

The Questions Parents Ask About School

“How was school today?” is a question asked all over Australia every day and how often do we get a one word answer to describe the last seven hours? Why is this question so hard for children to answer?

To begin with, the child has to sum up a whole day and that’s hard for anyone to do. We would like to think that your child really wants to say, “My day was full of so many interesting learning experiences my teachers presented, I contributed lots of my ideas and I got to play with different friends at recess and lunch time and now I just don’t know where to begin” but let’s face it, an answer like this is rather unlikely.

Inquiring about the day at school shows you’re interested in what’s going on in his/her life. This interest highlights your value in education, promotes mental health, happiness and wellbeing and has also been shown to have a positive effect on children’s behaviour and achievement. It provides an opportunity for you to learn more about what is expected of your child at school, how he/she learns, handles challenges and keeps you in touch with your child’s feelings about what is happening at school.

Giving your child space between school and talking about school is useful in that it allows him/her time to relax and settle in to the after school routine without the pressure of reflecting on the day. Specific questions about parts of the day will more likely elicit information. Try to use open ended questions which require more than a “Yes” or “No” answer. For example:

- What was fun?
- Who did you play with/talk to at lunch time?
- What topics are you talking about/studying in maths now?
- What did you look at at the library?
- What did you do straight after recess today?

The degree of focus you show will have a bearing on the response you receive. Putting aside what you are doing and giving your child full attention relays a message that you are fully engaged with them and very interested. Using respectful language when you talk about school and teachers with or in front of your child conveys a message that you hold the school in high esteem and shows that you expect your child to respect teachers and the school. Active listening techniques such as allowing your child to finish uninterrupted, concentrating on what they are saying without thinking about what you will say next and reframing what he/she has said in slightly different words show your child you are listening and understanding. If a problem at school is raised, listen, empathise with his/her feelings, ask if anyone else at school knows about the problem, if anyone has been able to help already and make further inquiries with the class or home room teacher if you feel that it is serious enough to do so.

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