at your child's school? Read the PTA newsletter, call the principal's office or ask the teacher about this possibility.
- ❖ **Do you have a special skill?** Are you a computer expert or perhaps a teacher yourself? Can you teach music or do you speak a foreign language fluently? Let your child's teacher know so she can plan a special time for you.
- ❖ **Remember you are counted on.** If you can't make it, let the teacher know as soon as possible so she can find a replacement or rearrange the day.
- ❖ **Arrive a little early** so you can sign in at the office and get a **classroom-volunteer** pass, if needed. Don't forget to sign out when you leave.

In the classroom

- ❖ **Keep information confidential.** If you overhear anything personal about a student, keep it to yourself. What you hear in the **classroom** should stay there. After all, you wouldn't want your child gossiped about, would you?
- ❖ **Know the classroom rules.** What are the teacher's rules for the students about getting a drink, using the restroom, sharpening pencils, roaming the **classroom**? You should know them so you can direct children if asked.
- ❖ **Observe.** Does the teacher run a quiet or active **classroom**? Keep these traditions even if they are contrary to your own style.
- ❖ **What should children call you?** Parent volunteers are often referred to as Mr., Ms. or Mrs. when in the class. Likewise, even if you are on a first-name basis with the teacher, refer to her by her last name in front of the students.

Volunteering success

- ❖ **Use names.** Call the students you are working with by their first name.
- ❖ **Listen.** Encourage interaction when appropriate. Work across from the student so you can talk to each other. Use eye contact.
- ❖ **Praise.** Even students who are slow to learn can shine when encouraged. As a volunteer in my son's class, I cheer slower students on by finding small things they do well, for instance, "You have such nice handwriting."

- ❖ **Present positive alternatives.** Avoid negative speak. "If you clear your mind of other things, you will be able to focus on this math equation" instead of "You never pay attention so you can't solve the problem."
- ❖ **Be observant.** Watch how the students work. Get to know when they need assistance and when you should hold back. Doing children's work for them is not helpful in the long run; being there to assist and guide is.
- ❖ **Be flexible.** Be prepared to do what the teacher needs when you arrive. You might have been told you would help with reading, but cutting paper stars is more of an immediate necessity. Keep a perspective: Your role is to help free up the teacher's time so she can teach.