**The difference you can make**

**Helping children learn – the secondary years**

Your child learns every day and everywhere, at home, at school, and in the community.

How you support your child’s learning matters. You have a key role in shaping their values, attitudes and approaches to learning at home and at school.

It’s important that you continue to stay engaged with your child’s learning in secondary school. There are simple things you can do to help your child thrive and become independent learners.

**Why it matters**

There are real benefits when you stay involved in your child’s secondary school education. The benefits include:

* improved academic achievement
* higher completion rates
* young people have stronger aspirations for post-school learning and employment
* positive student attitudes and behaviour at school
* increased self-esteem and healthy relationships
* reduced mental health issues
* improved attendance rates.

**Why secondary school can be challenging for parents**

Young people are more independent in secondary school. They are more active in their own education. This means the way you support your child’s learning could change.

Secondary schools are different to primary schools. They have different structures. How they communicate student progress is different too. As your child grows older, being involved in their education may require additional planning.

**What matters most**

Research shows that a young person’s development in secondary school is strongly influenced by how a family values school and their education. This includes a family’s expectations and aspirations for their child’s future.

If your home is a place that encourages and supports learning, it affects how your child learns. Research shows this has more influence than your direct involvement with the subjects your child is studying.

**What you can do**

**Be sensitive and give structure**

Be sensitive. Young people want to be more independent. Give them structure and support.

* Think about your parenting style. Be supportive, warm and responsive.
* Encourage your child to do their own or joint decision-making.
* Help your child make their own schedules to manage school and homework.
* Let your child solve their own problems.
* Maintain a consistent level of support and supervision.

**Discuss aspirations and expectations for your child’s learning**

* Talk about why and how you value education for your child’s future.
* Set high but realistic educational goals for your child.
* Have aspirations for your child.
* Talk about post-school education options, courses and careers.
* Be positive. Talk with your child about the things they   
  are good at.
* Encourage your child to learn from their mistakes.

**Talk about learning**

Talk about school, learning and education. Talk often and listen.

Discuss big ideas around politics, society, science and culture. Link these to schoolwork if you can.

Talk about books, movies, documentaries, television and online media. Talk about what your child is reading or watching.

* Ask questions in a way that encourages a discussion. Try to avoid questions that only need a ’yes’ or ‘no’ answer. Use example open-ended questions.
* What did you enjoy…?
* What do you think about…?
* Why did you like…?
* Give encouragement.
* Develop influence through questioning. Helping your child to develop their views and opinions by exploring different aspects of a topic.

**Keep connected**

Stay in contact with school. Have discussions with teachers in formal and informal ways. It could be at a parent-teacher interview, through an email conversation or over the phone. Be present for conversations about your child’s future. Together, talk with the school about your child’s education and career opportunities. Attend course counselling sessions with your child.

Make contact with as many of your child’s teachers as possible. Find out the best ways to keep in contact. Some secondary schools use apps that help parents to see their child’s learning and communicate with teachers.

Find out who the key contact person is for your child. It might be the care group teacher or home group teacher. This teacher will have an overview of your child’s wellbeing. They will keep track of their progress and achievements.

**Give your child appropriate homework support**

Support your child with their homework. Help them develop their own schedules for doing homework. You can also help them to manage other activities like sport or work.

If you can, make sure your child has a quiet and organised space for doing their homework. Your local library might work if there isn’t space at home.

Avoid direct involvement in doing your child’s homework if they are struggling. Help them problem-solve the issue, and work out what they will do next. This is more important as your child grows older.

Show interest in what your child is learning and doing at school. Ask about what homework they have. Follow your child’s schedule through the school.

**Find out more**

[Talk to your school or preschool](https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites-and-facilities/education-and-care-locations/find-school-service) about how you can be more involved

[www.education.sa.gov.au/parentengagement](http://www.education.sa.gov.au/parentengagement) – find out what parent engagement resources are available

[https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/parent-information/ –](https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/parent-information/%20–%20) information on what all Australian students learn as they progress in their learning at school  
  
[www.learningpotential.gov.au](http://www.learningpotential.gov.au) – ideas and activities to support learning from birth to Year 12  
  
[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au) - information to help parents and carers make decisions about parenting their children.

**About this information**

This information is adapted from a series made in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). The ACT Education and Training Directorate developed the series in partnership with:

* the non-profit Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY)
* representatives of ACT independent, and Catholic schools and parent organisations.

The series is Creative Commons. It is based on international research and consultation with teachers and parents.