

A Support Team For Your Student

by Joe Bruzese

What is your vision for the school year? Is academic achievement at the top of the list, or will this be the year your child breaks out of his social shell? Will your family grow closer or more distant as they face the challenges of another school year? Who will guide your child's development?

According to the United States Census Bureau, today's generation of school-age children spend the majority of their waking hours in the care of someone other than their parents. Given the influence that teachers, coaches, mentors and extended family members have on a child's development, the necessity for building a positive and dynamic relationship with this group of people has never been greater. It also requires a special set of parenting skills.

Five Steps to Building Your Support Team

1 Create a roster. Who will impact your child's life this year? Begin by creating a list of the adults who will connect with your child during the first month of school.

2 Position the players. With a completed roster in place, identify when and where your child will see these critical people. Teachers and school personnel typically fall within a specified seven-hour time block on a regular Monday-through-Friday schedule. However, the after-school hours are equally important. Identifying who will supervise your child beyond the conclusion of the school day creates an accurate picture of your child's life and the role that each adult will play this year.



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3 Connect. The beginning of a school year marks the start to many new and inspiring relationships. During the first few weeks of school, take two minutes to communicate with each person on your roster. Send a written note or e-mail message, or share a quick conversation in person. The message to convey is short, yet sincere: “Hi, I just wanted you to know how excited I am to have you in my child’s life this year.” This quick introduction sends a powerful message to everyone on your team about the importance of his or her role in your child’s life.

4 Check in. Don’t wait until a problem arises to initiate a conversation. Check in with each of the people on your roster every two to three weeks. Start the conversation by asking, “How are you?” and let the discussion flow from there. Beginning with an open-ended question allows the conversation about your child to evolve naturally. Leading questions like, “How was her behavior today?” or “Were there any problems?” bring immediate focus to a potentially negative set of comments that result in creating greater distance between parents and key adults in their child’s life. The opportunity to share positive comments or questions is lost amid the negativity.

5 Celebrate. Reaching milestones and achieving goals is cause for celebration. Placing a quick call to your child’s teacher after the conclusion of a long-term project or class play shows acknowledgement and appreciation, two characteristics of supportive teams. The more often team members celebrate together, the stronger the relationship grows. As a teacher and a mom, Dee Moran knows the importance of celebrating achievement. “Our 6-year-old likes being recognized for his achievements. The simplest words of praise and acknowledgment leave him proud for days. Julie, our 13-year-old, typically opts for a more subtle approach to celebration, preferring to spend a night out with friends at the movies after bringing a successful semester to a close. Celebrating achievements both small and large keeps everyone moving forward.”

Bringing the valued members of your team together, both at home and in the community, allows your vision to become a reality. And celebrating the fulfillment of a vision inspires motivation for continued success. □

Joe Bruzese is author of *A Parent’s Guide to the Middle School Years*.

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