



Guide  
for School Personnel

# Participation of parents in the academic success of elementary school students

**Direction de l'adaptation scolaire  
et des services complémentaires  
Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport du Québec**

**Author**

Daniel Côté

**Coordination**

Annie Tardif

Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport

**Layout**

Lyne Trudelle

**English version**

Direction de la production en langue anglaise

Services à la communauté anglophone

Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport

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## INTRODUCTION

Youth Health was implemented in 1996 by the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec and developed in collaboration with the Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux. The purpose of the Youth Health project is to reinforce the measures taken by the school and its partners (parents, child-care services, CLSCs, municipalities, community organizations, etc.) to contribute to the personal and social well-being of students. It aims to incite students to take responsibility for their health and well-being.

Youth Health follows in the spirit of the Healthy Schools initiative from the World Health Organization. In many cases, this project is used to motivate and support the implementation of this initiative.

## CLASSROOM CONDUCT

The first component in Youth Health is classroom conduct, that is, a specific activity through which the teacher builds and maintains a setting of interpersonal relations that are conducive to learning.

The *Québec Education Program* mentions that socialization is an integral part of the school's mission. The program emphasizes that it is up to the school to "promote the fundamental values of democracy and prepare young people to become responsible citizens."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Québec, Ministère de l'Éducation, *Québec Education Program. Preschool Education, Elementary Education* (Approved Version) (Québec: Government of Québec, 2001), p. 3.

Considering that the classroom is a place where students learn to live together, the way that the teacher conducts the class indeed affects the acquisition and development of values and attitudes of democracy. It is difficult for students to develop the ability to assert themselves, to communicate effectively, to exercise critical judgment or to find solutions considered satisfactory by others if, every time they have a problem, the teacher takes full responsibility for solving it. In order to be real and tangible, the preparation of students to be citizens involves the teacher adopting a model for conducting the class in which students are invited to take an active role to improve the quality of life in the classroom and to organize it. This model encourages "interaction, participation, mutual support, respect for each person's point of view and abilities [and creates] situations in which participants make suggestions, discuss, argue, make decisions about major and minor issues, projects, responsibilities and common rules of functioning."<sup>2</sup>

Using such a model requires certain elements. For many teachers, the idea of conducting the class by calling on students to participate involves modifying teaching approaches and methods. As most teachers have learned the model in which students are considered recipients of a service and teachers reserve the exclusive right to lead the class, it is hard to believe that implementing the approach proposed in Youth Health does not call for any change.

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2. Québec, Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, *Éduquer à la citoyenneté, Rapport annuel 1997-1998 sur l'état et les besoins de l'éducation* (Québec: Government of Québec, 1998), p. 45. (free translation)

Participating means taking the floor, presenting one's point of view, ideas and talents, and taking one's place. In every group there are people who have difficulty taking their place, who, as mentioned in Youth Health, tend to behave like *mice*. This means that they allow others to dominate them and they remain virtually hidden in their mouse hole. We also see people who behave like *elephants*. As opposed to mice, elephants take up a lot of space and tend to dominate, or even crush others. Other people are easily influenced and are therefore like *sheep*. Because they follow elephants, sheep also take up a lot of space in a group. Lastly, others are like *birds* and are not afraid to assert themselves, even if their words or actions differ from what their friends say or think. These people know how to take their place in a group, but without crushing or following the others.

Applying the classroom conduct model proposed in Youth Health brings about demands not only on the teachers, but also on the students. Those who act like *mice* are encouraged to come out of their holes and to assert themselves more. Students who act like *sheep* are encouraged to show more independence and originality. Lastly, students who are generally considered to be *elephants* are encouraged to respect the space of *mice* who leave their mouse hole, and *sheep* who leave the flock.

Youth Health offers teachers an educational tool designed to help students meet the requirements of participation. It also proposes training and development activities on the strategies and tools to use in order to encourage the students to contribute to organizing and improving the quality of life in the classroom.

Despite all the importance attributed to it, conducting a class is not the conclusion of Youth Health in itself, but the starting point for reflection on the school's mission and promoting health.

### **IMPART KNOWLEDGE, FOSTER SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, PROVIDE QUALIFICATIONS**

The mission of schools in Québec consists of three dimensions: to provide instruction, to socialize and to provide students with qualifications. These dimensions cannot be applied separately. They make up the schools' mission, whose aspects are complementary and inextricably linked.

Since the act of learning is social, as are teaching and providing instruction, everything that applies to conducting the class also applies to how material is learned. The use of educational approaches that encourage students to participate, or to put effort into learning, is recommended to ensure that students are being properly prepared to become good citizens. The themes for thought on classroom conduct proposed in Youth Health quite naturally lead to highlighting educational approaches "such as cooperative education, project-based learning, differentiated instruction, learning by discovery or other educational approaches characterized by openness and dialogue that call for cooperation, participation and interaction and bring into play abilities for transaction, such as negotiation."<sup>3</sup>

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3. *Éduquer à la citoyenneté*, p. 45 (free translation).

Whether we are talking about life in the classroom (socialization) or learning (instruction), the requirements for participation or taking one's place are the same. In every classroom, there are students who, when learning, actually tend to behave like *mice* (do not really participate in the activities), *sheep* (do what is asked of them and no more, lack initiative and originality) or *elephants* (always want to be the best, answer in place of others, have trouble accepting that they made a mistake or accepting criticism).

The mission of providing qualifications means that schools "have a duty to make it possible for all students to achieve educational success and to facilitate their integration into society and the workplace at the end of their schooling, whatever the path they choose."<sup>4</sup> Naturally, it is unthinkable to try to meet this challenge without the participation of students; however, it is not easy. As we have seen, it requires changes in both the teachers and the students. The purpose of Youth Health is to guide the school and its partners in the implementation of these changes to ensure that students are seen and see themselves increasingly as actors responsible for the quality of life in their classroom, for their learning and for their health.

## HEALTHY SCHOOLS

The Healthy Schools initiative promotes the success, health and well-being of young people. The approach proposed to reach this goal is a comprehensive promotion and prevention strategy that begins at school. It

consists of a set of actions taken regularly by various partners (school, family, CLSC, community organizations and other partners) who work together.

It is comprehensive in that it acts simultaneously on the six key factors in young people's development (self-esteem, social competencies, lifestyle, safe behaviour, environment, prevention services) through various means that target four levels (young people, the school, the family and the community). It is a joint strategy because, given that it acts on several factors and at different levels, it is essential for the partners to collaborate in planning and taking consistent actions in a coordinated and harmonious fashion.

Creating conditions that encourage students to participate, helping students take their place while maintaining respect for others, and working on developing attitudes and values associated with being a citizen are also ways of taking action with a view to promoting good health. In fact, assertiveness, critical judgment, the abilities to communicate effectively and to calmly resolve conflicts are some of the skills that help students choose and maintain safe behaviour in all areas of life. In this perspective, Youth Health may be just one of the many actions taken in a healthy school.

While academic success cannot be attained without the participation of students, it would be difficult to achieve without the participation of parents.

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4. *Québec Education Program. Preschool Education, Elementary Education* (Approved Version), p. 3.

## PARENTAL PARTICIPATION

School is quite a challenge. It is not easy to get involved and put effort into the different socialization and learning experiences every day. It requires will, effort and perseverance, as well as a good dose of courage, even audacity. We are reminded by Meirieu<sup>5</sup> that “getting acquainted” with something or someone almost inevitably generates certain uneasiness or fears (of rejection, of ridicule, of making a mistake).

To increase their chances of meeting this challenge, students need the participation of their parents. We now know that when parents take an active role in their child’s education, the children get better marks, are absent less often, have few behavioural problems, a more positive perception of the classroom and the school environment, self-regulating skills, better orientation toward employment and greater academic aspirations.<sup>6</sup> When parents put effort into their parental duties, value education and pass high aspirations on to their children, while imposing firm rules and demands and showing that they care, students increase their chances of success.<sup>7</sup>

Parental participation involves requirements not only for the parents, but also for the teachers, because establishing certain

conditions fosters a commitment from parents. These conditions will be examined later in this guide.

This support guide is designed to help teachers take a critical look at how they interact with the parents of their students. It also offers strategies, activities and tools to promote the participation of parents in the academic success of their children. It begins by discussing parents’ attitude toward the school and teachers’ attitude toward parents. It then examines what teachers can do to encourage an “actor” attitude in parents. The guide then deals with teachers’ leadership style and interpersonal relations in the classroom as well as tasks and activities offered to parents.

Most of the tools and activities suggested in this guide have been tested by teachers of the Commission scolaire de la Côte-du-Sud. Their cooperation was very helpful and we would like to express our sincerest thanks. We would also like to express our gratitude to the Direction régionale de la Capitale-Nationale and the Direction régionale de la Chaudière-Appalaches of the Ministère de l’Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, which funded the design and drafting of this support guide, thanks to the Fonds de développement coopératif.

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5. Meirieu, Philippe, *L’école et les parents, la grande explication*. (Plon, 2000), p. 162.
  6. Deslandes, Rollande and Richard Bertrand, *La création d’une véritable communauté éducative autour de l’élève : une intervention cohérente et des services mieux harmonisés*, Research report, (Québec: CQRS/MEQ, 2001), p. 6. (free translation)
  7. Québec, Conseil de la famille et de l’enfance, *Pour une plus grande complicité entre les familles et les écoles*. (Québec: Government of Québec, 2000), p. 22.

## 1 A QUESTION OF ATTITUDE

*Participate* is clearly an action word. When asked to define it, the words *involvement*, *collaboration*, *contribution*, etc. come to mind. Parental participation in children’s academic success involves taking action, ensuring that they eat well and get enough sleep, supervising homework time, talking to them about school (the class, their

classmates, the teachers, future projects), reacting to their marks by encouraging them, complementing them and inciting them to do better, and establishing good ties with the school and the teachers.

In order to take action, it is necessary for parents to see themselves as actors and to feel that they are perceived as such. Studies indicate that understanding one's role as a parent is the best predictor for parents deciding to get involved at school. In other words, the more parents believe that they should be involved in their children's education, the more involved they become.<sup>8</sup>

Therefore, participating is not only a matter of taking action. It is primarily a question of parents' attitude toward the school or the teachers' attitude toward the parent.

### 1.1 Parents' attitude toward the school

Like teachers, parents are not a homogenous group. Given their different experiences, expectations and needs, it goes without saying that not all parents have the same attitude toward the school. Most parents come from a society in which the welfare state encouraged professionals to take charge of individual, family and community problems. We can therefore presume that some parents have a tendency to adopt a spectator attitude toward the school, rather than an actor attitude.

Most of us have been raised with the concept of a helping-helped relationship that manifests as an attitude of submission toward an omnipotent authority figure. The

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8. *La création d'une véritable communauté éducative autour de l'élève : une intervention cohérente et des services mieux harmonisés*, p. 8.

traditional role of a person who needs help is to present the helping expert a problem and wait passively for a solution. Conversely, the role of the person who helps is to study the situation and then provide the solution. This is what we all learned at school and what is reinforced every time we go to the doctor, to a lawyer, to an architect, in short, to all those professionals we consult during the course of our lives.<sup>9</sup>

While it is true that the involvement of parents made it possible to improve school transportation safety and to create school lunch and daycare services,<sup>10</sup> we should not think that the perceptions and representations carried over from the period of the welfare state do not influence the attitude of many parents. As mentioned earlier, parental commitment is linked to requirements, including the adjustment of parents' approaches and methods from a period in which it was strongly encouraged that school professionals take charge of education.

### 1.2 Teachers' attitude toward parents

Parental participation in the academic success of their children also calls for a change in the attitude of teachers. Since they share with parents the same perceptions and representations promoted by the welfare state, it is not surprising that some parents tend to adopt a passive attitude toward the school due to the fact that teachers do not always show much openness to their participation. "As such, the school often speaks out of both sides of its mouth with regard to parental support. It asks parents to

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9. Adapted from: Heap, Ken. *La pratique du travail social avec les groupes*. (Les Éditions ESF, 1987), p. 27.

10. Adapted from: *Pour une plus grande complicité entre les familles et les écoles*, p. 21.



help with its task of educating and to feel responsible for the academic success of their children, but at the same time, it often makes parents feel like they are not doing things “as they should be done,” that they are incompetent and, therefore, it would be better not to intervene to prevent causing any confusion in the child’s mind.”<sup>11</sup>

Teachers “know that they need parents’ support to see their work through. However, many have trouble establishing a reciprocal relationship with parents.”<sup>12</sup>

The welfare state gradually weakened the family with regard to its role, trust in its own resources, its feeling of competency and its educational responsibilities. In fact, as the Conseil supérieur de l’éducation (cited by Goupil) states, the school today has to deal with parents who feel less competent than in the past and need to be increasingly reinforced and strengthened.<sup>13</sup> To do this, it is vital to embark on an empowerment initiative with parents.

Empowerment consists in encouraging individuals to take control of their lives and to take responsibility. “This process is the obvious solution to allow parents to take full control of their children’s education and to make use of their experiences and innate qualities as the natural educators of their children.”<sup>14</sup>

Implementing this empowerment process must begin with a change of attitude in teachers. From this perspective, we respect the principle according to which the first step in increasing parental participation consists of “shifting attention from what the parents don’t do to what could be done differently in the schools.”<sup>15</sup>

To encourage parents to adopt an “actor” attitude, teachers must first and foremost stop perceiving parents as consumers of services, or as people who expect the school to assume full responsibility for educating their children. Perceptions guide attitudes; therefore, if parents are perceived as people passively waiting for the school to find solutions to their problems, it is highly likely that they will be treated as such, and this will not help to promote empowerment.

As we will see later, the leadership style of teachers, i.e. how they handle relations with parents, also influences parental participation. Teachers encourage parents to adopt an “actor” attitude when they show their ability to take action (confirmed leadership) while boosting parents’ feeling of competence (shared leadership).

## 2 TEACHER LEADERSHIP

By the very nature of their occupation, teachers have a leadership role to play with their students. They have the prime responsibility for creating and maintaining an atmosphere conducive to learning, and for helping the students develop the competencies outlined in the *Québec*

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11. Goupil, Georgette. *Communications et relations entre l’école et la famille*, (Montréal: Chenelière/McGraw-Hill, 1997), p. 10. (free translation)
  12. Adapted from: *Pour une plus grande complicité entre les familles et les écoles*, p. 15.
  13. Adapted from: *Communications et relations entre l’école et la famille*, p. 8.
  14. Québec, Conseil de la famille et de l’enfance, *L’école et les familles : de son ouverture à leur implication*, (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 1995), p. 27. (free translation)

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15. *La création d’une véritable communauté éducative autour de l’élève : une intervention cohérente et des services mieux harmonisés*, p. 9. (free translation)

*Education Program.* One of the primary expectations of parents is that their children be entrusted to teachers who have the necessary competencies to exercise their duties, or to take the driver's seat, so to speak. When you get on a bus, you expect the driver to know how to drive and where he or she is going. These are the basic conditions for joining the trip.

The same can be said for parents' attitude toward the school. It is hard to expect them to collaborate if they do not feel that the teachers are motivated and competent. From their initial contact with parents, teachers must assert their leadership, that is, show through their behaviour that they have the skills required for teaching, especially communication and organization skills.

## 2.1 Communication

Although it is important, as mentioned in the introduction, to use a classroom conduct model as well as approaches that incite students to exchange ideas, interact and participate, the fact remains that an important part of a teacher's job is to convey information. Because parents play a similar role in their family responsibilities, they suspect that, to successfully have a group of 25 or 30 students hear and understand what teachers are saying for 180 days in the classroom, teachers need communication skills. At a parent-teacher meeting at the beginning of the school year, for example, it is to the teacher's advantage to keep certain communication principles in mind.

### *Verbal communication*

When addressing a group, the message conveyed must be **clear, evocative, short** and **funny**.

### **Clear**

A clear message is one that a person has taken the time to properly construct. The subject is mentioned at the start to ensure that everyone quickly knows what the message is about. It is then developed in steps that are linked by a thread that gives the message meaning and coherence. If we make sure that this thread appears clearly and no one loses sight of it throughout the delivery, there are strong chances that the message will be understood.

In order for the message to be clear, the speaker must also pay attention his or her vocabulary. Abbreviations (SHSMLD, PPO, ICT, etc.) and professional jargon (summative evaluation, cross-curricular competencies, etc.) should be avoided, unless an explanation is provided. Using professional jargon can not only make the message unclear but, in some cases, it also reinforces the parents' feeling of incompetence, which could encourage them to adopt a passive attitude toward the school.

It is important to educate parents when addressing them, and to make professional jargon comprehensible by using analogies that simplify the message without altering it. Simplifying the complex and not complicating the simple—is that not one of the essential roles of a teacher?

### **Evocative**

A message is evocative when it generates an image in the recipient's mind. People understand when they "see" what the other person is saying. The image is therefore a key element of verbal communication.

Examples, anecdotes and analogies are very useful for evoking images. These methods

are even more effective when they are presented in story form, that is, by giving details and making the message interesting. The stories people remember the most are those that were told to them.

### **Short**

Since both children and adults have relatively limited attention spans, messages conveyed through the lecture approach should be brief. Although the validity of this principle is recognized, there seems to be some difficulty in putting it into practice. As a matter of fact, at the initial information meeting for parents, teachers often dominate the conversation for 75, 80 or 90 minutes.

Some claim that it is difficult to keep messages brief, given the amount of information to pass on. Before coming to the conclusion that it is impossible to keep things brief, it is important to remember that lectures are not the only way to pass on information. Other methods, such as written documents, hypothetical situations and group discussions could be useful. We will discuss these later. We should perhaps also ask ourselves whether all the information given at the initial parent-teacher meeting is necessary.

### **Funny**

Laughter is contagious. It brings people closer together and helps create an atmosphere of trust, attentiveness and openness toward others. Although it is not magic, humour is undoubtedly beneficial to communication.

When using humour in the classroom, the fear most frequently expressed by teachers is that of losing control of the class. Students sometimes take it too far. For some, it is as if

the teacher, by making a joke, is opening the door to extremes. They get excited and worked up and cannot stop. This quite often leads to the drastic consequence of humour being banned in the classroom.

However, it is possible to learn to have fun in the classroom without losing control. This is learned in small steps and, as with any other learning, it takes patience from the teacher and practice from the students. Teachers must try again and again to let the students learn to have fun in the classroom, knowing that the teacher is in control. Despite all the effort, there is no guarantee of success. In fact, the only sure thing is that, if humour is banned after the first offence, the students will never learn.

The nervous feeling most teachers get when meeting with parents probably explains in large part why there is not much laughter during those meetings. True, it is not necessarily funny (pardon the pun) for teachers to stand in front of 30 adults they hardly know and who are expecting to be informed, reassured, encouraged and impressed.

Although these meetings are certainly much less stressful for parents than for the teacher, we must not think that parents are completely at ease. They have their own uncertainties: Will the meeting be long? Will we be asked to introduce ourselves in front of everyone? Is the teacher nice, reserved or cold? What are his or her expectations of us?

Teachers' nerves and parents' insecurity can be detrimental to communication. As shown above, preparing a message without creating a favourable atmosphere can lead to failure. Humour can, however, help create the desired climate of ease. It is important to

understand that the teacher is not a stand-up comic, with the parents laughing and slapping their thighs. The idea is to take time to warm up the atmosphere and put everyone at ease. Some ways to do this include giving examples of funny past experiences with the students, simplifying ideas to be better understood, breaking the ice using enjoyable activities, such as those outlined in the appendix of this document, and being spontaneous and available while having fun.

### ***Non-verbal communication***

Communication also goes beyond words. Non-verbal communication (gestures, posture, looks, etc.) also conveys information; some even say that non-verbal language is the most powerful form of communication. Those who suggest judging people by their actions rather than their words surely think so.

Non-verbal communication is a broad, complex subject that deserves much more attention than we are able to give it here. For now, we will limit ourselves to some basic principles that should be respected when addressing a group.

### **Posture**

A speaker's posture definitely conveys an image to the audience, and an image is worth a thousand words. What image is a teacher giving to parents by staying seated at the desk during the entire lecture? What message do they receive when a teacher addresses them sitting on a desk or pacing back and forth?

When addressing a group, it is best to stand straight up, balanced, arms at the side (to help concentration).

### **Gestures**

When someone wants to communicate but does not know the language, he or she uses gestures to be understood. Hands can speak, and it is to our advantage to use them, even if we speak the language.

Speakers who address a group with folded arms or hands in their pockets are depriving themselves of a very useful communication tool. By keeping their arms at their sides, speakers leave their hands free to help convey the message.

### **Look**

Eye contact promotes communication significantly. This is true whether addressing an individual or a group.

The problem when addressing a group is that it is not possible to establish eye contact with more than one person at a time. To get around this, speakers should frequently scan the group or stand to include as many people as possible in their field of vision.

### **Position**

A person's position in a space, that is, being physically close to or far from the audience, is another factor that influences effective communication. There are three zones of communication: social, personal and intimate.

The **social zone** has the greatest distance between people. Individuals are close enough to make contact, but far enough apart to protect themselves. People use this zone when they are not completely comfortable, or when they are uncertain or worried. This may explain why many parents choose to sit near the back of the

class during parent-teacher meetings. People tend to keep their distance in unfamiliar situations.

While the social zone offers the necessary distance for observing and analyzing, the **personal zone** provides a good distance for listening and talking. Contact is more personal in this zone, as its name suggests. For example, a teacher sitting at his or her desk who gets up and stands in front of the first row of students goes from the social zone to the personal zone. People usually move from the social to the personal zone when they want to understand the discussion or to be understood.

The **intimate zone** is one of closeness and sharing. A teacher who goes up to a student and puts his or her hand on the student's shoulder enters the intimate zone, as does a mother who hugs her crying child. The reasons for moving from one zone to another are affective: to encourage, motivate, congratulate, calm, console, etc.

One zone is not necessarily better than another. They are all useful and important in their own way. The secret is in knowing the right time to change zones, but it is nevertheless difficult to figure out. Since the time it takes to feel comfortable enough to change zones varies from one person to another, strict rules on where to position oneself when addressing a group cannot be established. However, two recommendations can be made.

The first is to be aware of the different zones of communication and be sensitive to them. The only way to do this is to know how to listen to the inner voice and to the group, which is an essential quality in any good communicator. Being attentive to personal

feelings and to what goes on in the group is helpful for determining when to get closer to or move away from the audience.

The second is that it is preferable to move around when talking to a group. For example, it is very likely that a teacher who stands at the blackboard for 10, 15 or 20 minutes will lose the attention of certain students, especially those at the back of the class. Conversely, a teacher who moves around frequently is certainly interesting, although he or she could be too intrusive for some. Losing the audience's attention is detrimental to communication.

### Written communication

Strictly speaking, discussing the leadership of teachers, and more specifically the skills expected in a leader, should not lead to a discussion of written communication. However, given that it is a method frequently used with parents, it cannot be overlooked, especially because what goes for verbal communication also goes for written communication. In short, the message must be clear, evocative, short and funny.

In general, according to Georgette Goupil, the principles to respect when writing a message to parents are quite similar to those that apply to verbal communication.

The author's recommendations are:

- Determine the purpose of the letter: a welcome to the new school year, sending information, a special occasion (e.g. Christmas), end of the school year, etc.
- Use easy-to-understand vocabulary and avoid professional jargon.
- Avoid using abbreviations.

- Make the tone of the letter positive and encouraging.
- Avoid adopting an expert attitude.
- Structure the letter to facilitate its comprehension; present each subject in a different paragraph.
- Organize the letter so it is easy to read; if necessary, use titles and subtitles.<sup>16</sup>

Using the results of a study on the subject, Ms. Goupil stresses that personalized letters are read more often than non-personalized letters. This an important reason to add some humour to messages (press release, notice of meeting, information sheet) intended for parents. Adding a bit of humour to a text is akin to winking at the reader. Humour draws people closer and fosters more personal contact.

Once again, the goal is not to make parents roar with laughter. It is simply better to write livelier messages since most notices sent to parents are rather conservative.

Add some imagination to the message. Use analogies, digress, add images such as drawings, caricatures or photos. In short, be original, be a bit less impersonal!

The appendix to this guide presents some examples of messages intended for parents written in a humorous style.

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16. Adapted from: *Communications et relations entre l'école et la famille*, p. 79.

### Tip

You must send a letter to parents asking them to complete and return a slip. To increase the response rate, organize a contest. For example, the name of one student who returns the slip will be drawn at random to participate in another physical education class or to sit in the teacher's chair for half a day. The reward could also be collective. For example, classes with a response rate of at least 80% will get a longer recess.

## 2.2 Organization

Teachers have a leadership role to play and their approach can influence parents' attitude toward the school. People are usually more inclined to work with leaders who know where they are going and have the necessary skills to get there. This is why it is important for teachers to show their leadership skills, starting from their initial contact with parents.

A leader is expected to be a good communicator and to succeed in being heard and understood. A leader should also have the necessary skills to organize a group or, in the particular case of teachers, to organize the classroom.

### Organizing life in the classroom

Without organization, life in the classroom would quickly become impossible, and nothing good comes from anarchy. Parents know this, which is why they hope that their children have teachers who are capable of organizing the classroom properly.

Teachers can reassure parents by telling them, at the initial information meeting, about the rules of classroom conduct,

planning (schedule, routines for the beginning and end of the school day, work deadlines, busy times in the week, etc.), the responsibilities and tasks entrusted to the students (plant waterer, reading area monitor, timekeeper, moderator, team leader at recess, etc.) as well as the appreciation activities used (as a reward, to develop self-esteem, to develop a feeling of belonging, daily gestures of welcome, etc.).

Each of these points can be presented briefly. In fact, most parents are not looking to know in detail how things are run in the classroom. They simply want to know and, especially, to feel that proper functioning of the class is an important concern for the teacher. Given that the parents will realize this more if teachers practise what they preach, it is very worthwhile for teachers to respect the following principles when leading the information meeting:

- Greet each person warmly by making personal contact (handshake, handing out agenda, etc.).
- Make sure everyone is seated comfortably.
- Draw up an agenda and following it.
- Respect the schedule (starting and finishing on time).
- Start by welcoming everyone, going over the objectives, the agenda and the length of the meeting, and taking the time to introduce himself or herself.
- Refocus the discussion on the initial objective every so often.
- Be attentive to each person's contribution.
- Allow those who ask to speak to do so, if appropriate

- Emphasize the relevance of a contribution through words, gestures or repetition.
- Be tactful in restoring order if some dwell too long on an issue that is not on the agenda and does not concern the entire group; if necessary, suggest the discussion be continued after the meeting.
- Recognize his or her limits, errors and past difficulties.
- Give everyone a meeting evaluation form (see the example in the appendix) to complete at home and return to the school.
- End the meeting by thanking everyone for attending and participating, and sum up the follow-up to the issues discussed as well as the date of the next meeting.
- Say goodbye to everyone by making personal contact once again (handshake, handing out the evaluation form, etc.).
- Ask those who wish to speak in private to wait until he or she has said goodbye to those leaving.

### **Organizing instruction**

While parents hope that their children's teacher is capable of ensuring proper classroom functioning, it goes without saying that they also hope the teacher has the necessary skills and knowledge to help the students succeed. Therefore, the planned activities, the material to be used and the evaluation of learning must be on the agenda for the initial information meeting.

As mentioned above, it would be wrong to believe that teachers must explain the organization of instruction to parents in

detail in order to reassure them. Teachers must practise what they preach: it is better to structure the information meeting to take into account the different learning styles of the parents.

Therefore, avoid having meetings with only one structure: the lecture. Use other methods such as group discussions, hypothetical situations, individual exercises and handling materials. In other words, show that you are a teacher!

### 2.3 Sharing leadership

One of the main reasons parents attend the first information meeting of the school year is that they want to see “what the teacher is like.” They want to see whether he or she has the leadership skills required to exercise the position: to be capable of being heard and understood, organizing a group and creating learning conditions that encourage as many students as possible to succeed. To reassure parents, teachers should talk about how the classroom operates and how learning is organized. More particularly, they should demonstrate through their approach to organizing and leading the meeting that they have the expected skills. In other words, the teachers assert their leadership.

It is too much to expect the cooperation of parents if teachers do not manage to win their trust. Therefore, the assertion of the teacher’s leadership is an important element in the process of empowering parents, but it is still insufficient. It could even lead to the opposite of the desired outcome. If teachers limit themselves to demonstrating that they have the necessary skills to adequately perform their task, they run the risk of reinforcing the perception they learned

during the era of the welfare state that education should be the responsibility of professionals, thereby encouraging parents to adopt an attitude of passive expectation toward the school.

To encourage parents to adopt an “actor” attitude, teachers must not only assert their leadership, but also create conditions that increase parents’ feeling of competence, therefore promoting the sharing of leadership. The next chapter will examine one of these conditions: establishing and maintaining a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere.

## 3 ATMOSPHERE

The relationship aspect is very important in the process of empowering parents. Because a person’s perception influences his or her attitudes, it is hard to develop a feeling of competence in parents without first establishing and maintaining a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere in which they feel recognized and appreciated.

There is no rule or formula for creating such an atmosphere. In fact, rules and formulas in the field of human relations are more often detrimental than beneficial. Using everyday observations as a basis, sensitivity to others seems to really help establish a relaxing, welcoming atmosphere.

The previous chapter examined the issue of parents hoping that their children’s teacher is competent and motivated. Parents also hope that the teacher will be sensitive, attentive and available to the students and to them.

True, these are great virtues, but they can be expressed quite simply through gestures that



welcome, show appreciation for and recognize. These small gestures are meaningful and are often noticed and appreciated more than one might think.

It is also true that such small gestures require time. To take this time, teachers need a minimum amount of faith, silliness and enthusiasm, without which these gestures would be perceived as meaningless. “A parent-teacher relationship is a matter of faith. It is important to believe that each one needs the other and that each can bring something essential to the other. The greater this conviction, the more meaningful the steps will be.”<sup>17</sup>

The following pages present a few examples of activities of welcome, appreciation and recognition that help to create and maintain a warm, relaxed atmosphere with parents. Because parents are as sensitive to the small gestures made toward their children as those made to them, these activities are designed for both students and parents.

### 3.1 Welcoming, appreciating and recognizing students

A warm, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom is first and foremost created when teachers are thoughtful toward their students. Greetings, encouragement, winks, kind words and thanks are just a few ways to let students know that they are important and appreciated, especially if they have a tendency to behave like *mice*.

However, daily gestures lose some of their flavour and effectiveness over time. It is

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17. *Communications et relations entre l'école et la famille*, p. 5 (free translation).

common knowledge that habit can adversely affect emotional relationships.

To improve the classroom atmosphere, original activities that welcome, show appreciation for and recognize students should be organized from time to time. Most teachers already organize similar activities for special occasions, such as Christmas, St. Valentine's Day or birthdays. Such activities are often held for no special reason, only because it is important to take the time to remind students in a special way that they are appreciated. Furthermore, such activities should be organized to mark milestones in students' lives, such as their first day of elementary or school or high school, and to mark the high points in the school year including back to school, the end of the term and returning after the holidays or March break.

These milestones and high points are important not only for the students but also for their parents. Think of the excitement that back-to-school stirs up in most families. Considering that families become more sensitive to their children's experiences at school, the activities organized to mark the milestones in students' lives or the high points in the school schedule usually have a very positive effect on school-family relations.

Below are a few examples of activities to welcome, show appreciation for and recognize students. Their purpose is to help establish a relationship of trust with parents.

#### ***Hi, this is your teacher speaking!***

*The day before the first day of school, teachers call each student to introduce themselves and to say that they are excited*

*to meet them. The students usually run to tell their parents the news. They appreciate the call as much as their child does.*

### ***Welcome aboard!***

*On the morning of the first day of school, one staff member (principal, teacher, secretary, caretaker, etc.) boards each school bus bringing in students. Every time the school bus stops to pick up students, this person gets off to give each student a warm handshake. He or she greets any parents before getting back on the bus.*

### ***Welcome ceremony***

*On the occasion of the parents' meeting, a welcome ceremony is organized for students in their first year of school, namely students in kindergarten and in other years who are new to the school. The ceremony begins with an introduction of each student. One by one, they are called to the front of the room, with their parents, to receive a welcome letter printed on parchment paper with the signatures of all the students and staff of the school in the background. In this way, they are taking a solemn oath to help make the school an enriching living environment in which each person is recognized, accepted and appreciated.*

### ***Thirty thanks***

*The students are asked to help make large thank-you cards that will be distributed with the report cards. At that time, each student will receive a card containing a message of thanks from each classmate. The parents and teacher can also write messages in the card.*

*To begin, each student receives a package of yellow self-stick sheets, enough for one sheet per classmate, as well as a list of the students in the class.*

*The students must number each sheet they receive. On sheet no. 1, they write the reason they want to thank the student whose name is at the top of the list. There are many reasons for thanking a classmate: his or her good mood, dynamic personality, collaboration, openness, generosity, discretion, etc.*

*Students repeat this for each student on the list. On the sheet bearing the number that corresponds to their own name on the list, they simply write their name. Once students have finished, the teacher collects the sheets and thanks the students.*

*The teacher then makes a card for each student in the class, alone or with the help of some students. A piece of Bristol board folded in half works well. On the front, the teacher writes "Thank You" followed by the student's name. He or she places the self-stick sheets with the messages from the students on the inside.*

*When report cards are being handed out, the teacher gives each parent a blue self-stick sheet and invites them to write a reason why they find it important to thank their child. The teacher does the same with a green sheet. The parents and teacher then glue their sheets into the card of the student in question. If students are present when report cards are handed out, they will receive their card. If not, their parents will give it to them at home.*

### 3.2 Welcoming, appreciating and recognizing parents

Parents come to school much more often nowadays than in the past. For example, parents whose children use the school daycare service come into the school every day or almost every day. If they do not come in when they drop off their children in the morning, they certainly enter when picking them up at the end of the day. Naturally, it is impossible to discuss establishing a warm, relaxed atmosphere with parents without mentioning the daily contact many have with the daycare staff.

As mentioned in the previous section, the important thing is the attention given to the individual. When parents are greeted with a warm smile, are listened to, receive polite answers to their questions, do not receive only negative comments about their child, are thanked for listening and for their collaboration and are bid a warm goodbye, they feel like coming back again. This is also true when they deal with other school staff (secretary, principal, teacher, psychologist, etc.). The way parents are greeted when they call the school is another important point to consider in school-family relationships. In this respect, personalized voice mail for each teacher is a good idea.

Some schools have their outgoing voice mail message recorded by a student:

*Hi, my name is Stephen. I'm in Mrs. Smith's second grade class. Everyone at the school is busy now. If you're calling to let us know that your child will be absent, say his or her name and the teacher's name after the beep. Otherwise, please leave your name and phone number; and don't worry, we'll call you back! Thank you.*

The setup of the premises also affects the atmosphere. Is the signage in the school sufficient and appropriate? Are the hallways and other places where parents are greeted welcoming? Are there chairs so parents can sit down while waiting for their children or the person they are meeting? Is there a bulletin board that might interest them, an exhibition of student photos and work, or a word of welcome with a short document on the importance for parents to participate in their children's education or in parent-teacher relations?

“Every risk taken to establish a parent-teacher relation is a captivating social story. In the beginning, it is actually a meeting of two people with different values, preoccupied with the message to convey, influenced by the prejudices that the school harbours about the environment and that the environment maintains toward the school. It is also a meeting of two people who are aware that the challenge—the success and happiness of the child—makes it worthwhile.”<sup>18</sup> (Bergeron-Ahern)

Furthermore, are individual meetings with parents held in a quiet place where it is possible to talk freely? If the meeting is held in the classroom, is the intercom turned off?

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18. *Communications et relations entre l'école et la famille*, p. 5 (free translation).

Are the chairs for parents an adequate size? All these little details contribute to the quality of a relationship. With time, everyone will probably get used to it, notice it less or forget some of these details.

It is therefore worthwhile to occasionally organize special activities to welcome, show appreciation for and recognize parents, such as the activities below.

### ***Welcome café***

*On the morning of the first day of school, when many parents drop off their children at the daycare service, the school might provide coffee... and a lid for those who don't have the time to stay.*

### ***Happy holidays***

*On the last day of school before the Christmas holidays, parents might be given an ornament to put in their Christmas tree when they go pick up their children at the daycare. For Mother's Day or Father's Day, they might receive a helium-filled balloon or a daffodil.*

### ***Family portrait***

*During a family activity (open house, potluck, exhibition, etc.), each family present may be invited to have a portrait done. A copy of the photo is sent to parents, and another is displayed at the school.*

### ***Souvenir! Souvenir!***

*Two or three times a year, parents receive a photo of their child taken in class, in the schoolyard, in the gymnasium or elsewhere, along with a short, positive comment about the child.*

### ***Thank-you card***

*A thank-you card signed by all the students is sent to parents who act as chaperones during a trip, who go to the school to talk about their career or a hobby, or who lend or repair equipment; in other words, parents who make a specific contribution to the class. A group photo could be included with the card.*

### ***Introduction activities and icebreakers***

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the initial meeting held with parents does come with a certain amount of stress. The largest part is the responsibility of the teacher, who must face around 30 parents filled with quite legitimate expectations. As for the parents, while they do not feel the pressure the teacher does, not all feel completely at ease seated in a classroom with other adults they do not know, listening to someone they have more or less heard about.

Quite often, unfortunately, people act as if the teacher's nervousness and the parents' discomfort did not exist. They get moving on the task as quickly as possible, thinking that the initial discomfort will go away on its own, which is rarely the case. If teachers want to feel comfortable quickly and make sure the parents feel comfortable as well, it is important to take the time to create a welcoming atmosphere.

The appendix contains a few examples of introduction activities and icebreakers that can help create a welcoming atmosphere.

As their name indicates, introduction activities are designed to introduce the students or parents attending the information meeting in a pleasant, original way. Most of these activities are also used as an excuse to give parents a word of welcome prepared by their child. And they can be helpful for taking attendance.

Icebreakers, meanwhile, are intended to help the parents (and any students in attendance) establish contact among themselves. These activities are more playful than introduction activities and call for more active participation (e.g. moving around, exchanging information, etc.). They help participants get to know each other more quickly.

The goal of introduction activities and icebreakers is to make the atmosphere more comfortable. Fun, humour and spontaneity should be a priority.

To encourage parents to adopt an “actor” attitude, teachers must not only assert their leadership, but also create conditions that increase parents’ feeling of competence, thereby promoting the sharing of leadership. One of these conditions is creating and maintaining a warm, relaxed atmosphere in which parents feel recognized and appreciated.

Because parents are sensitive to the small gestures made toward their children, the activities that welcome, show appreciation for and recognize students, particularly those that mark the major steps in their academic career and the high points in the schedule, usually have a very positive effect on

school-family relations. Naturally, parents are also sensitive to the small gestures intended for them. The way they are greeted every time they go to or call the school is also an important factor. In addition, kind, polite and available staff members, well laid-out spaces and selected activities to welcome, show appreciation for or thank them seem to be other elements that help to create and maintain a warm, relaxed atmosphere.

The next chapter examines another condition to fulfill in order to increase parents’ feeling of competence: adequately structuring the suggested tasks and activities for parents.

## 4 SUGGESTED TASKS AND ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

The atmosphere is not the only factor that influences parental participation. The types of tasks and activities suggested and the way they are organized are also a factor. To encourage as many parents as possible to participate, it is best to offer adapted, diversified activities that put the parents into a situation that calls for action and that involves the students.

### 4.1 Adapting the tasks and activities

The Québec family has changed a great deal in the past 50 years. It is no longer based on one model. There are several types of families nowadays, such as two-parent, single parent, blended, etc.

“It is not only the family composition that has changed, but also how each family functions. Women have traditionally been absent from the labour market, but most women now have paid jobs. This movement

has especially affected mothers. In 1996, the labour force participation rate of mothers and fathers in two-parent families were 67% and 88%, respectively. The participation rate of single mothers between 20 and 44 years of age with children under 16 has continually increased, rising to 65% in 1997 from 45% in 1976.”<sup>19</sup>

Families also differ in their way of life, their ethnic or cultural origin and their income, which are determining factors in this context.

“Children and teenagers in the year 2000 have families with changing, varied characteristics. The homogeneity that existed when the Québec school system was created no longer exists.”<sup>20</sup> In order to truly encourage parental participation, it is essential to adapt the suggested tasks and activities to the family realities of the 21st century.

A lack of time is most definitely part of the daily lives of many families. Commuting time, irregular work hours, and jobs that require frequent travel and overtime are just some of the reasons that explain why more and more parents have less time, especially when combined with the demands of family life.

Two things must be avoided with regard to this problem. The first is to ignore it, to expect from parents more or less the same thing that could have been expected of them in the 1960s and to be surprised when few actually participate. The second, conversely, is to be so concerned with their limited

availability that the teachers do not dare ask them anything, taking on and delegating their responsibilities instead.

The challenge lies in finding a way to recognize the time problem that many parents face, without taking away their responsibilities. One option is to organize the tasks and activities that involve parents to suit different schedules. For example, teachers who give their students a list of homework assignments on Monday to complete for Friday are adopting a method that provides greater flexibility time-wise than assigning homework and correcting it on a day-to-day basis. Similarly, teachers who adopt a Thursday-to-Friday work plan give students the opportunity to work on the weekend, if they wish. This method offers greater flexibility than the plan of assigning homework on Monday for correction on Friday. What’s more, a Thursday-to-Friday work plan allows parents who are absent during the week (e.g. because of shared custody or travel for work) to use the weekend to get up to date.

Another way to consider the fast-paced lifestyle of many parents and to allow those who are absent during the week to get up to date is to give them more time to sign report cards and other documents that discuss their children’s progress. Also, sending a copy of the report card and important documents to the mother and father separately, in the case of parents living apart, can help them assume their parental responsibilities. Other ways of facilitating parental participation include announcing the meeting dates in advance so they can mark them on their calendar, reminding them of the meeting a few days prior, offering to hand out report cards at different times during the day (morning, afternoon, evening) or suggesting

19. *Pour une plus grande complicité entre les familles et les écoles*, p. 6 (free translation).

20. *Pour une plus grande complicité entre les familles et les écoles*, p. 5 (free translation).

other solutions for parents who cannot attend the initial information meeting (e.g. another parent provides a summary of the meeting followed by a call from the teacher, scheduling an individual meeting with the teacher at another time, giving the parent a video recording of the meeting, etc.).

Other constraints aside from time must be considered when adapting parent tasks and activities to the realities of the 21st century.

In some schools, it is necessary to hire an interpreter to make sure that parents grasp the message intended for them. In other areas, where illiteracy is widespread, parents are given the telephone number of a voice mail box where they can find out the homework assignments given to the students or any other information about them. Moreover, clinics have been organized to help parents support their children in learning to read, write and do arithmetic.

#### **4.2 Diversifying the tasks and activities**

Not all parents see the school-family collaboration the same way. While some parents are prepared to get involved in the governing board, others are more interested in participating in a soccer game between parents and students or in repairing educational games.

No matter how small, parental participation is always preferred. It gives students a feeling of pride, and it is a way for parents to show their children that they are interested in their school experience. For teachers, it is an appreciated helping hand, a pat on the back, and an opportunity to create or maintain a relationship of trust with the parents.

These are good reasons to make sure that the suggested tasks and activities for parents are not only adapted, but also diversified. They must be adapted to accommodate parents who have time, travel, financial or other constraints. They must be diversified because parents have different areas of interest and talents, and the wealth of this diversity is waiting to be tapped.

The suggested activities for parents are often the same: chaperoning students on outings, participating in fundraising activities, helping out at the library, attending a lecture on parent-child relations. This may be why it is always the same parents who participate. To encourage as many parents as possible to participate, it is important to present a list of activities for parents at the beginning of the year, covering several areas of interest and skill: taking photos in the classroom or during outings, washing or mending doll clothing or the bibs worn in physical education classes, holding a media review on Africa, children in the world or parents' place at the school, for example, preparing food for an event or tasting, building birdhouses, giving cooking lessons, etc.

In order to benefit from the diversity of their talents and areas of interest, teachers must find ways to get to know the parents of their students better. One suggestion is to have the parents fill out a questionnaire on their interests (film, cars, computers, gardening, hunting, fishing, fashion, bird-watching, cartoons, astronomy, travel, etc.) and their hidden talents (musician, acrobat, magician, singer, imitator, disc jockey, painter, storyteller, costume designer, etc.). Another way is to ask the students to describe their parents, highlighting their talents and tastes, then have the parents confirm this information. It may also be worthwhile to

conduct an interview prepared and led by the students.

Other people, such as grandparents, brothers, sisters, godfather, godmother, etc., may also be important in a student's life. They might be given occasional roles at the school as well.

### 4.3 Placing parents in a situation of action and interaction

Parents might have different areas of interest and talents, but they do have some things in common: they prefer to take part in discussions rather than attend formal presentations where communication is one-way.

“The andragogical approach favours mutual respect and the involvement of participants. Group situations allow participants to compare their perception with that of others, to share knowledge and to have fun learning. (...) In fact, adult education uses active methods and calls upon the student's past experiences and knowledge.”<sup>21</sup>

In keeping with this approach, activities that foster parental involvement are adapted and diversified, putting parents into a situation of action and interaction. This is important to remember when planning the initial information meeting with parents.

Jacqueline Caron stresses that parents need real answers to practical questions and they (also) need space to talk about what they are

experiencing with their child.<sup>22</sup> It goes without saying that a good part of this meeting should be devoted to giving the parents information, and formal presentations are appropriate for that, but time for parents to talk to each other should also be scheduled.

In order to be fruitful, these discussion activities must be properly structured, with an effective trigger, open, relevant questions and some benchmarks to produce a clear synthesis and draw meaningful conclusions. Otherwise, discussions quickly lose interest and are a waste of time for everyone involved. The appendix contains a few examples of structured activities that may give rise to interesting discussions.

The principle of placing parents in a situation of action and interaction can be applied to activities other than the initial information meeting. For example, when a concert, a circus performance or other show is planned, invite parents to participate in exploration workshops hosted by the students 30 or 40 minutes prior to the show. At these workshops, parents can hold the instruments or materials, try simple experiments and talk with the performers. Or, for an exhibition of students' work that parents will attend, suggest that the students prepare interactive exhibitions: trivia game, handling the works of art, role-playing, etc. For a concert, why not have one or two songs that parents can sing along with?

21. Dion, Marie-Andrée and Michel Blais. *Éduquer ensemble, Guide pédagogique sur le suivi personnel et scolaire des élèves*. (Commission scolaire Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, 1992), p. 28-29 (free translation).

22. Caron, Jacqueline. *Quand revient Septembre...*, *Guide sur la gestion participative de la classe*. (Éditions de la Chenelière, 1994), p. 165 (free translation)



#### 4.4 Having the students help

Because parents are sensitive to their children's requests, the latter can try to influence them. Why do more parents usually attend a show put on by the students than a lecture given by a speaker?

Involving the students in the suggested activities for parents would be a good way to encourage parental participation. This obviously does not mean that the students must attend every time their parents are invited to the school. Sometimes it is nice to be in the company of just adults. But why not involve the students in organizing an activity that they do not have to take part in? The first information meeting of the year is a good example. The students could write a personalized letter inviting their parents to attend the meeting, decorate and set up the classroom especially for the occasion, write a word of welcome for parents to find at their desk, and prepare and conduct an interview with their parents to evaluate the meeting a few days afterward.

Students can even take part in the meeting through a video recording (e.g. doing activities in the classroom or preparing something special for the parents' meeting, such as a song or message of welcome, a special greeting, or the presentation of a particular project).

Students, especially those in Cycle Three, could attend the meeting and take an active part in leading it. They could be responsible for greeting the parents at the entrance, distributing the agenda, welcoming everyone at the beginning of the meeting, explaining how the classroom is organized (rules, schedule, high points of the year, responsibilities given to students, rewards),

taking photos during the meeting, presenting special projects, thanking the parents at the end of the meeting and distributing evaluation questionnaires.

It could be highly worthwhile for students to participate in the distribution of report cards and to present their achievements, difficulties, successes and the challenges they are accepting for the next phase. In this way, they could be made accountable for their learning, which can only be encouraged.

We would, however, like to make four brief recommendations:

- The meeting should be presented as an opportunity for students and their parents to discuss the students' achievements, difficulties, successes and challenges and the conditions that foster success: self-esteem, autonomy, priorities, etc. The appendix includes examples of activities designed to help students and parents discuss these conditions.
- Students must clearly understand that they are responsible for guiding the meeting, and they must be prepared. With help from the teacher, students must:
  - determine the order in which the topics will be discussed
  - select the achievements they want to present to their parents
  - prepare the necessary materials for a discussion on the conditions for success, if applicable

- plan a method of evaluating the meeting with their parents
- The teacher ensures that both the students and their parents are satisfied with the meeting. If necessary, he or she provides additional information.
- Parents who wish to meet the teacher without their child should have the opportunity to do so.

Communication between parents and children helps to prevent many problems. While this is true in theory, actually sitting down with the children to talk about their successes, mistakes, projects or dreams is something parents do not do as often as they might think or wish to. Parents and their children are busy people: parents with their jobs, marriages, family obligations, hobbies, and children with their friends, computers, skateboards and television shows. Without realizing it, family members may get too caught up in their own problems and lose sight of each other.

Parents and children need time and special occasions to get away from the everyday, to chat, to get closer or simply to have fun together. The school can give them such opportunities. The report card meeting, in particular, is a great example. Alone or in collaboration with the municipal recreation service or other organizations, the school could also create opportunities for parents and children. During Family Week, for example, it could organize an exhibition in which parents are invited to set up a stand with their children on the theme of their favourite family activities, or plan a soccer game or improv event between parents and children. At Christmas, a choir with different families could be organized.

## CONCLUSION

Learning is fun, stimulating and enriching, but also demanding. It requires time, effort, openness, perseverance, courage and determination; in other words, it is quite a challenge.

Given that the chances of students successfully meeting this challenge are much higher when parents get involved in their academic progress, the aim of this document is to show what can be done to encourage parents to participate.

Participating means taking part in the action, taking an active role. In order to increase parental involvement, it is important to explore ways to encourage parents to participate. It is best to offer adapted, diversified activities that put parents into a situation of action and interaction and that involve the students as well.

While the action itself, that is, the suggested tasks and activities and the way they are organized, influences parental participation, the atmosphere where this action takes place is also important. To create and maintain a warm, relaxed atmosphere, the following principles should be respected:

- *Make sure that every time parents come to or call the school, they are greeted by a kind, polite and available staff member.*
- *Set up the premises so they are pleasant and provide at least a minimum amount of comfort.*
- *Occasionally organize special activities to welcome, show appreciation for and thank parents.*

- *Mark milestones in the lives of students and the high points in the school year in a special way.*

In addition, parents want their children entrusted to competent, motivated teachers. Because this is a basic condition for parental collaboration, it is in the teachers' best interest to assert their leadership from the initial contact with parents, in other words, to show that they have the necessary skills to carry out their duties, especially with regard to communication and organization.

Parents also want their children's teacher to be sensitive, empathetic and open toward them and their children. Therefore, teachers must not only assert their leadership, but also show sensitivity, interest and openness in sharing this leadership with parents. This openness can be demonstrated in their approach to establishing a relationship and to structuring the suggested tasks and activities for parents.

In the end, it seems that many actions can promote parental participation. Not only can homeroom teachers take action, but other staff members as well, such as the principal, daycare staff members, secretaries, specialists and psychoeducator. Each person's contribution, no matter how small, counts and will count even more if people work together.

In fact, by not working together, each person's actions not only have a much weaker effect than joint, coordinated, complementary actions, but they often cause confusion, repetition and inconsistency. To encourage participation, each person's actions must be part of a whole, that is, of a school-wide plan.

This plan could include a code of ethics on the attitudes and gestures needed to make parents feel welcome, as well as the annual program of suggested activities for parents. The program should inform the homeroom teachers how their colleagues intend to lead the initial information meeting as well as the distribution of report cards. The purpose of this exercise is to ensure that parents hear, see and experience different yet complementary things from year to year. Special activities that aim to welcome, show appreciation for and thank parents, those that honour new students and graduates, and those that mark the high points in the school year should also be included in this program.

Being the parent of young students is fun, stimulating and rewarding, but also demanding. It requires time, effort, openness, perseverance, courage and determination; in other words, it is quite a challenge.

"If left to themselves, without support from the school, families in Québec find it difficult to assume their role and provide adequate support to their learning children. Because of this, many families are tempted to give up."<sup>23</sup>

The school can therefore take action to help parents, but it cannot do everything. If an entire village is needed to educate one child, then an entire village is needed to support the child's parents. The school-family relationship is giving way to a school-community relationship.

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23. *Pour une plus grande complicité entre les familles et les écoles*, p. 8 (free translation).

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## **Complementary activities to Chapters 1 to 4**

**Written messages intended for parents**

**CLASSIFIED AD**

Dynamic, friendly teacher with a passion for travelling . . . by school bus seeks obliging, patient parents who like children (especially in groups of 26) as chaperones for an outing to the nature centre *The Great Outdoors* on Thursday, February 22. The bus will leave the school at 8:30 a.m. and return at 3:00 p.m.

Lots of songs, games and hearty laughter are on the agenda! If you're interested, please complete the slip below and return it to the school before the end of the week.

Michelle

---

**RETURN SLIP**

Dear Michelle,

I love kids (especially in groups of 26) and I also love travelling . . . by school bus. I would be happy to chaperone the outing on February 22.

Student's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone no.: \_\_\_\_\_



Newspaper

*The Hoax*

Special edition

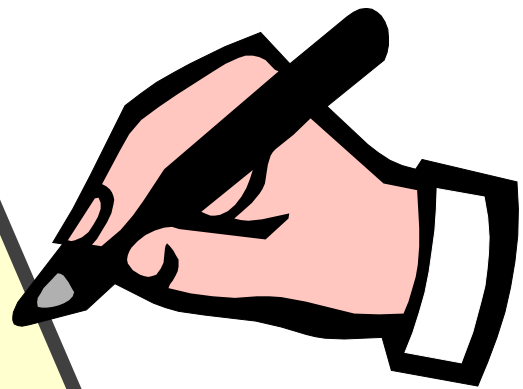
## Abandoned at the front door of the school

Three days ago, Jane Morrison, principal of Fuzzy Bear School, made a surprising discovery when leaving the building.

“I found it there, abandoned on the doorstep,” said Ms. Morrison. According to the principal, the item was no more than 2 years old, attractive, flexible and in very good condition.

Ms. Morrison mentioned her find to several people but, unfortunately, her efforts were in vain. At her request, we are publishing the message she posted in the school to inform students of this sad event.

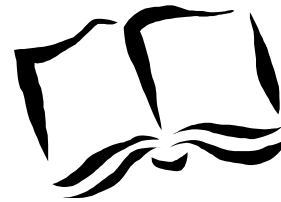
A baseball cap was found at the front door of the school. It is currently at the office in the lost-and-found box, along with other abandoned objects, big and small: socks, barrettes, rulers, shoe bags, hats, running shoes, etc. If you've recently lost something, it might be a good idea to have a look in the box. You may just find what you're looking for!



The facts in this article are fictional. Any resemblance to reality is not arbitrary, however, as the lost-and-found box is full . . .



PERSONAL DIARY



*Dear Diary,*

*Three days. Only three days left before our meeting. I'm so excited that I can hardly sleep. The decorations, the music and the greeting are all ready . . . well, almost. Fortunately, the students helped me. You should see them—they really take it to heart!*

*I'm quite certain that the parents will enjoy the evening. I hope no one will forget:*

**Wednesday from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m.  
Information Meeting for Parents**

*See you then!*



**PARENT MEETING**

***EVALUATION***

**Please check  
the appropriate box**

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>More or less</b>	<b>No</b>
I was satisfied with the meeting in general.			
The information was useful.			
The atmosphere was pleasant.			
The way the meeting leader conveyed the information was interesting.			

What I liked the most: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What I liked the least: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Comments and suggestions: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your cooperation.



## **Introduction activities and icebreakers**

## INTRODUCTION ACTIVITIES AND ICEBREAKERS

Every year, the same uncertainties with regard to the initial parent information meeting of the school year almost invariably crop up: *How many parents will attend the meeting and what will their state of mind be? Will they be open and interested, cautious and suspicious, passive and indifferent, or demanding and aggressive? Will the meeting content interest them? Will I be able to keep their attention? What will they think of me?* Given that uncertainty often breeds insecurity, it is probably safe to say that many teachers consider the parent information meeting to be a particularly stressful situation.

We must admit that being in front of 30 adults we hardly know, who are expecting to be informed, reassured, encouraged and impressed is not entirely relaxing. As mentioned about the stages in group development,<sup>24</sup> the beginning of an initial group meeting is inevitably accompanied by tension.

It is not just the teacher who experiences stress, however. While the situation is obviously much less stressful for parents, we should not think that all feel completely at ease seated in a classroom with other adults they do not know listening to someone they have more or less heard about.

Quite often, unfortunately, we go on as if the teacher's nervousness and the parents' discomfort did not exist. We get moving on the task as quickly as possible, thinking that the initial discomfort will go away on its own, which is rarely the case. If, as teachers, we want to feel comfortable quickly and make sure the parents feel comfortable as well, it is important to take the time to create a welcoming atmosphere.

In this section, we will present a few introduction activities and icebreakers that can help establish such an atmosphere.

As their name indicates, introduction activities are designed to introduce the students or parents attending the information meeting in a pleasant, original way. Most of these activities are also used as an excuse to give parents a word of welcome prepared by their child. They can also be helpful in taking attendance.

Icebreakers, meanwhile, are intended to help the parents (and any students in attendance) establish contact among themselves. These activities are more playful than introduction activities and call for more active participation (e.g. moving around, exchanging information, etc.). They help participants get to know each other more quickly.

Whether we use introduction activities or icebreakers, we must keep in mind that the goal is to establish a welcoming atmosphere. We should therefore make fun, humour and spontaneity a priority.

---

24. Québec: Ministère de l'Éducation. *Youth Health – Quality of life in the classroom*. (Québec: Gouvernement du Québec, 1997).

## SELF-PORTRAIT

### **Purpose**

- To introduce the students in the class
- To give each parent a word of welcome prepared by his or her child

### **Classes**

Grades 4, 5 and 6

### **Materials**

A copy of Sheet 5.1 for each student in the classroom

### **Duration**

15 minutes

### **Preparation**

- The teacher explains to the students the importance of taking the time to give their parents a warm welcome at the information meeting.
- Each student completes Sheet 5.1.

### **Steps**

#### **Introduction**

*The meeting leader:*

- explains that the students have prepared a welcoming activity that will allow the parents to confirm just how well they know their child
- mentions that each student has also prepared a self-portrait with some of his or her qualities; the purpose of the game is for the parents to guess which is their child's portrait

## **Exploration**

*The meeting leader:*

- has each student's completed Sheet 5.1 on hand
- randomly picks a sheet and reads the self-portrait aloud
- asks the parents who believe it is their child to raise their hands

If more than one parent raises a hand, the teacher asks each person to give his or her answer before revealing the author of the self-portrait. When a parent is right, the teacher asks the student in question to sit with him or her. The student then gives a copy of Sheet 5.1 to that parent and asks him or her to read the personalized welcome message on it. If the students are not attending the meeting, the sheet is given directly to the parent.

If no one correctly identifies the author of the self-portrait, the teacher puts that student's sheet aside.

Once all the self-portraits have been read, the teacher asks the parents who did not identify their child to raise their hands so they get one last chance. If they still do not guess which self-portrait their child wrote, they must apologize to their child in a comical, original way in front of the entire group at the end of the meeting. If these students are not attending the meeting, the apology is put into writing and left on the desk of the student(s) in question.

## **Conclusion**

The teacher explains to the parents how much the students appreciate them taking the time to attend and that the activity was meant to show them the students' appreciation.



**SELF-PORTRAIT**

My father has a real talent for: \_\_\_\_\_

My mother is pretty good at: \_\_\_\_\_

What my parents like most about me is: \_\_\_\_\_

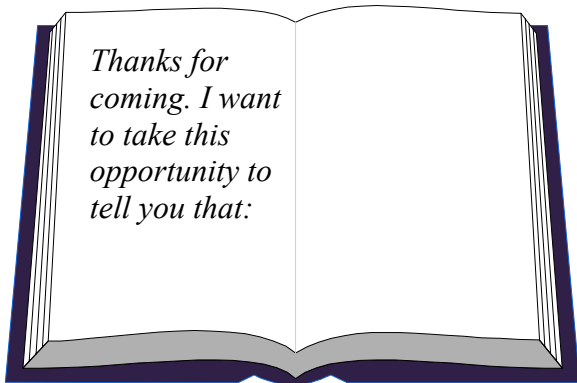
They sometimes don't like it when I: \_\_\_\_\_

But they know me well and appreciate my many qualities. My two main qualities are:

\_\_\_\_\_

*Student's name:* \_\_\_\_\_

*Message of welcome*



Student's signature: \_\_\_\_\_



## A SURVEY FOR PARENTS

### **Purpose**

- To give parents the opportunity to establish contact with each other and to talk about their child

### **Classes**

Cycle One

### **Materials**

- A copy of Sheet 6.1 for each parent
- A pencil for each parent

### **Duration**

10 minutes

### **Information**

This activity is intended for parents only. Later on, we offer a version that can be used during meetings attended by both the parents and children. This version is called *Autograph Hunters* (see Sheet 7).

### **Steps**

#### **Introduction**

*The meeting leader:*

- says that, at the beginning of the year, parents like to know who their child is dealing with. They want to get to know the teacher, see how he or she works and be aware of his or her vision, demands and expectations. They also want to know who their child's classmates are. Who does the child sit beside? Who does he or she play with at recess? Who is this Emily he can't stop talking about?
- offers parents an activity so they can get to know their child's classmates better; this activity is called *A Survey for Parents* (see Sheet 6.1).





**Exploration**

*The meeting leader:*

- gives each parent a copy of Sheet 6.1 and a pencil
- explains that when he or she gives the signal, everyone must get up and talk to the other parents to complete the sheet
- states that the activity will last five minutes
- gives the signal to start the activity
- asks the parents to take their seat again once time is up

**Conclusion**

*The meeting leader:*

- thanks the parents for participating
- asks them to take the sheet home to show their child the results of their survey
- explains that he or she finds it important for the meeting to have a warm, relaxed atmosphere and that the activity they just did is a way to create such an atmosphere



## A SURVEY FOR PARENTS

**Complete this sheet by getting the following names from the other parents:**

- Two children in the class who were born in the same month as your child
- Three children in the class who have the same eye colour as your child
- One child in the class who weighed less than 10 pounds at birth
- Three children in the class who have the same shoe size as your child
- Two children in the class who are the only girl in the family (they have only brothers or are an only child)
- Two children in the class who have the same number of brothers as your child
- One child in the class whose mother has the same eye colour as the mother of your child
- Three children in the class who go to bed at the same time as your child during the week
- Two children in the class whose bedroom is the same colour as your child's
- Two children in the class who don't like chocolate



## AUTOGRAPH HUNTERS



### **Purpose**

- To give parents and children the opportunity to establish contact

### **Classes**

Cycles Two and Three

### **Materials**

- A copy of Sheet 7.1 for each parent and student
- A pencil for each parent and student

### **Duration**

10 minutes

### **Information**

This activity involves both parents and children. The previous pages contain a version that can be used for parent-only meetings. That version is called *A Survey for Parents* (Sheet 6.1).

### **Steps**

#### **Introduction**

*The meeting leader:*

suggests an icebreaker for parents and children whose purpose is to help create a warm, relaxed atmosphere; this activity is called *Autograph Hunters*

**Exploration**

*The meeting leader:*

- gives everyone a copy of Sheet 7.1 and a pencil
- explains that when he or she gives the signal, everyone must get up and find other parents and children who match the descriptions on the sheet. When they find a match, they must ask for the person's autograph. The time allotted to complete Sheet 7.1 is five minutes.
- answers any questions and gives the signal to start the game
- announces the end of the game once time is up and asks everyone to take their seats

**Conclusion**

*The meeting leader:*

- thanks the children and parents for participating
- stresses that it is important for parents and children to be more than mere spectators during information meetings held at the school. These meetings must give each participant the opportunity to be an actor, that is, to establish contact and talk to others. This activity aims to give the parents and children an initial opportunity to take an active role in the meeting.



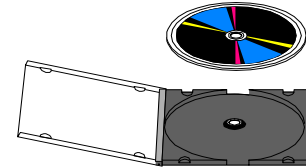
## AUTOGRAPH HUNTERS



**Find parents and children who match the descriptions below and ask for their signature:**

- Two parents who were born in the same month as you
- Two students who have the same eye colour as you
- One parent who is wearing glasses
- One student whose favourite dessert is the same as yours
- Two students who are wearing white socks
- Two students who have a red bicycle
- One student who is left-handed

## THE CD



### **Purpose**

- To introduce the parents
- To give each parent a message of welcome prepared by his or her child

### **Classes**

Cycle Three

### **Materials**

One empty CD case per student (no disc or insert)

### **Duration**

15 minutes

### **Preparation**

- The teacher explains to the students the importance of taking the time to give parents a warm welcome at the information meeting.
- Following the instructions on Sheet 8.1, each student prepares a CD jacket using, as the theme, the member(s) of his or her family (mother and/or father) who will attend the meeting.

### **Steps**

#### **Introduction**

*The meeting leader:*

- explains that the students have prepared an activity to welcome the parents that will help them get to know each other better, but particularly to see whether they recognize themselves

- explains that each student has also prepared a CD jacket featuring the family member(s) attending the meeting. The title of the CD and the five songs on it refer to the student's mother, father or both parents. Using the titles, the parents must guess which CD is meant for them.

### **Exploration**

*The meeting leader:*

- picks a CD jacket at random, reads the titles of the CD and the five songs aloud, then asks the parents who believe it is intended for them to raise their hands
- asks the parents who raised their hands to give their names, then lets them know whether there is a correct answer. If so, the teacher asks the student who made the CD to give it to his or her parent(s) to read the message of welcome inside the case. If the students are not present, the teacher gives the CD to the parents.

If the parents do not identify a CD, it is put aside. Once all the CDs have been presented, the teacher comes back to the ones set aside. Parents are given one last chance. If they still do not identify the CD, they will receive the CD at the end of the meeting. In exchange, the parents must apologize to their child in a comical, original way in front of the entire group at the end of the meeting. If these students are not attending the meeting, the apology is put into writing and left on the desk of the student(s) in question.

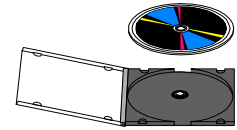
### **Conclusion**

*The meeting leader:*

- explains to the parents how much the students appreciate them taking the time to attend and that this activity was meant to show them the students' appreciation
- congratulates and thanks the students for the time and energy they spent preparing the activity



## THE CD

**Instructions**

We are going to do an extra special activity to make your parents feel welcome at the information meeting. Using the instructions below, design and make a CD jacket with the member(s) of your family (mother, father, both parents or another person) who will attend the meeting as the theme.

The CD jacket will include a title page with the title of the CD and a list of the five songs on it. Each title must refer to the qualities, tastes, habits, etc of the person(s) you are making the CD for. The parents must guess which CD is theirs, using only the information in the song titles as clues.

**Materials**

- One empty CD case.
- Crafts material: paper, cardboard, scissors, colour crayons, felt markers, etc.

**Title page**

Cut out a 12 cm x 12 cm square of white or coloured paper, which will be used to make the title page of your CD jacket. As its name indicates, this page must include the title of the album. The title must refer to the person(s) you are making the CD for.

Given that this is the title for the entire album, it can be quite general. At this point, the important thing is to know whether you are talking about your mother, father, both parents or another person, but without mentioning their names! Here are a few examples to give you some ideas:

- Papa don't preach
- Mama, it's me
- The tortoise and the hare
- Mommy loves you
- A perfect couple



Add an interesting picture to your jacket (e.g. drawing, lettering, collage, etc.). You can use it to give specific clues about the identity of the person you are making the CD for. For example, the visual could relate to objects, places, activities or events that have a special meaning for the person(s).

Once your title page is ready, insert it into the CD case.

### **Tracks**

Cut out another 12 cm x 12 cm square of white or coloured paper, which will be used to list the five songs or tracks on the CD.

The titles should provide enough information so that the person who the CD is intended for recognizes himself or herself. Be more specific than you were with the title of the CD. For example, you could find songs about the tastes, activities, habits or expressions of the person(s) in question. Here are a few examples to give you some ideas:

- Thursday night bowling
- On the phone with Aunt Denise
- Clean your room, Stephanie
- The Queen of Shepherd's Pie
- Green slippers

At the bottom of the list, write your name and the name of the person you are making the CD for. Add a meaningful picture.

Once you have completed your list, insert it into the CD case.

### **Message of welcome**

Cut out a cardboard circle the same size as a CD. On it, write a message of welcome thanking your parents for coming to the meeting and telling them how special they are to you.

Sign it and put it in the CD case. Check that you wrote your name on the list of tracks, then give the CD case to your teacher.



**Discussion activities for the parent information meeting  
held at the beginning of the year**

## I LIKE SCHOOL, I LOVE SCHOOL, I'M CRAZY ABOUT SCHOOL!

### **Theme**

Motivation in school

### **Purpose**

- To give parents and their children the opportunity to compare their perceptions of the child's motivation in school
- To find strategies that would increase motivation in school
- To identify attitudes that adversely affect motivation in school

### **Classes**

Cycles Two and Three

### **Materials**

- A copy of Sheets 9.1 and 9.4 for each student
- A copy of Sheets 9.2 and 9.3 for each parent
- A pencil for each parent

### **Duration**

40 minutes

### **Preparation**

If the students are not attending the meeting with their parents, have them complete Sheet 9.1.



## **Steps**

### **Introduction**

*The meeting leader:*

- asks the parents (and the students in attendance) whether it is important to like school in order to do well, and why
- after getting a few answers, asks whether it is important to adore school to do well, and why
- explains that, although it is not necessary to adore school, the chances of success are lower if students don't at least like it
- asks whether a love for school, or motivation in school, can be developed, and why
- explains that motivation in school is not something we are born with; it has to be developed and, like one's appetite, can come and go, depending on the circumstances
- suggests examining the issue more closely by having everyone answer a short questionnaire on motivation in school

### **Exploration**

*The meeting leader:*

- gives each parent a copy of Sheet 9.2. If the students are in attendance, they each receive a copy of Sheet 9.1.
- gives everyone five minutes to fill out the sheet
- asks the students to sit by their parent(s) once they have completed their sheets so they can compare their answers, talk about why certain perceptions are different, if necessary, and answer the following two questions:
  1. As students, what can we do to increase our motivation in school?
  2. As parents, what can we do to encourage our child to be motivated at school?



- after 10 minutes, asks everyone to end their discussion, and has one or two parents and one or two children give their answers to the above questions

*If the students are not present, the meeting leader:*

- gives parents a copy of Sheet 9.1, which their child filled out earlier in class, so they can see whether their perception of their child's motivation in school corresponds with the evaluation
- asks the parents, in the event of a significant difference between the parent's and the child's answers, whether it means that one of them is wrong, and why
- stresses that, if the perceptions differ, they have more to gain by seeking to better understand how the other perceives things than by trying desperately to defend their point of view
- asks the parents to draw up a list of things they could do to encourage their child to be motivated at school
- asks the parents to draw up a list of what the children could do to increase their motivation in school

### **Conclusion**

*The meeting leader:*

- explains that, while it is true that certain actions of the children or parents have a positive effect on motivation, others have an adverse effect
- gives each parent a copy of Sheet 9.3. If the students are present, each one receives a copy of Sheet 9.4; if not, Sheet 9.4 is given to each parent
- reads Sheets 9.3 and 9.4 aloud
- reminds everyone that motivation in school is not something we are born with; it has to be developed and, like one's appetite, can come and go, depending on the circumstances. It has to be maintained.



## MY MOTIVATION IN SCHOOL

Student's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Read each statement and say whether or not you agree with it by checking the appropriate box.

If your behaviour is similar to the description, check the *Agree* box.

If your behaviour is sometimes similar to the description, check the *Agree more or less* box.

If your behaviour is rarely or never similar to the description, check the *Disagree* box.

		Agree	Agree more or less	Disagree
1-	I often find reasons to avoid doing my homework and assignments or to hand them in later.			
2-	I make a fuss when it's time to do my homework or to study.			
3-	I do my homework in the subjects that are easier for me and I neglect the ones I find more difficult.			
4-	I don't spend enough time doing my homework and assignments to do them properly.			
5-	I am often behind in my school work.			
6-	I don't work regularly; instead, I "cram" every now and then.			
7-	I quickly give up if I have trouble.			
8-	I don't try to understand what I am learning; I simply try to memorize what I have to know.			
9-	I'm not focused and attentive when doing my homework and studying.			
10-	The place I do my homework and study does not help my concentration.			
11-	The time of day I choose to do my homework and study is not the best for my concentration.			
12-	In general, my homework is not very well done.			
13-	I'm not proud of my marks.			



## MY CHILD'S MOTIVATION IN SCHOOL

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Read each statement below and check the appropriate box.

		Agree	Agree more or less	Disagree
1-	My child often find reasons to avoid doing homework and assignments or to hand them in later.			
2-	My child makes a fuss when it's time to do homework or study.			
3-	My child does homework in the subjects that are easier for him or her and neglects the ones he or she finds more difficult.			
4-	My child doesn't spend enough time doing homework and assignments to do them properly.			
5-	My child is often behind in his or her school work.			
6-	My child doesn't work regularly; instead, he or she "crams" every now and then.			
7-	My child quickly gives up if he or she has trouble.			
8-	My child doesn't try to understand what he or she is learning; he or she simply tries to memorize what is required.			
9-	My child is not focused and attentive when doing homework and studying.			
10-	The place my child does homework does not help his or her concentration.			
11-	The time of day my child chooses to do homework or to study is not the best for his or her concentration.			
12-	In general, my child's homework is not very well done.			
13-	My child is not proud of his or her marks.			



**PARENTAL ATTITUDES THAT ADVERSELY AFFECT  
A CHILD'S MOTIVATION IN SCHOOL**

- Criticizing the school regularly (school administration, teachers, professional development days, activities, regulations, etc.)
- Having a pessimistic attitude about young peoples' future
- Boasting about having worked harder or earned better marks than their child
- Comparing their child to his or her brother, sister, friend or any other person, with emphasis placed on what the other person does better
- Claiming that their child's difficulties are hereditary: "She's like me; I never understood mathematics."
- Recalling their own shortcomings as a student: "When I was in school, I hardly studied."
- Openly expressing a feeling of inability: "I can't help you because we didn't learn that when I was in school."





## STUDENT ATTITUDES THAT ADVERSELY AFFECT THEIR MOTIVATION IN SCHOOL

- Thinking negative thoughts or thinking about the difficulties they or others encounter, instead of putting emphasis on more positive, enjoyable things
- Often talking about things that are not going well or that are hard, and almost never talking about what is good
- Being indifferent to everything, not getting involved or showing enthusiasm, getting caught up in what happens to them or to others. Often saying “*That’s nothing,*” “*Yeah, so?*” and “*I don’t feel like it.*”
- Comparing themselves to others on a regular basis, with emphasis placed on what the others have or do better
- Hanging out with others who are unmotivated
- Always putting off what needs to be done
- Waiting for time to sort things out
- Purposely not enjoying what they do, telling themselves that the only reason to go to school and to do homework is because they have to
- Being convinced that motivation is inherent in them and they cannot do anything to change that. Often saying “*It’s not my fault.*”



## A RESPONSIBLE TRIO

### **Theme**

Homework and studying: responsibilities of the student, the parent and the teacher

### **Purpose**

- To identify the factors that do not help make the time for homework and studying enjoyable, productive and effective
- To introduce the responsibilities of the student, the parent and the teacher to make homework and studying time enjoyable, productive and effective

### **Classes**

- Cycles One, Two and Three if the students are not attending the meeting
- Cycles Two and Three if the students are attending the meeting

### **Materials**

- A copy of Sheet 10.1 for each participant
- A pencil for each participant

### **Duration**

30 minutes

### **Steps**

#### **Introduction**

*The meeting leader:*

- tells the participants that, before talking about homework and studying, they will do a simple activity designed to evaluate their ability to follow instructions; this activity is called *Pop Quiz*.



- explains that each participant will receive two sheets stapled together and asks that they not look at the second page before the signal to start
- gives each participant a copy of Sheet 10.1
- reads the introduction page and gives the signal to start the quiz
- asks everyone to stop after five minutes

### **Exploration**

*The meeting leader:*

- asks those who passed the quiz to raise their hand, and checks whether some already knew the exercise
- asks those who did not pass the quiz to explain why they did not follow the first instruction
- explains that eagerness, or the desire to do things quickly, is one of the main reasons why participants do not follow the first instruction, and therefore do not pass the quiz
- asks the participants whether a connection can be made between this small exercise and the time for homework and studying; if so, what is that connection?
- explains that eagerness is one of the many factors that do not help make the time for homework and studying enjoyable, productive and effective. He or she suggests taking a few minutes to identify other factors together.
- asks the participants to make teams of four or six. If the students are present, they must be on the same team as their parents.
- gives each team a copy of Sheet 10.2 and asks them to answer the two questions:
  1. What are the factors (attitudes, behaviours, work conditions, etc.) that do not help make the time for homework and studying enjoyable, productive and effective?
  2. What can we, as parents and students, do to make the time for homework and studying enjoyable, productive and effective?

- after 10 minutes, asks everyone to finish and asks a representative from two or three groups to give a summary of their answers to the questions

### **Conclusion**

*The meeting leader:*

- asks the participants whether it is possible for certain factors to help make the time for homework and studying more fun, but to hinder productivity and effectiveness. Completes the participants' responses, if necessary, by giving examples, such as doing homework and studying while watching television may be fun, but it is bad for concentration and, in turn, for productivity (the homework is not done) and for effectiveness (the homework is poorly done).
- asks the participants whether it is more important for the time for homework and studying to be fun, productive or effective, and why
- explains that if these three aspects (fun, productivity, effectiveness) theoretically have the same value, finding a balance in practice is not always easy. Unfortunately, there is no miracle solution. What produces results in one case does not necessarily produce them in another. We do know, however, that when the student, the teacher and the parent know their respective responsibilities and adequately assume them, the chances of the time for homework and studying being enjoyable, productive and effective are greater.
- gives each person a copy of Sheets 10.3, 10.4 and 10.5 and reads them aloud
- presents his or her policy (pace, rules, consequences, prescribed duration, etc.) on homework and studying

## POP QUIZ

### **Introduction**

- Wait for the supervisor to give the signal before turning the page and reading page two.
- You are not allowed to talk to your neighbour or ask the supervisor questions once he or she has given the signal to start the quiz.
- The maximum time to complete this quiz is 5 minutes.



## POP QUIZ

- 1- Read all the instructions before beginning.
- 2- Write your name in the top right-hand corner of this page.
- 3- Circle the word “name” in point 2.
- 4- Draw five small squares in the top left-hand corner of this page.
- 5- Draw an “X” in each square.
- 6- Circle each square.
- 7- Sign your name underneath the title of this page.
- 8- To the left of the title, write “yes, yes, yes.”
- 9- Circle sentence number 7.
- 10- Draw an “X” in the bottom left-hand corner of this page.
- 11- Draw a triangle around this “X.”
- 12- Say your first name out loud.
- 13- Count to 10 in a medium-loud voice.
- 14- Underline all the even numbers on this page.
- 15- Say the following out loud: “I’m almost done and I followed the instructions.”
- 16- Now that you’ve finished reading the instructions attentively, do not do what is asked in points 1 and 2.



**QUESTIONS EACH TEAM MUST ANSWER**

- 1- What are the factors (attitudes, behaviours, circumstances, working conditions, etc.) that do not help make the time for homework and studying fun (pleasant), productive (the work gets done) and effective (the work is well done)?
  
- 2- What can we, as parents and students, do to make the time for homework and studying enjoyable, productive and effective?



## THE STUDENT'S RESPONSIBILITIES

**To ensure that the time for homework and studying is enjoyable, productive and effective**

- Take home all the materials (books, workbooks, sheets, etc.) you need to do your homework and to study.
- Set a regular work schedule and stick to it:
  - Work every evening, except on weekends
  - Work three evenings a week
  - Work Sunday morning and two evenings a week, etc.
- Opt to do your homework when it is fairly quiet at home and when you are ready to do homework:
  - right after school
  - before supper
  - after supper
  - in the morning
- Choose a place where you can concentrate and study there as often as possible:
  - quiet
  - well-lit
  - well-ventilated
  - comfortable chair
- Set aside enough time to do your homework and to study properly.
- Relax before starting.
- Adopt a work method:
  - Study often, a little at a time.
  - Adopt a work plan (e.g. begin with your favourite or your least favourite subject).
  - Use your own resources (memory, imagination, books, workbooks, etc.) before turning to someone for help.
  - Have someone quiz you to see whether you grasp the material.
- Hand in your homework on time.
- Try to understand what you have to learn rather than simply memorizing it.
- Allow yourself to make mistakes and assume the responsibility for correcting them.





## THE PARENT'S RESPONSIBILITIES

### **To ensure that the time for homework and studying is enjoyable, productive and effective**

- Plan the homework schedule with your child and see that it is respected.
- Decide together with your child on a place the child can concentrate and ensure that he or she works there as often as possible.
- Ensure that your child relaxes before starting homework and studying.
- Make sure it is quiet at home.
- Show interest in what your child does, says and reads. Recognize his or her talents and strengths and give him or her challenges.
- Encourage your child to work independently, but do not leave your child on his or her own completely:
  - Do not constantly stay beside your child.
  - Encourage your child to call upon his or her own resources (memory, imagination, books, dictionaries, etc.) before turning to someone for help.
  - Do not do any of the work for your child.
- Help out, when necessary:
  - Quiz your child about a lesson.
  - Suggest possibilities for starting an oral or written assignment.
  - Listen to your child read, etc.
- Ask your child every day what he or she did at school and what he or she has for homework.
- Accept the fact that your child makes mistakes.



## THE TEACHER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

### **To ensure that the time for homework and studying is enjoyable, productive and effective**

- Help the students make connections between the homework and past and future learning activities.
- Give the students clear instructions: deadline, correction criteria, method of presentation, etc.
- Explain the work: give examples, suggest approaches, make them aware of possible difficulties, etc.
- Ensure that the students takes home the necessary materials for their homework and studying.
- Adapt assignments to the students' abilities.
- Vary the types of homework:
  - Applying skills learned in class: memorizing addition or multiplication tables, division exercises, spelling, etc.
  - Preparing future activities or lessons: researching animals in the Laurentian forest, asking family members about past occupations, preliminary reading of a text to be studied the next day, etc.
  - Creativity-oriented: research project, text composition, science experiment, etc.
- Set realistic deadlines.
- Establish rules and consequences with regard to supervising homework.
- Give each student feedback (notes, comments) on their homework.
- Do not give homework merely to keep the students busy.
- Do not use homework and studying as punishment or a disciplinary measure.
- Take stock of the students' experience with homework and studying on a regular basis (e.g. difficulties, preferences, successes, time devoted, etc.).



## **DEVELOP YOUR INTEREST AND IT WILL PAY OFF!**

### **Theme**

Homework and studying: tips and strategies to pique students' interest

### **Purpose**

- To discuss and learn tips and strategies designed to stimulate students' interest in the types of homework and studying they like the least
- To give Cycle One students a few tips and strategies to interest them in reading and writing

### **Classes**

- Cycles One and Two if the students are not attending the meeting
- Cycle Two if the students are attending the meeting

### **Materials**

*If the students are attending the meeting:*

- A copy of Sheet 11.1 for each student
- A copy of Sheets 11.2, 11.3 and 11.4 for each parent

*If the students are not attending the meeting:*

- A copy of Sheets 11.2, 11.3 and 11.4 for each parent

### **Duration**

40 minutes if the students are in attendance  
30 minutes if the students are not in attendance



## Steps

### Introduction

*The meeting leader:*

- explains to the participants that before tackling the subject of homework and studying, he or she thinks it would be good to take a few minutes to talk about the parents' duties, or housework, and see whether a parallel can be drawn between these two types of obligations
- asks the parents to state their main household duties and writes the answers on the blackboard
- asks the parents whether there are certain tasks they like less than others and why
- asks the parents (and the students, if present) whether a parallel can be drawn between the parents' household duties and students' homework and studying, and why
- suggests taking stock of the types of homework and studying that students like the most or the least by having participants complete a questionnaire

### Exploration

*If the students are in attendance, the meeting leader:*

- gives each student a copy of Sheet 11.1 and each parent a copy of Sheet 11.2, and gives them five minutes to complete it
- Once everyone has completed the questionnaire, asks the students to join their parent(s) so they can:
  - 1- compare the answers on their respective sheets
  - 2- discuss and try to explain the difference in points of view, if necessary
  - 3- start making a list of tips and strategies that can pique the student's interest in the types of homework and studying he or she likes the least



## SHEET 11 (CONT.)

- after 10 minutes, asks the parents and students to make teams of six to eight people (the students must be on the same team as their parents) and explains what must be done:
  - 1- Share the tips and strategies each family came up with.
  - 2- Complete this list by adding other tips or strategies that pique students' interest in the types of homework and studying that they like least.
  - 3- Decide whether they think certain tips or strategies are preferable to others and why.

*If the students are not in attendance, the meeting leader:*

- gives the parents a copy of Sheet 11.2 and gives them five minutes to complete it
- once everyone has completed their sheet, asks the parents to make teams of six to eight people to do the following:
  - 1- compile the answers each team member gave on the sheet to make a list of the types of homework and studying. This list should be written on a clean copy of Sheet 11.2 to be given to each team.
  - 2- make an inventory of possible tips and strategies to stimulate students' interest in the types of homework and studying they like the least
  - 3- decide whether they think certain tips or strategies are preferable to others and why

### **Conclusion**

*The meeting leader:*

- calls the participants back after 10 minutes to share their team's work
- asks a representative of each team to share the tips and strategies they found to stimulate students' interest in the types of homework and studying they like the least



- once each team representative has presented their tips, explains that, although it is highly unlikely that we can turn around a student who hates multiplication and division tables, for example, we can still make this task more fun. There is no single solution; a tip or strategy that works for one person may be completely ineffective for another. However, we know that in the case of repetitive exercises (learning vocabulary, numbers, fractions, operations), being original or varying the approaches can help increase students' interest.
- gives some examples of tips on making repetitive exercises more fun:
  - play the game *Hangman* to learn how to spell words
  - review numbers on the television remote control
  - review fractions by cutting fruits or vegetables
  - replace the lyrics of a simple, well-known song by multiples of five to help the child memorize them
  - use two dice to review multiplication, etc.
- gives each parent a copy of Sheets 11.3 and 11.4 and describes the strategies that can be used to interest and encourage Cycle One students to read and write at home
- stresses that nothing is worse than thinking that a fondness for something is permanent and that if we do not like a type of activity, we can't do anything to change it. Interest can be developed, and when an effort is made, it pays off



## MY PREFERENCES

Student's name: \_\_\_\_\_

You must do different types of activities when doing homework and studying. Sometimes, you must do memory work (multiplication or division tables, vocabulary words, etc.); other times, you must write or compose a text or search for information (interview people, consult magazines, books, the Internet). Naturally, you like certain activities better than others.

For each activity, indicate whether you like it *a little*, *somewhat*, *a lot* or *not at all* by checking the appropriate box.

Type of activity		A little	Somewhat	A lot	Not at all
1-	Memory work (addition and multiplication tables, vocabulary words, etc.)				
2-	Writing or composing texts				
3-	Reading				
4-	Calculating (addition, division, measuring perimeter, etc.)				
5-	Consulting magazines, newspapers, encyclopedias, the Internet				
6-	Preparing a speech				
7-	Doing an assignment on the computer				
8-	Solving problems				
9-	Interviewing people				
10-	Drawing				
11-	Doing an assignment that requires the use of objects (ruler, scissors, tape recorder, costume, etc.)				
12-	Doing an assignment that requires the use of your imagination (inventing a story, preparing a sketch, creating an ad, etc.)				



## MY CHILD'S PREFERENCES

Student's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Children must do different types of activities when doing homework and studying. Sometimes, they must do memory work (multiplication or division tables, vocabulary words, etc.); other times, they must write or compose a text or search for information (interview people, consult magazines, books, the Internet). Naturally, they like certain activities better than others.

For each activity, indicate whether your child likes it *a little*, *somewhat*, *a lot* or *not at all* by checking the appropriate box.

Type of activity		A little	Somewhat	A lot	Not at all
1-	Memory work (addition and multiplication tables, vocabulary words, etc.)				
2-	Writing or composing texts				
3-	Reading				
4-	Calculating (addition, division, measuring perimeter, etc.)				
5-	Consulting magazines, newspapers, encyclopedias, the Internet				
6-	Preparing a speech				
7-	Doing an assignment on the computer				
8-	Solving problems				
9-	Interviewing people				
10-	Drawing				
11-	Doing an assignment that requires the use of objects (ruler, scissors, tape recorder, costume, etc.)				
12-	Doing an assignment which requires the use of their imagination (inventing a story, preparing a sketch, creating an ad, etc.)				





**SUGGESTIONS TO ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD  
TO READ AT HOME**

- Read in front of your child (learning by imitation).
- Talk to your child about what you have read (book, magazine, newspaper, advertisement, etc.).
- Read books and stories to your child regularly and talk about them together.
- Place books, magazines and comic books that are likely to interest your child in strategic locations around the house (bathroom, living room, kitchen).
- Set aside a time during the day for reading: after supper, at bedtime, when getting up.
- Leave notes for your child: in his or her lunch box, on his or her pillow, on the refrigerator.
- Give your child books as presents.
- Put your child's favourite books on one shelf.
- Go to the library often.
- Ask the librarian to recommend some good books.
- Allow your child to skip pages or to not finish a book and to take occasional breaks from reading.



**SUGGESTIONS  
TO ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD  
TO WRITE AT HOME<sup>25</sup>**

- Write often in front of your child.
- Show your child that writing is very useful and a part of everyday life.
- Ask your child to help you correct the grocery list, greeting card messages, invitations, etc.
- Discuss writing ideas with your child.
- Show your child that an outing to the shopping mall, a fishing trip, a friend's birthday, a visit to a farm or a little brother's or sister's antics could be excellent topics to write about.

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25. Inspired by:  
Schwartz, Susan and Mindy Pollishuke. *Construire une classe axée sur l'enfant*, translation of *Creating the Child-Centred Classroom*. (Éditions de la Chenelière, 1992).  
Pennac, Daniel. *Comme un roman*. (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1992).

THE RIGHT ANSWER<sup>26</sup>**Theme**

Homework and studying: tips and strategies for learning

**Purpose**

To exchange and learn tips and strategies for learning

**Classes**

- Cycles One, Two and Three if the students are not attending the meeting
- Cycles Two and Three if the students are attending the meeting

**Materials**

- One deck of cards for every two people at the meeting. For example, if 40 people are in attendance, you will need 20 decks of cards.

**Duration**

30 minutes

**Steps****Introduction**

*The meeting leader:*

- proposes a simple game to participants that offers some food for thought about the issue of homework and studying. The game is called *The Right Answer*.
- asks the students to team up with their parent(s) and to sit together around a desk. If the students are not attending the meeting, the teacher asks the parents to make teams of two or three.
- distributes a deck of cards to each team and tells them to keep the cards face down on the desk.

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26. Inspired by: Beaulieu, Daniel. *Techniques d'impact en classe*. (Académie Impact, 2001), p. 77.



- once each team has put down their deck, explains that the game consists of finding the card he or she asks for on the first try.

### **Exploration**

*The meeting leader:*

- calls out a card (e.g. three of hearts). The teams pick up a card from the desk, turn it over and show the meeting leader
- writes the card on the blackboard as well as the number of teams that managed to find it
- continues until five cards have been called. After the fifth card, the meeting leader asks the teams to have a discussion on how they can improve their performance. He or she says that they are allowed to turn over the cards during their discussion. Once they have finished their discussion, however, they must turn the cards face down again. They may also change the order of the cards or how they lay them down. Teams are given five minutes for the discussion.
- after five minutes, announces the beginning of the second round of the game. The meeting leader makes sure that each team's deck is face down, then calls out a card. The teams pick a card, turn it over and show the meeting leader.
- writes the card on the blackboard as well as the number of teams that managed to find it
- continues until five new cards have been called, then announces the end of the game

### **Conclusion**

*The meeting leader:*

- asks the participants whether their performance improved after their discussion (did they have more right answers?) and why
- explains that if their performance improved in the second round, then they must have used the discussion time to:
  - 1- look at the cards
  - 2- discover a tip, method or strategy to remember where each card was



- asks the participants whether a parallel can be drawn between this game and students' homework. If so, what is that parallel?
- explains that to get good marks at school, students must use tips, methods and strategies that help them remember and learn the material, as in the game
- asks the participants to give tips, methods and strategies that can help students learn their material and writes the answers on the blackboard. If necessary, he or she gives some examples to help the participants:
  - write a summary of what you studied two or three times, checking that nothing important was overlooked, and reread it often
  - note down the most important or most difficult concepts of a lesson and reread them often
  - record a summary of what you studied two or three times on an audio cassette, checking that nothing important was overlooked, and listen to it often
  - have someone quiz you on your homework
  - make associations to remember things better (e.g. the word *hear* contains the word *ear*, which you use to hear)
  - summarize what was learned using one or more diagrams, explain these concepts to someone using the drawing and check that nothing important was overlooked
  - ask someone who had to study the same thing as you
  - imagine the type of questions that could be asked to stump students if you were in charge of preparing the exam on the current subject of study
- asks the participants whether they find certain tips, methods or strategies more effective than others. If so, which ones do they find more effective and why?

- explains that the effectiveness of these tips, methods or strategies depends on two things:

1- *What must be studied:* The tip about making associations, for example, can help you to remember the spelling of a word, a date or a place, but it will not be very helpful for learning multiplication tables.

2- *The student:* We all have different learning styles. The tips, methods and strategies that work for one person may not work for another. It is therefore up to each person to find the best strategies for himself or herself.

- stresses that the worst attitude for students to adopt when they are having trouble learning is to tell themselves that they have a bad memory, that they don't understand, and therefore, they cannot do anything to improve the situation. In most cases, learning difficulties have nothing to do with an individual's abilities, but rather with ineffective learning strategies. Instead of giving up, students must roll up their sleeves and look for strategies and approaches that are more adapted to their style of learning or to the activity.

**Activities for parents and children  
to discuss report cards**

## FAMILY PORTRAIT

### **Theme**

Self-esteem

### **Purpose**

- To give students and their parents the opportunity to say what they like about each other
- To recognize the importance of learning to love oneself

### **Classes**

Cycles Two and Three

### **Materials**

- A copy of Sheet 13.1 for each student
- A copy of Sheet 13.2 for each parent
- A copy of Sheet 13.3 for each student and each parent

### **Duration**

15 minutes





## FAMILY PORTRAIT

(Student's sheet)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

My parent:

**Answer the following questions about your parent or guardian who will attend the report card meeting. If both your parents are attending, ask your teacher for another sheet.**

Which parent are you writing about: Mother ( ) Father ( ) Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

- 1- My parent's two main qualities are: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2- What I like a lot about my parent is: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3- My parent is really good at: \_\_\_\_\_
- 4- My parent does quite well in: \_\_\_\_\_
- 5- I think that life is good with my parent because: \_\_\_\_\_

### Answer the following questions about yourself.

Me:

- 1- My two main qualities are: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2- What I like a lot about myself is: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3- I am really good at: \_\_\_\_\_
- 4- I do quite well in: \_\_\_\_\_
- 5- The members of my family think life is good with me because: \_\_\_\_\_

### Once you have finished:

- Compare your answers with those of your parent and discuss the ones that surprise you the most.
- Together with your parent, answer the following questions:
  - Is it easier to recognize other people's qualities than your own? Why?
  - Is it important to recognize your own qualities? Why?
- Read the text called *Learn to Love Yourself* (Sheet 13.3) with your parent.



## FAMILY PORTRAIT

(Parent's sheet)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Answer the following questions about your child.

My child:

- 1- My child's two main qualities are: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2- What I like a lot about my child is: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3- My child is really good at: \_\_\_\_\_
- 4- My child does quite well in: \_\_\_\_\_
- 5- I think that life is good with my child because: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Answer the following questions about yourself.

Me:

- 1- My two main qualities are: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2- What I like a lot about myself is: \_\_\_\_\_
- 3- I am really good at: \_\_\_\_\_
- 4- I do quite well in: \_\_\_\_\_
- 5- The members of my family think life is good with me because: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Once you have finished:

- Compare your answers with those of your child and discuss the ones that surprise you the most.
- Together with your child, answer the following questions:
  - Is it easier to recognize other people's qualities than your own? Why?
  - Is it important to recognize your qualities? Why?
- Read the text called *Learn to Love Yourself* (Sheet 13.3) with your child.



LEARN TO LOVE YOURSELF...

Did you know that you're the most important person?  
Did you know that you're responsible only for yourself?  
So take care of yourself  
Take responsibility for your life and your life only.

Things are complicated enough.  
Love others enough  
So they can do the same  
Because, you see, you have to be loyal  
To your ideas and to yourself.

You have so many qualities.  
Why overlook yourself?  
Why deny yourself?  
Why not love yourself?

Follow your path,  
But don't forget to stop sometimes  
To look around:  
Something or someone  
Will always be there  
To guide you.

Overcome your fears,  
For that's how happiness is often found.  
Be a friend and love others  
Deeply and sincerely.

Take the time to get to know yourself,  
Take the time to appreciate your qualities,  
Take the time to love yourself  
Take every opportunity  
To move forward on your path.



## PRIORITIES

### **Theme**

Setting priorities

### **Purpose**

- To give students an opportunity to discuss their order of priorities with their parent(s)
- To recognize the importance of giving priority to essential activities rather than to “filler” activities

### **Classes**

Cycle Three

### **Materials**

- A copy of Sheet 14.1 for each student
- A copy of Sheet 14.2 for each parent
- A copy of Sheet 14.3 for each student and each parent

### **Duration**

**15 minutes**



**PRIORITIES**  
(Student's sheet)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Rank the following in order of importance. Put the most important element in your life first. This is the one that occupies the biggest place and to which you devote the most time. Each element must be included in the ranking. Write one element per rank only.

- **TV, computers, video games**
- **Relaxation** (relaxing, hanging out, doing nothing special)
- **Family** (family activities, outings, talking with your parents, etc.)
- **Homework**
- **Cultural activities** (reading, drawing, music, dance, etc.)
- **Love** (talking about the crush you have on someone or the crushes other people have, going out with your sweetheart, talking about boys or girls)
- **Sports and the outdoors** (biking, soccer, skateboarding, etc.)
- **Manual work** (carpentry, mechanics, cooking, sewing, crafts, etc.)
- **Personal development** (learning to manage things on your own, acquiring knowledge in different areas, taking on responsibility, experiencing different things)
- **Friends** (talking, going out, etc.)

**Rank**

No. 1:	_____	No. 6:	_____
No. 2:	_____	No. 7:	_____
No. 3:	_____	No. 8:	_____
No. 4:	_____	No. 9:	_____
No. 5:	_____	No. 10:	_____

**Once you have finished:**

- Compare your list with that of your parent(s). Discuss the elements for which you had different answers.
- Read the text called *What Really Matters* (Sheet 14.3) with your parent(s).
- Once you have read the text, decide together whether your priorities are rocks or merely fillers (sand, gravel).

**PRIORITIES**  
(Parent's sheet)

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Rank the following in the order of importance you believe your child would give. Put the element you believe to be the most important one in your child's life first. This is the one that occupies the biggest place and to which he or she devotes the most time. Each element must be included in the ranking. Write one element per rank only. Decide on the ranking based on what you observe in your child, and not what you wish to see.

- **TV, computers, video games**
- **Relaxation** (relaxing, hanging out, doing nothing special)
- **Family** (family activities, outings, talking with you, etc.)
- **Homework**
- **Cultural activities** (reading, drawing, music, dance, etc.)
- **Love** (talking about having a crush on someone, going out with his or her sweetheart, talking about boys or girls)
- **Sports and the outdoors** (biking, soccer, skateboarding, etc.)
- **Manual work** (carpentry, mechanics, cooking, sewing, crafts, etc.)
- **Personal development** (learning to manage things independently, acquiring knowledge in different areas, taking on responsibility, having diverse experiences)
- **Friends** (talking, going out, etc.)

**Rank**

No. 1:	_____	No. 6:	_____
No. 2:	_____	No. 7:	_____
No. 3:	_____	No. 8:	_____
No. 4:	_____	No. 9:	_____
No. 5:	_____	No. 10:	_____

**Once you have finished:**

- Compare your list with that of your child. Discuss the elements for which you had different answers.
- Read the text called *What Really Matters* (Sheet 14.3) with your child.
- Once you have read the text, decide together whether your child's priorities are rocks or merely fillers (sand, gravel).



## WHAT REALLY MATTERS

One day, an old university professor was hired to give a seminar on time management to a group of 15 directors from large North American companies. This was one of the five seminars offered that day. The old professor therefore had only an hour to teach the group.

Standing before this elite group of ready to write down everything he would say, the professor looked at them one by one and said, *“We’re going to do an experiment.”*

The old professor took a large one-gallon Mason jar from underneath his desk and placed it on top. He then took out 12 rocks the size of tennis balls and gently placed them in the jar one by one. When he could not fit another stone into the jar, he looked at the students and asked:

*“Is this jar full?”*

Everyone replied: *“Yes.”*

The old professor waited a few seconds, then asked:

*“Really?”*

This time, he pulled a container filled with gravel from underneath the desk. He carefully poured the gravel over the rocks, then shook the jar. The gravel fell between the rocks . . . right to the bottom. The old professor looked at the class again and asked:

*“Is this jar full?”*

This time, his clever students were beginning to understand his ploy.

One person replied: *“Probably not!”*

*“Good!”* said the old professor.

Now, he pulled a bucket of sand from below his desk. He carefully poured the sand into the jar. It filled in the spaces between the rocks and the gravel. Once again, he asked:



***“Is this jar full?”***

This time, without hesitation, the students replied ***“No!”*** in unison.

***“Good!”*** said the old professor.

As his prestigious students expected, the old professor took a pitcher of water from the table and filled the jar to the top. He looked at the class and asked:

***“What does this experiment tell us?”***

The most daring student, who had given it thought throughout the seminar, answered:

***“It tell us that even when we think our agenda is completely full, we could add more appointments and more things to do, if we really wanted to.”***

***“No, that’s not it,”*** replied the old professor.

What this experiment tells us is: ***“If we don’t put the rocks in the jar first, we can never fit them all in.”***

Total silence followed, with each person thinking about this statement. The old professor continued:

***“What are the rocks in your life? Your health? Your family? Your friends? Making your dreams come true? Doing what you love? Learning? Defending a cause? Relaxing? Taking your time? Or something else?”***

What we must remember is the importance of making our ROCKS a priority in our lives, otherwise we won’t be able to. Giving priority to fillers (gravel, sand) will fill our lives, and we won’t have enough time to devote to the important things. So don’t forget to ask yourselves: ***“What are the ROCKS in my life?”*** Then, carefully put them in the jar of your life first.

With a wave of his hand, the old professor bid goodbye to his audience and slowly left the room.





## WHAT I'M GOOD AT

### **Theme**

Self-esteem

### **Purpose**

- To give students the opportunity to compare their self-evaluation with their parent's (or parents') perception of their strengths and weaknesses
- To recognize the importance of being able to make a fair and realistic judgment about themselves

### **Classes**

Cycle Three

### **Materials**

- A copy of Sheet 15.1 for each student
- A copy of Sheet 15.2 for each parent

### **Duration**

15 minutes



**WHAT I'M GOOD AT**  
(Student's sheet)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Evaluate your talents and skills by checking the appropriate box.**

<b>I'm good at...</b>	<b>Very good</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Not bad</b>	<b>Not very good</b>
1- Individual sports				
2- Team sports				
3- Manual tasks (cutting, nailing, hammering, sewing, knitting, etc.)				
4- Activities that require good balance				
5- Everyday tasks (folding laundry, putting things away, cleaning, preparing meals, etc.)				
6- Visual arts (drawing, painting, gluing, cutting, etc.)				
7- Music				
8- Theatre				
9- Making people laugh				
10- Understanding and using computer software				
11- Explaining things to others				
12- Planning and organizing				
13- Sorting and classifying				
14- Telling stories				
15- Calculating				
16- Memorizing things				
<b>I'm able to...</b>	<b>Very well</b>	<b>Pretty well</b>	<b>Not badly</b>	<b>Not very well</b>
17- Listen to others				
18- Cooperate				
19- Make friends				
20- Be generous				
21- Express my ideas				
22- Express my feelings				
23- Assert myself (say what's on my mind, even when it isn't easy)				
24- Make choices				
25- Respect rules and authority				

**Once you have finished:**

- Complete the following sentence: I think I'm fun to be with and others like my company because...
- Compare your answers with those of your parent(s). Discuss the points for which you had different answers.
- Answer the following questions, together with your parent(s):
  - Is it easy to make a fair and realistic judgment about yourself? Why?
  - Is it important to be able to make a fair and realistic judgment about yourself? Why?
  - Can comparing your point of view with another's help you to make a more fair and realistic judgment about yourself? Why?



**WHAT I'M GOOD AT**  
(Parent's sheet)

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_

*Evaluate your child's talents and skills by checking the appropriate box.*

<b>My child is good at...</b>	<b>Very good</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Not bad</b>	<b>Not very good</b>
1- Individual sports				
2- Team sports				
3- Manual tasks (cutting, nailing, hammering, sewing, knitting, etc.)				
4- Activities that require good balance				
5- Everyday tasks (folding laundry, putting things away, cleaning, preparing meals, etc.)				
6- Visual arts (drawing, painting, gluing, cutting, etc.)				
7- Music				
8- Theatre				
9- Making people laugh				
10- Understanding and using computer software				
11- Explaining things to others				
12- Planning and organizing				
13- Sorting and classifying				
14- Telling stories				
15- Calculating				
16- Memorizing things				
<b>My child is able to...</b>	<b>Very well</b>	<b>Pretty well</b>	<b>Not badly</b>	<b>Not very well</b>
17- Listen to others				
18- Cooperate				
19- Make friends				
20- Be generous				
21- Express his or her ideas				
22- Express his or her feelings				
23- Assert himself or herself (say what's on his or her mind, even when it isn't easy)				
24- Make choices				
25- Respect rules and authority				

**Once you have finished:**

- Complete the following sentence: My child is fun to be with and others like his or her company because...
- Compare your answers with those of your child. Discuss the points for which you had different answers.
- Answer the following questions, together with your child:
  - Is it easy to make a fair and realistic judgment about yourself? Why?
  - Is it important to be able to make a fair and realistic judgment about yourself? Why?
  - Can comparing your point of view with another's help you to make a more fair and realistic judgment about yourself? Why?



## I CAN DO IT ALL BY MYSELF

### **Theme**

Autonomy

### **Purpose**

- To give students and their parent(s) the opportunity to:
  - compare their evaluations of the child's degree of autonomy at home
  - discuss approaches to take to increase the child's degree of autonomy at home

### **Classes**

Cycles Two and Three

### **Materials**

- A copy of Sheet 16.1 for each student
- A copy of Sheet 16.2 for each parent

### **Duration**

15 minutes



**I CAN DO IT ALL BY MYSELF**  
(Student's sheet)

**Evaluation of my degree of responsibility at home**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*Evaluate your degree of responsibility at home using the following scale:*

- If you are able to do the activity mentioned without an adult's help or without being asked **most of the time**, write **three points** in the right-hand column.
- If you are able to do the activity mentioned without an adult's help or without being asked **occasionally**, write **two points** in the right-hand column.
- If you are able to do the activity mentioned without an adult's help or without being asked **rarely**, write **one point** in the right-hand column.

Activity	Points
1- Going to bed at a reasonable time	
2- Doing your homework and studying	
3- Putting away and finding your things	
4- Controlling your emotions: anger, excitement, anxiety, etc.	
5- Limiting the time spent in front of the TV or computer or playing video games	
6- Limiting the amount of candy you eat	
7- Leaving for school on time	
8- Respecting your curfew	
9- Avoiding getting into dangerous situations (injuries, breaking objects, etc.)	
10- Organizing your free time	
11- Brushing your teeth and taking a bath or shower	

**Once you have finished:**

- Compare your answers with those of your parent(s). Discuss the points for which you had different answers.
- Together with your parent(s), pick one or two points to improve and discuss approaches on how to make these improvements.



**I CAN DO IT ALL BY MYSELF**  
(Parent's sheet)

**Evaluation of my child's degree of responsibility at home**

Child's name: \_\_\_\_\_

*Evaluate your child's degree of autonomy at home using the following scale:*

- If your child is able to do the activity mentioned without an adult's help or without being asked **most of the time**, write **three points** in the right-hand column.
- If your child is able to do the activity mentioned without an adult's help or without being asked **occasionally**, write **two points** in the right-hand column.
- If your child is able to do the activity mentioned without an adult's help or without being asked **rarely**, write **one point** in the right-hand column.

Activity	Points
1- Going to bed at a reasonable time	
2- Doing homework and studying	
3- Putting away and finding his or her things	
4- Controlling his or her emotions: anger, excitement, anxiety, etc.	
5- Limiting the time spent in front of the TV or computer or playing video games	
6- Limiting the amount of candy he or she eats	
7- Leaving for school on time	
8- Respecting his or her curfew	
9- Avoiding getting into dangerous situations (injuries, breaking objects, etc.)	
10- Organizing his or her free time	
11- Brushing his or her teeth and taking a bath or a shower	

**Once you have finished:**

- Compare your answers with those of your child. Discuss the points for which you had different answers.
- Together with your child, pick one or two points to improve and discuss approaches on how to make these improvements.

