

FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN***Why is it important for my child to be at school every day, on time?***

- Your child's school is dedicated to helping your son or daughter develop the spiritual, intellectual, aesthetic, emotional, social and physical capabilities to live fully and to meet the future challenges of adult roles and responsibilities.

Is this what you want for your child? Most parents would emphatically answer, "Yes!". The school can best contribute to your child's education and development when you form a partnership with them.

- As parents you have many responsibilities towards your child. One responsibility is to ensure that your child is in school every day, ready to learn. In fact, it is the law. The Provincial Education Act states that every child between the ages of 6 and 16 is required to attend school every day from the first school day in September until the last school day in June.
- Parents and schools can work together to keep kids in school. One of the most important first steps is for parents to become aware of the dangers that school **absenteeism** poses to a child's success in school and later in life.
- When students miss school, they fall behind. When your child comes home from school after an absence and tells you that he didn't miss anything when he was away yesterday, remember: He was away. He cannot begin to know what he missed during the hours the class was together.

Each school day a teacher presents new material that builds on the work given the previous day. When students return after an absence, they must catch up. For students who are not strong, independent workers, this can be difficult. Even strong students will find it progressively more difficult to do their best as the gaps in their knowledge and the need to catch up increases with every absence.

- **Arriving at school on time does make a difference.** Your children learn the importance of punctuality from the example you set.

Insist that the kids leave the house in time to arrive at school at least 5 or 10 minutes before the bell. The time spent in the school yard before school is a transition time that allows your child to reconnect with classmates and to refocus on school issues. Lining up to enter the school with the rest of the class allows your child to become part of the group and to ease into the routines of school.

The first few minutes in the classroom are critical. During these minutes the teacher deals with the many issues that individual students share – just like the busy excitement of a group of relatives getting together for a visit. And the teacher eases the students into the business of learning with a number of routine opening activities. When your child arrives even five minutes late, it is like arriving at a family gathering when everyone else is already seated at the table. You would have missed some important information and you might feel a little ‘outside’ the group.

- If you are thinking of taking your child out of school for a week or more, reconsider. Most children cannot afford to miss a week or more of class work.
- Success at school helps children engage in learning. Children who miss school and then fall behind tend to miss more school. These children risk becoming frustrated and ‘giving up on school’. In fact, the process of dropping out of school begins very early in the lives of some children. It can start when a child misses school days without sufficient reason and then develops the idea that attendance is optional. At the same time, the student becomes discouraged with his or her poor academic achievement and feels even less like going to class. Would you feel like going to work if you were graded every day on how well you did your job, and many days you received a disappointing grade? Set your child up for success by insisting that he or she attend school daily, and on time.
- The habit of **non-attendance** established in elementary school typically continues into secondary school. By the time your child is in high school, he or she will have more independence and you will have less influence. Begin now to set the standard that every school day is compulsory, even on days when your child has a headache, is not ready for a test, or is tired because everyone stayed up late for a family function. Consider too, the messages you send about your own attitudes toward missing work or using sick days.
- While some children may feign illness or beg to stay home because they feel that they do not fit in with their classmates, other children are gradually excluded by their peers as their irregular attendance makes them increasingly marginal to the social group. Socially isolated children are often chosen as targets by bullies, providing the child with one more reason to avoid school.

FACT SHEET FOR PARENTS OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN***What can I do to help my child attend school every day, on time?***

- Make a solid commitment to do whatever it takes to ensure that your child attends school every day, on time.
- Children who are organized and can follow rules are more successful in school. Establish regular and consistent routines for getting ready for school in the morning, for mealtimes, homework, chores and bedtime.
- Memory and concentration are known to deteriorate when children (and even adults!) are tired. Make sure that your child has plenty of sleep with a bedtime appropriate for your child's age. Experts suggest that 4-6 year olds require 11 hours of sleep in every 24 hour period. Older children require 9 to 10 hours per night.
- Establish routines while your children are young. If at all possible, place the phone, television and computer in a room other than your child's bedroom. You may be able to ensure that your four to ten year old goes to bed and stays there, but many a pre-teen and adolescent is up until one or two in the morning talking on the phone, chatting on-line, or watching television. After a child is used to having a phone, TV or computer in the bedroom, most parents of teens find it very difficult to take them away and impossible to supervise their use.
- Ensure that your child has a regular time to complete homework. Provide support and direction when necessary. Like so much else in life, homework completion is easier when it becomes a daily habit. Some families find it helpful if they establish the routine of scheduling homework immediately after something that happens every day, like immediately after school/snack or immediately after supper/dishes. In this way the child does not have the opportunity to fall into the habit of delaying homework until it is too late.
- Maintain positive communication with your child's teacher and attend all parent/teacher interviews. Get involved in parent/school activities. Many studies have shown that children of parents who are involved with the school are less likely to miss school or to later quit school before graduation. Did you know that most school trips require parent volunteers? This is a great way to learn a lot about your child and his or her class.

- Talk with your children about their experience at school. Most likely, when you ask, “What did you do at school today?” the answer is a predictable, “Nothing.” Instead ask a more specific question, which is easier if you are in contact with the teacher and know what the class is doing, or if you are able to look at your child’s notebooks. A question like, “Tell me about the painting you did today?” (to a kindergarten-age child) or “What’s happening in that book you are reading for your book report?” (to a grade seven age child) will more likely give you a fuller answer.

In talking to your child about school, one of your goals is to communicate that school is important. You will have more opportunities to hear how your child is really experiencing school if you listen carefully and do not judge or give advice when your child answers your questions about school. If you really feel that your child needs to hear what you think about something he or she tells you happened that day, ask first. It is respectful to ask, “Do you want an idea about another way that could have been handled?” Something like, “I wonder what the teacher was thinking or feeling when you did that?” might enable a child to look at a situation from another perspective, without feeling like he or she is receiving a lecture.

- Avoid activities and commitments that will cause your child to be away from school. This includes family vacations and appointments that can be scheduled outside of school hours.
- If your child refuses to go to school for no apparent reason, or you suspect that there is something more to the repeated ‘stomach aches’ or ‘sore throats’, talk to your child and the teacher to uncover possible reasons why your child might want to avoid school. Help your child problem-solve any difficulties that surface. If the issue persists, stay in touch with the school and continue to work to remove any obstacles to your child’s full commitment to his or her education.

**Remember that you have a responsibility to ensure that your child
attends each and every school day, on time.**