



# Working with parents and carers to positively influence their child's education

**UPDATED 2014**

Studies have shown that one of the biggest factors in a child's success at school is parental attitudes and involvement in a child's education. School involvement however, can be a complex and daunting process for refugee families who may have experienced a very different education system and set of expectations. Homework program co-ordinators can assist refugee families in understanding the Australian education system and how they, as parents or carers can positively influence their child's education.

The following information outlines a number of ways that parents can help their child or teenager to reach his/her potential, either through activities and routines at home or through various levels of involvement with the school.

## Parental Support at Home

Important things that parents can consider at home are to:

- Show an interest in their child's day at school, including social and learning activities.
- Develop routines before and after school that include some time for leisure, play and homework.
- Provide a quiet study space for school work/reading.
- Ensure their child has adequate sleep so that he/she is well rested for school the next day. It is important to remember that teenagers generally need at least 9 hours sleep.
- Pack a healthy lunch and morning tea for school and send a water bottle.

The Centre for Multicultural Youth is a Victorian not-for-profit organisation supporting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to build better lives in Australia.

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*CMY acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government*

- Support their child with homework – if English is not spoken at home, discuss homework in first language. Also discuss current affairs/news in first language.
- Consider a balance between television viewing, computer time and other activities to allow adequate time for homework.
- Praise and encourage their child for effort and work, especially when they have tried hard. Use mistakes/failures as learning opportunities. Display work around the house. Have high but reasonable expectations of their child.
- Talk to their teacher/school staff if their child is struggling with school work and homework.
- Read a variety of books and other material with their child.
- Do basic maths with younger children e.g. when shopping, cooking and driving.
- Talk to their child about their culture and encourage them to talk about this at school.

## Communication with the School

Building good relationships with the school and teachers is important. Actions that parents can take to foster these relationships are:

- Speak to their child's teacher if they have a concern about school work or other difficulties.
- Read student reports when they come home. Ask their child's teacher to clarify anything they don't understand. Talk to their child about the things they are doing well and the things they are struggling with. Check younger children's bags for notes and other information.
- Attend parent/teacher interviews. This is a chance to sit with their child's teacher and discuss progress and difficulties.
- Read school newsletters so that they are informed about what is happening at the school e.g. new programs and initiatives, staff changes and opportunities to be involved.
- Attend school events like productions or displays.

## Volunteering/School Involvement

Getting involved in their child's school can assist parents to learn a bit more about the school, its culture and the people who work and study in it. This can also create opportunities to talk about school with their child. Ideas for volunteering include:

- Being a member of the parent club at the school, being on the school council, or assisting at the school canteen.
- Attending classroom education activities, excursions or helping with specific projects.
- Assisting with a one-off or annual event such as a school concert or fundraising activities.

## Assistance for Parents/Children with English as an Additional Language (EAL/ESL)

Parents who speak English as an additional language can consider the following:

- Let the school know if they need an interpreter for interviews, information sessions, enrolments or other meetings. The school can organise interpreters free of charge, but will need some notice for bookings.
- Find out if their school has a Multicultural Education Aide (MEA). The role of this person is to:
  - » assist in the communication between their child and teacher in the classroom
  - » help their child to get involved in school activities
  - » assist teachers in gaining an understanding of the family's culture and their expectations of the school and education
  - » help newly arrived families to settle into the school environment.iii
- Talk to their child's teacher about EAL support – some schools qualify for this support and some don't – it depends on a number of factors. If their child is receiving EAL support, they can find out who the teacher is and get a bit more information.

## References

i Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Victoria Being Involved, <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/aboutschool/participation/default.htm>, viewed 12 June 2012. [Internet].

ii Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (2006), *A Three-Way Partnership? Exploring the experiences of CLD families in schools*, CMYI, Melbourne.

iii ESL Unit, Targeted Branch Programs (2008) *The MEA Handbook*, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria <http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/teachlearn/student/meahandbook.pdf>, 12 June 2012.

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The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture. *School's in for refugees: A whole-school approach to supporting students of refugee background*. 2nd ed. Melbourne: Foundation House; 2011.