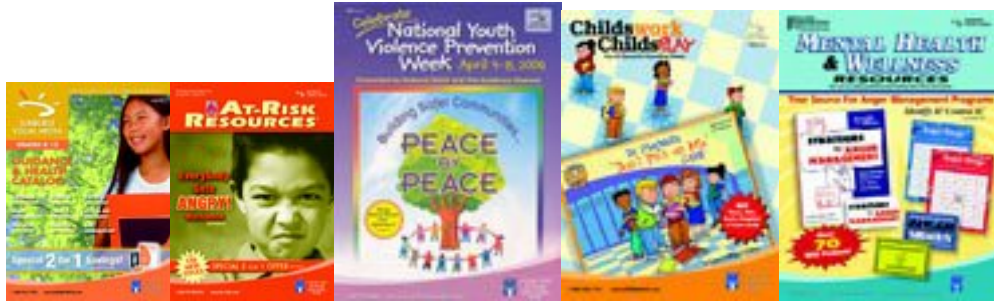


## THE COUNSELOR'S CLASSROOM

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### HOOKING PARENTS IN

By Julia Taylor, MA from the [American School Counselor Association](#) for [GuidanceChannel.com](#)

Numerous research studies have indicated the best predictor of student achievement may be parental involvement. In addition to enhancing student success, parents who are actively involved in their child's educational environment receive positive social benefits. The key to "hooking parents in" is to do it early in the school year and in a non-threatening manner. Some parents may feel intimidated by the school environment if they did not have a good experience themselves in school, while others may feel apprehensive about a new social venture. Enabling parents to interact with one another can help them to overcome these concerns so that they will be more likely to be engaged in their children's education.

Below are some easy-to-implement activities that you can use to get parents more involved in your school.

#### Parent Coffee Club

Pick a day of the month (for example the first Friday of every month) and host a coffee club to discuss upcoming activities in the school. This can be an informal gathering and can give the PTA the opportunity to find volunteers for future events. It can also be a great way for administrators to mingle with parents and for parents to get to know one another. Creating a sign up sheet for snacks is an idea for schools that are short on funds.

#### Parent Book Club

Oprah has one and so can your school! Book clubs not only provide a social atmosphere for everyone involved, they build reading skills, as well. Creating a club is easy and essentially runs after a few opening questions. The book club could meet once a month and have a yearly reading list posted in a newsletter, flyer, website, etc. This would give parents the opportunity to have a list to choose from if they are not already interested in specific topics. The books can be related to child development, current trends/issues, fiction books, the *New York Times Bestsellers*, or a combination of all of them. The discussion questions don't need to always be thought-provoking, what matters most is that they get a conversation started. Below are some questions you could use for any book.

- What did you like about the book?
- What parts of the book did you not agree with?
- How does this book relate to our situations?

- Why do you think the author chose this topic?
- Did the author bring up any topics you would have liked to be discussed in greater detail?
- What chapter hooked you in the most?
- Did you find the book easy or difficult to read?
- Have you changed any of your habits (child-rearing, personal, or relational) as a result of the book?
- Would you recommend this book to a friend?

Another idea is to create a parent/child reading club. The guidelines are the same, only you would pick appropriate books for all ages. Another benefit from creating a reading club will be the added brownie points with your English teachers!

### **Bring Your Parent to School Day**

Once a year try to reverse the ever popular “bring your child to work day.” This is more feasible at the elementary level, but can work in secondary schools, as well. This type of program gives parents the opportunity to experience the school environment, see how educational standards have evolved since their time in school, share a nutritious school lunch, and support their children’s education. It is also a fantastic opportunity for parents to fill out an evaluation to see how the school can meet their needs. The program does not need to be expensive, especially if you want them get the real experience (for example, no gourmet lunches for the parents, just the grilled cheese sandwiches the students eat every Tuesday). The cost could only entail paper for invitations and extra food from the cafeteria.

### **Parent E-Pal Program**

Establishing an email exchange program between parents is another way to bridge the communication gap that often exists in schools. Your school could produce a parent email list, a grade-by-grade or class-by-class email message board (make sure there is a moderator), or a listserv.

### **Parent Support Groups**

The benefits of parent support groups are endless and highly feasible in any educational setting. It is suggested you run a variety of groups at different times throughout the year. Topics can include: ADHD, learning disabilities, special education, bullying, relational aggression, grief, behavior, deployment, transitioning issues, study skills, anger management, and/or raising teenagers. The key to the success of these groups is to keep the focus on the topic with an emphasis on parenting. For parents, support groups can:

- provide a sense of belonging;
- help them cope with their children’s behaviors;
- reinforce the school/community connection;
- share information, ideas and resources;
- build more effective parenting skills;
- learn ways to deal with issues surrounding their child and school; and
- have an opportunity to form friendships and connections.

Parent involvement is a vital part of the overall success of your students and implementing some or all of these ideas can benefit your entire school community. Good luck!

### **References**

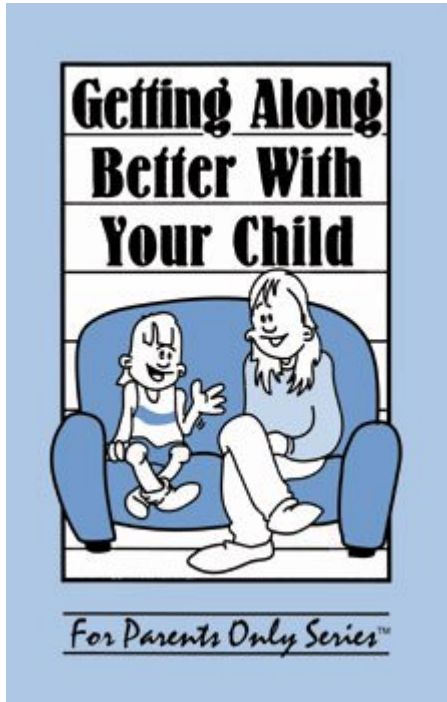
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For over 30 years, Sunburst Visual Media has been producing the highest quality guidance and health programs. From the start, Sunburst Visual Media's mission has been to enhance learning and help teachers get students thinking and talking about the difficult issues they face every day. Sunburst Visual Media's reputation as the recognized leader in the field of guidance and health, is built on its ability to present tough-to-teach topics in a realistic, non-judgmental, and captivating manner. Sunburst Visual Media's prides itself on consistently providing educators with award-winning programs in such areas as: anger management, bullying and harassment, character education, violence prevention, conflict resolution, drug abuse prevention, sex education, career education, health, and parenting skills.

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### **ABOUT JULIA TAYLOR, MA**

Julia Taylor is a freshman counselor for Loudoun County Public Schools in Virginia and is the Regional Conference Chairperson for the Virginia School Counselor Association (VSCA).

### **ABOUT THE AMERICAN SCHOOL COUNSELOR ASSOCIATION**

Professional school counselors everywhere share the same vision to support their schools by serving their students. School counselors know that guiding students toward personal and social development leads to improved academic achievement. Through their partnership with principals and teachers, school counselors help prepare today's students to become tomorrow's adults.

The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) responds to school counselors' unique needs, helping them grow individually as professionals and providing them with real tools to guide their students. As an international nonprofit organization founded in 1952, ASCA has the benefit of foresight and hindsight. It has grown to fit counselors' changing needs through social and educational movements from desegregation to standardized testing. Responding to the needs of counselors as voiced by counselors has enabled ASCA to remain vital and forward-thinking.

ASCA serves as the voice of school counselors on Capitol Hill and helps members ensure their voices are heard in state legislatures. ASCA has active government affairs representatives who monitor activities in Congress, the Department of Education and throughout Washington to advocate on behalf of school counselors' interests: funding, certification, student-to-counselor ratios and more.

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