

Tips for Involving Parents

- Welcome parents and children to the school. Spend time with the family in an informal interview. Answer any questions they may have and assure them that personal information will be treated confidentially. Tour the school with parents and their children.
- Speak clearly in a normal tone and at a natural speed when conversing with a new family; e.g., not too fast but not slowly or loudly.
- Arrange for interpreters, if necessary, through a settlement organization (e.g., Calgary Immigrant Aid Society, New Home Immigration and Settlement) or suggest parents bring an English-speaking family member or friend to meetings at the school.
- Follow up initial interviews with subsequent meetings and telephone calls as orientation continues.
- Invite parents to visit the school and watch a class in action (more appropriate in Division I than in Division II or III).
- Provide basic information about the school; e.g., address, weekly/class schedule and yearly calendar of holidays and special events, names and contact information of teachers and the principal. Provide a form with the names of any contact teachers and their schedules and include written instructions to parents for student absences from school.
- Encourage parents to speak their first language at home with their children and assure them that doing so will enhance learning English as a second language.
- Find out if there are cultural holidays or customs that will keep the child away from school, or affect his or her participation in regular activities, so the school can make accommodations as necessary. Instruct parents about the importance and process of advising the school of student absences.
- Rewrite information letters regarding school meetings or upcoming events in simple English (this can be a task that involves the ESL student and a teacher assistant working together) or have the letters translated with the help of a settlement organization or an interpreter.
- Contact Immigration Canada and/or local settlement organizations for background information on various cultures that teachers and administrators would find helpful.
- Consider putting together a newcomer kit for parents and students. For more information, see *Welcoming New Students*, Chapter 2, p. 24.

The following page is a sample handout for parents of ESL students.

Helping Your Child Learn English

There are several ways you can help your child learn English.

Read to your child: One important activity you can do is read to your child. It does not matter whether it is English or your first language. Read anything—stories, articles, poems. Ask family members or friends to help.

Use your first language: Continue to speak your first language at home with your child. The stronger the first language, the better your child will progress in English studies.

Allow your child to speak your first language. Your child is intellectually and emotionally developed beyond what he or she can express in English. Your child will eventually catch up in English. In the meantime, he or she will be less frustrated if allowed to use your first language.

Plan activities: Help your child acquire English through planned activities; e.g., trips to the park, movies, a neighbourhood sports event or other activities. New words and structures will be learned and reinforced.

Share stories: Share common fairy tales and stories with your child in your first language and in English, either by reading together or watching videos. Share your family stories and history with your child. Teach your child about your culture and homeland.

Listen to your child read: Discuss what your child is doing in English. Accept that errors are fine when learning a language. It is more important in the early stages that your child express himself or herself.

Find a translator: Provide the school with the name and telephone number of a relative or close family friend who speaks English and whom the school can contact in an emergency, to pass on important information to you or act as a translator in confidential situations.

Be patient: Recognize that, even in an immersion situation, it will take five to seven years for your child to develop English skills to the same level as his or her first language.