



Q. I just received the school year calendar from my kids' school. On the calendar is a "back to school night." What is it and is it important for us to attend? Also how can I ensure that my kids have a successful school year?

A. Yes, it is important and yes you should definitely attend. First, you should attend as many school meetings as possible. They not only keep you informed but allow you to provide your ideas and concerns. Back to school night is a general meeting that has the following purposes: you get to meet your children's teachers, principal and other important staff, academic standards and expectations are outlined, homework expectations are presented, behavioral issues are addressed, parent expectations are outlined, specialty staff are introduced should your child need any services during the school year, your district's handbook is presented and explained, dress codes are stated and you get to meet other parents and the PTA committee in the school. Back to school night is not the time for a parent-teacher conference. Most back to school nights occur within the first two to three weeks of new school year. Your children's teachers don't have anything to tell you, yet. Your child's teacher will introduce herself and give an **overview of students' daily routines, schedules, goals, and activities** — some of this may already be written on the blackboard when you get there so the teacher can dive right into other important things. She will also

discuss her homework policy, discipline, plan

, and any other important information such as if she maintains a classroom homepage and how to contact her. The lengthiest part of the evening will be spent

going over the curriculum

and the methods the teacher will use to reach the year's goals. If your child has several teachers for different subjects, you may go from classroom to classroom doing this, usually in the same order your child would, so you experience a mini-day of school.

Some questions you may ask the teachers are as follows:

1. How much homework do you give?

2. What grading system do you use?
3. How do we communicate with you?
4. Will you call once you see that my child is struggling?
5. How do you handle behavior issues?
6. How do you handle children who may be a little advanced?
7. What can I do at home to ensure a successful school year for my children?
8. Can I volunteer in the classroom?
9. Can I accompany my children on trips?
10. What are school lunches like?
11. Can my child bring a snack?
12. How do you handle special need students who need extra help?

13. Do you have a reward system?
14. My child is shy. How will you help him/her to speak up?
15. What supplies does my child need?
16. Do you send a weekly calendar or is my child expected to remember notices?
17. Are there specific books used at school that I can purchase for home use?
18. Can the school send home textbooks for home use?
19. Can my child gain extra points for extra work?
20. What can we do as parents to aid in the education of our children in your class?
21. Can I leave you my contact numbers in case of an emergency?
22. What is your teaching philosophy?
23. How do you uplift your students who may need extra encouragement?
24. How do you reach students who may be below average?

25. Do you teach via all modalities so that all of the children benefit including visual learners, auditory learners and hands on learners?

Q. I heard recently about a baby who died at a public swimming pool because he swallowed some pool water that was full of bacteria. Can you share some safety tips with parents?

A. Sure! I discussed swimming pool safety earlier this year about how to avoid drowning accidents. The case you are referring to is just a sad reminder of how careful and diligent we have to be while watching our children. Children love to swim in pools! However, if the pools are not properly cared for, bacteria can thrive and infect children. Basically, if the level of chlorine is not high enough to kill bacteria from children urinating in the pool, parents allowing sick children to swim, parents swimming with babies in diapers who defecate in the water, then other children can get very sick. The WebMD.com website offers these safety tips from environmental dangers:

Ask the management how the pool is sanitized and ventilated.

Talk to a pediatrician about the safety of chlorine exposure for your child.

Only swim in a pool if the water looks clear and not cloudy -- you should be able to see right to the bottom. Although a clear pool could still harbor germs, cloudy water is an indication of a pool that's not being properly maintained.

Touch the sides of the pool before going in -- they should not be slimy or sticky.

Listen to make sure that the filtering equipment is on.

Be wary of a very strong chlorine smell -- it's a sign of chloramines and poor ventilation.

Tell your kids not to swallow the water in swimming pools -- it's really best if they don't get it in their mouths at all.

Protect others by telling your kids to shower before getting in a pool, and by never letting them go in a pool when they're sick – especially with a stomach bug.

Avoid swimming in a highly chlorinated pool every day.

If you have your own pool at home, you should:

Make sure indoor pools have good ventilation -- just opening the windows and doors can make a big difference in air quality.

Keep your pool free of leaves and insects.

If you use chlorine, make sure not to use more than necessary. Keep Safe!

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