

UNDERCOVER TEACHER: HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD WITHOUT BEING PUSHY

Our Undercover Teacher advises how to be supportive without tipping over into the dreaded realms of 'pushy parent'



One of the hardest things to do as a parent is to find the right balance between being supportive of your child and being 'pushy'. They are not mutually exclusive, and in fact, schools do welcome parents who take an active part in their child's education. But you can go too far, and that can actually backfire on your child's wellbeing. Here are some useful tips for navigating that fine line:

1. Know where your child's homework diary is

Different schools have different systems. Some children will still have paper diaries but most of them especially in secondary school are online now. The software they use normally lists the homework your child has in due-date order, and is set by the teacher, so you aren't reliant on your child writing it down. Understand your child will almost never have 'no homework'. The school (and eventually your child) will greatly appreciate you checking up once in a while on how their task list looks.

2. When your child has a setback, make sure they understand where they went wrong and how to put this right

A really good test of where you are on the supportive/pushy continuum is whether your child feels able to tell you the truth about how they are doing at school in any assessments. The key is how you react when it has gone wrong (and it probably will at some point!) The best thing you can do (apart from hug them) is to ask them how much they understand about where they went wrong and how to put it right. As long as you are satisfied they know this, they can move on and improve.

3. Celebrate the process more than the outcome

An easy way to encourage your child to talk to you more about their education is to notice, comment on and, if appropriate, celebrate the process they went through for the work they are

doing. This applies to every subject, and in fact almost anything they do in and out of the classroom. The process in this case can include the effort they put in, the way they used trial and error, the way they responded to a setback during a project, the technique they used and much more. Your child will appreciate that you notice these things and, more importantly, will focus more themselves on the process than the outcome, which in the long term will help them greatly.

4. Be prepared to check what they are saying about the school, with the school

It is a working parent's burden that when they come home and ask their child about their day at school, their child will unburden themselves with all the things they are unhappy about at school. This could be complaints about a teacher, or about something a fellow pupil said or did, or what they consider to be an unfair punishment. What they say could be true, or not true, exaggerated, or even understated. These often seem worse to children at night. Your temptation might be to fire off an email to your child's school immediately.

My advice is to wait until morning and ask if your child still feels the same. If you do end up writing to the school, the best advice is to just state what your child said and ask for the school to investigate it. Remember, it can work both ways - if you don't believe everything your child says about the school, the school won't believe everything your child says about you!

5. Find out when reports are published, how you read them, and focus on the comments not the grade

Reports are usually published online now. I am always surprised how many parents either don't get around to reading them, or don't know how to read them, and then focus only on the grades given without reading the comments. The school will publish a guide to what the grades actually mean, and do ask your child what they mean too. The best way to read a report is with your child. Do feel free to check their and your understanding with the school. More importantly, read the comments. They will often say some very nice things about your child, and more importantly explain what they might improve on. Teachers spend a long time on these comments, and they shouldn't be ignored. More importantly, if you read them, your child will too.
