



Black Parents and Their Children's Education

20 ACTION POINTS

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1. MAKE EDUCATION NUMBER ONE ON YOUR AGENDA

For all parents the education of their children is very important. However, because of pressures at work and elsewhere in their lives, Black parents often feel isolated when it comes to approaching schools for support for their children. We therefore urge parents to seek help and advice where necessary from local community organisations, other parents at your child's school, friends and relatives.

2. MAKE YOURSELF KNOWN AT YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL

When parents need to find out how their child is progressing, they should contact their child's tutor to discuss this. Where possible visit the school to speak to teachers about your child's progress. It is important that you do not feel that you only visit the school when a problem arises with your child. You should also attend parents evenings and other events to discuss your child's development.

3. QUESTION CRITICALLY THE WAY YOU PARENT YOUR CHILD

Parenting is the only job we have for life, but it is also a job that changes throughout life and is different under different circumstances. As Black parents, we have to remember that if we have been parented in a culture which is different from the one in which we are bringing up our own children, then there are likely to be additional stresses.

4. IF YOU ARE A SINGLE PARENT, ASK A FRIEND TO BE A ROLE MODEL OR MENTOR TO YOUR CHILD

As a parent you are your child's main role model. If there is an absent partner it is worth seriously considering having a mentor for your child who could assist in helping them to develop a strong and confident self-image.

5. LINK UP WITH A PARENT SUPPORT GROUP WITHIN YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL

Many Black parents within schools are beginning to meet together within a supportive environment to discuss their needs and the needs of their children. However, these groups cannot begin if parents do not make the decision to start them up themselves.

Talk to other Black parents whose children attend your child's school to explore whether they would like to set up such a group. You can contact local community organisations or the Race Equality Council (REC) in your borough for information on other support groups for schools in your area. It is important for Black parents to set up such initiatives themselves so that their interests can be met and their voices heard.

6. CONSIDER BECOMING A PARENT GOVERNOR IN YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL

Black parents should take an active role in the running of their child's school. One way to do this is to participate in the decision-making of the school. Once a year, schools try to encourage parents to become governors. It is therefore important that you seek such a position in the school or in the local LEA governor section. Black governors may feel isolated once in these positions, so our advice is to join a support network especially for Black governors.

7. ATTEND AS MANY PARENTS' EVENINGS AS POSSIBLE

If you want to find out how your child is doing at school, it is vital for you to attend parents' evenings. You as a parent need to find out how your child is progressing. It is important for your child to see that you are interested. Attending parents' evenings gives you the best opportunity to voice your concerns to teachers, particularly in view of the busy lives many parents now lead which makes it difficult for them to ring or visit schools during the day.

8. RESPOND TO DISAGREEMENTS THAT MAY ARISE WITH THE SCHOOL

Parents often receive reports and letters about their child and become angry if they disagree with them. Should this happen, do not remain silent or voice your anger to your child. Rather, go back to the school and discuss your concerns with the teacher. Ask your child about the problem, inform them about any planned meetings and monitor the situation as appropriate.

9. BECOME FAMILIAR WITH SCHOOL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Some parents may feel intimidated when they do not fully understand the information sent to them by schools in prospectuses and newsletters. Read this information thoroughly and seek to understand the school procedures. Do not be afraid to ask questions about information and policies. There needs to be a dialogue between parents and schools, and parental opinion is important to schools.

10. ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO READ MORE AT HOME: MAKE READING PART OF YOUR LEISURE ACTIVITY

If you want your child to get excited about reading, make sure you read! Parents are often busy and tired by the time they get home but try to make time to read with your child. For reading to be fun for your child, you might need to develop a set routine for when and where it takes place.

11. CHECK YOUR CHILD'S HOMEWORK

You should have a visible homework diary for your child, so that you are clear when your child needs to be doing homework. Agree a time and suitable place for homework. You may want to have a place in the home where your children can leave questions or problems they may have about their homework. Above all, give as much encouragement and praise as you can to your child.

12. ENSURING FAIR TREATMENT

When you believe your child has been treated unfairly by any school procedure, be this an hour-long detention or an exclusion, it is always important that you let a senior teacher know of your concerns. When you attend an appeal it is always wise to bring a representative from a local community organisation, or a friend who can give you support and advice on educational matters. Parents often feel isolated when their child is excluded and they are required to attend school to appeal the decision. Try to have as much support as possible. *Schools are required to listen and consider appeals.*

13. GET SECOND OPINIONS AROUND ISSUES SUCH AS SPECIAL NEEDS

Whenever a decision has been made which you are not completely happy about concerning your child, always try to get a second opinion. Try to meet with Education Welfare Officers, Special Needs Co-ordinators or Educational Psychologists in order to discuss your child's particular needs. Also contact local agencies who may be able to identify cultural issues involved in special needs assessments.

14. USING BLACK SUPPLEMENTARY SCHOOL AND HOMEWORK CLUBS

Black Supplementary schools are vital in providing additional educational support and development opportunities for your child. Some organisations have long waiting lists so put your child's name down early to ensure a place. Homework Clubs allow children to do their homework with additional tutor support, especially if their parents are working full-time and can't give direct support after school.

15. DEVELOP A CAREER TRACK OR ACTION PLAN FOR YOUR CHILD

Setting targets and devising action plans should not be something restricted to the school environment. Parents and their children can also set targets, which involve not only the child's progress at school but also at home, in areas such as homework, studying, helping out around home – as well as planning for the future. Career tracks and action plans are a useful guide for parents and children. They should be started at primary school and updated regularly.

16. BE AWARE OF GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

The Government wishes to consult with parents about educational issues; they have published papers such as "Excellence in Schools". Sometimes these papers are available in doctors' surgeries and supermarkets. If you have concerns or comments about Government papers, express them to your local MP or the Department for Education and Employment.

17. TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT THEIR DAY AT SCHOOL

Using mealtime as a time for enjoying conversation and sharing ideas is a good place to start. It is also important to listen to your child without judging. This is a unique opportunity for parents to demonstrate their interest in the 'little' details of their child's life. It is often easier to do this with younger children but secondary age children need this type of attention just as much.

18. DEALING WITH RACISM AND BULLYING

Coping with racial abuse and discrimination is painful for all who experience it, but it can be particularly difficult for children and young people. Black families have a long history of providing their members with support and techniques for surviving the harshness of racism, and Black parents are often best placed to give advice to Black children. When Black children experience bullying at school they may feel too anxious to approach their teacher for help (especially when teachers do not come from similar racial backgrounds). A child experiencing racist bullying at school may become withdrawn or respond by expressing anger at friends, family members and in the classroom.

19. ENCOURAGEMENT AND SELF-ESTEEM

Encouragement is a very important aspect of parenting. A child cannot grow, develop and gain an sense of belonging without encouragement. As parents, we often try to improve our children by concentrating on their mistakes. We can be experts at finding fault. This is discouraging to a child. Our society does not train us to encourage, but when we are on the lookout for effort and improvement, children begin to grow in confidence and make good strides. All human beings, regardless of ethnicity, need to develop a positive sense of self. The Black family plays a major role in assisting the Black child in developing a personal identity. This includes pride, self-esteem, positive feeling and self-confidence.

20. COPING WITH ADOLESCENCE

As parents we may have a tendency to view the many physical and emotional changes that our young experience simply as part of growing up. Black parents need to draw on their own memories of their teenage years. Being an adolescent is made all the more complicated when you are Black in White society. Remember that your teenager may be feeling insecure and vulnerable and will need to know that there is a safe haven in your home. You must also question yourself as a parent. Are you prepared for your child's growth into adulthood, their increasing independence, the possibility that they will be sexually active and that they may soon leave home? Try to deal with your own worries as a parent and show your teenager that you are supportive but not interfering. Through this you can help your child approach adulthood safely and will set in place the foundations for a long-lasting parent-child relationship.

Remember it is your child's right to be educated – so give the necessary support to ensure that this is done properly.

Supported by the National Lottery Charities Board

The Runnymede Trust has launched a new section of the Real Histories Directory.



Tell Me What I Need to Know

is designed to help parents, especially those from Black and Minority Ethnic, Refugee, Asylum-Seeking and Traveller communities to support their children in education.

www.realhistories.org.uk