

Barriers or Roadblocks to Involvement

It's not a lack of interest that keeps families from becoming involved in PTA or at school. Studies have shown that there are nine significant barriers which prevent families from becoming involved in their children's education. Consider the following as you reach out and ask people to join PTA:

Cultural Differences - People talk about common courtesy, but courtesy is not common – it is culturally determined. U.S. mannerisms, practices and habits can embarrass or offend people from different cultures. Likewise, the ways of other cultures may embarrass or offend people from the United States.

Language - Parents who do not speak English or don't speak it well may not understand newsletters, fliers, or speakers at meetings.

Time - It's hard for parents to find enough time to volunteer, attend meetings, and join decision-making committees at their children's school. These activities are often scheduled at times that interfere with work and other obligations, such as religious observances.

Not Feeling Valued - Some parents aren't sure they have anything of value to contribute. They feel intimidated by principals, teachers, and PTA leaders. These parents may have had unpleasant experiences when they were in school, or they may have limited education.

Not Knowing How To Contribute - Some parents feel they have talents but don't know how to contribute to the school or PTA.

Not Understanding the System - Many parents don't understand the system or how to be involved at their children's school. Many people from other countries have been taught to treat educators with the greatest respect. As a result, they may not question or provide input about their child's education.

Feeling Unwelcome - Parents may feel they are not welcome at school. Many parents have met a principal, teacher, or school employee who sends the message "Parents need not interfere".

Literacy - Parents who cannot read may not understand the newsletters and brochures that are sent home.

Not Understanding the Jargon - Many people feel put-down, confused, and left out when school staff and PTA officers use jargon and expressions they don't understand. Highly specialized language promotes insider/outsider groups.

Not Being Part of the Clique - Many people view PTA as an established clique that excludes others. This image of PTA can be a turn-off to new parents and many groups from cultures that are different from the dominant norm in your school community.

Taken from National PTA's "Respecting Differences Resource Guide"