How many times have you asked your kindergartner what happened at school today only to hear the quick response of “nothing” or “I don’t know”? As a parent, you know lots of things are going on each day in your child’s classroom, but you may have to become a bit of a detective to find out what. The more you know about what is happening in the classroom, the better able you will be to help your child do his or her best. Listed below are several easy suggestions on how you can stay in touch and involved with what is going on in your child’s classroom and school.

• Get to know your child’s teacher! Visit regularly by short visits or brief notes. Let the teacher know that you are interested in what your child is doing and learning.

• Arrange to volunteer in the classroom. This allows you to experience your child’s learning environment and provides a much needed extra pair of hands for the teacher!

• Attend all parent-teacher conferences. Take with you a list of questions or concerns you want to talk about with the teacher.

• Join the school’s Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and become actively involved. This group can help you to stay informed about school activities, issues, and concerns. It is also a good way to meet other parents and teachers.

• Each afternoon or evening, sit down with your child and go through his or her backpack (or papers brought home).
  —Go over each paper. Listen to your child’s reaction to schoolwork. Be positive and give lots of praise and encouragement.
  —Be sure to read all notes and papers sent home by the teacher or the school and respond as needed.
  —Find out your child’s homework assignments. Encourage and assist as needed. Provide a quiet and well-lit place to work on homework assignments.

• Make up a family calendar. Mark dates of all school, family, and work activities. Be sure to include dates of holidays and early dismissals. This will help you to remember ahead of time if you need to pack a special lunch, provide spending money, or arrange child care.

To learn more, check out the U.S. Department of Education’s website: ed.gov/parents/. The online book “Helping Your Child Succeed in School” at ed.gov/parents/academic/help/succeed/ has good suggestions and activities for your child.
Pumpkin Pie in a Bag

Cooking with your child is a great way to teach life skills, spend positive time together, and reinforce school skills like math and direction following. Try this fun recipe for pumpkin pie that is made in a zipper-type freezer bag.

American settlers made pumpkin pie inside of the pumpkin shell. They sliced off the pumpkin’s top, removed the seeds, and filled the insides with milk, spices, and honey. It was baked in the hot ashes of a fireplace. Today you can make a modern version of pumpkin pie in a bag. It will make 2 to 6 servings, depending on how much pie you want to eat!

Materials needed:
- 1 quart-sized zipper-type freezer bag
- ⅔ cup cold milk
- ½ package (4 serving size) instant vanilla pudding mix
- ½ cup canned pumpkin (about ¼ of a 15-ounce can of solid-pack pumpkin)
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
- ⅛ teaspoon ground ginger
- ½ cup graham cracker crumbs
- Whipped topping (optional)
- Cups or bowls, spoons, and a pair of scissors

Directions:
1. Combine the milk and instant pudding in the plastic zipper bag.
2. Remove the air and close the bag.
3. Squeeze and knead with hands until blended for 1 minute.
4. Add the pumpkin, cinnamon, and ginger.
5. Remove the air and close the bag.
6. Squeeze and knead with hands until blended for 2 minutes.
7. Divide the graham cracker crumbs into the bottom of each cup or bowl.
8. Cut the corner off the plastic bag and squeeze the pie filling into the cups.
9. Add whipped topping, if desired.
10. Add a spoon. Enjoy!


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