

# **How to be an Effective Room Parent**

Dear Kramer Parent,

Would you like to become more involved at school? Have you considered becoming a Room Parent but just don't know what's involved? If so, read on! I'd like to share some ideas with you. First, when I was asked to be a Room Parent for my older son's class, I was a bit nervous, because I had no clue what was involved. Over the last year or so, I've learned that being a Room Parent is a rewarding experience both for you and for the classroom you're helping out with. It's also a lot of fun! You have the opportunity to become more involved at school, get to know new friends & feel good about yourself while volunteering your valuable time. No experience necessary! Surprisingly, it's less work than you might think. In the past, Room Parents have been called Room Mothers, but slowly the name has been changing to "Room Parent" to be more politically correct. Yes, more & more Dads are becoming Room Parents as well; thus the name change.

So what is a Room Parent, exactly? A Room Parent is someone who serves as a representative for the classroom. Here at Kramer, your three main responsibilities are: 1). To contact parents for various reasons throughout the year, 2). To help the teacher in the classroom when she/he needs it (this includes helping out during Teacher Appreciation Week as well). And, 3). To coordinate two class parties a year: Halloween & Valentines Day. It can also include organizing the class gift at the end of the school year (optional, but most classes do it) & attending PTA meetings to stay informed on current issues affecting your child.

So, how do you get started? First, either sign up online at Kramer's website or look for the Room Parent Sign Up Sheet that will come home in your child's weekly Colt Folder, early in the school year. Then, make sure you register at DISD's website as a volunteer; volunteers need to re-register every school year, so even if you've volunteered in the past, you need to update your volunteer status this year. I think Sarah has put a link to DISD's volunteer form on Kramer's website, but if not, go directly to DISD's site & sign up there. You're in! That was easy. Now for some specifics. Below are some tips on how to be an effective Room Parent at Arthur Kramer Elementary:

## **1). Get To Know Your Child's Teacher**

It's important to get to know your child's teacher as soon as the opportunity arises. If you don't already know him or her, introduce yourself early on; attend the "Meet the Teacher" night & get acquainted. Spend a few minutes asking questions you may have; find out if you can work with this person. Make sure you can get along effectively & can communicate clearly with one another. Once you get to know him or her, ask your teacher what you can do to help in the classroom. Do this frequently; maybe once a week or every two weeks. Stay on top of it. Say hello often; be around at school. Stay in frequent contact to assure that you will know how to help & will be there when help is needed. Remember, you are a very valuable resource to your teacher!

## **2). Get to Know Other Parents In The Class**

As a Room Parent, being an effective liaison is key to your success. Coordinating activities depends on enlisting

the help of other parents. Getting to know other parents is key because you can't do it all yourself; besides, who would want to! If other parents want to help, take them up on it. It will make things run much smoother for everyone. Find out which parents you can lean on, when push comes to shove. Like you, other parents want what's best for the kids and want to work as a team to accomplish the class' goals. Another aspect of your job as Room Parent is to help make sure other parents feel welcome & to help them feel confident about helping out at school. I suggest you choose a friend to be your co-Room Parent, so you can work as a team. A team is especially effective. Send home a note from both of you in the weekly Colt folder introducing yourselves (maybe sometime during the first three weeks of school) and include your phone numbers & email addresses, so that the other parents can contact you with their ideas, questions and concerns.

### **3). Set up an Email Contact List**

Ask your child's teacher for the list of phone numbers & email addresses of other parents in the class. The Kramer directory generally doesn't come out until late October, so you will need to gather this information yourself. Set up your e-mail contact list early, maybe by three weeks to a month into the school year. This step is probably the most critical to your success as a Room Parent, because it will be your best communication tool. You will use it often during the school year & it's so easy! Email is generally the best way to communicate with parents & your teacher. Copy your teacher on all emails sent out to class parents, so he or she is "in the loop". Only call parents when your teacher asks you to, otherwise, email (there are exceptions to this, as you know, because some parents don't have email addresses). Generally, however, parents won't mind if you call once in a while, but if you call too frequently, they may become annoyed & complain. If you can, open up the lines of communication early & often!

### **4). Help Out in the Classroom**

At Kramer, some examples of things teachers need done in the classroom on a regular basis are: stuffing Colt folders on Mondays, reading to the class, & copying, sorting & organizing paperwork. Sometimes parents volunteer to plan a special activity for the class like a science or art project, or come in & speak to the class about their profession. Teacher Appreciation Week is also worth mentioning. It's in the spring and involves coordinating volunteers to either bring in lunch for teachers or to cover teachers' lunch shifts during the week. It's pretty low stress.

### **5). Coordinate Class Parties**

As a Room Parent, another responsibility is to coordinate class parties. These are really fun! This does not mean you have to do all the work. You can outline what needs to be done (usually via email) & ask for volunteers. For example, ask for volunteers to handle 1). paper goods (mention specifically what's needed) 2). cup cakes, 3). water, 4). party decorations, 5). A party game or two & 6). Maybe goody bags for the kids to take home. As mentioned before, the two required parties for the year are Halloween & Valentines Day. Parties generally fall on the Friday before the date; for example, Halloween parties this year will probably be held on Friday 10/30/09. Valentines Day parties will probably be held on Friday 2/12/10. I have some great ideas for party games, which I'll get out to you via the Kramer website. I love doing these with the kids! Making goody bags for the kids to take

home is also a lot of fun. Candy, little toys, pencils, stickers, (whatever you like!) are always favorites and make the kids feel special. Sometimes classrooms have a Holiday party too, but that's up to you & your teacher.

#### **6). Organize a Class Gift For Your Teacher**

Although this is not a requirement, many classes give their teacher a gift at the end of the school year to thank him or her for all the hours & hours of dedication. You can have each child in the class make an inexpensive but meaningful gift like a craft or card; You could ask each parent for a donation of \$10 for example & then put together a gift basket with your teacher's favorite treats; another idea, with the donations, purchase a gift card at Target, Barnes & Noble or your teacher's favorite store. Teachers do not accept cash, however, to my knowledge. A gift is always much appreciated! Show your teachers how special they are!

#### **7). Help with Field Trips**

Field trips are so much fun.... If you have a chance to go, go! This is not a requirement either, but before an upcoming field trip, you may want to ask your teacher if she needs you to coordinate volunteers to help out. Often, she has already handled this, but help is always appreciated. Field trips are great because they allow kids to take a break from school while still learning and having a great time. Volunteers are always needed on field trips to make sure that the children stay together, behave and have a great time! Tip: sign in as a volunteer in the office beforehand; get your volunteer badge; sign out when you leave. Thanks!

I hope this article has been informative. I hope you will consider becoming a Room Parent at Kramer. Although it's work, it's so much fun too! In my experience, it's mostly about taking the initiative, but once you do, parents start pitching in & things get rolling. Choosing a friend to do it with you is especially fun & effective. A couple of other points to mention: diplomacy, compromise & democracy are important to keep in mind. Parents are busy, as you know. Everyone likes to pitch in on his or her own terms. My attitude is: any contribution, no matter how small, is a good one. All volunteers count. Being a Room Parent is occasionally a lot of work, but the satisfaction you get in the end makes it all worth it! I hope you will consider becoming a Room Parent at Arthur Kramer Elementary. We sure need you! Please call or email me with any questions or concerns. Thanks!

Sincerely,

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(Note: this article is based in part on "How to Be An Effective Room Parent For Your Child's Class" published on [www.associatedcontent.com](http://www.associatedcontent.com) by Shannon Wilson on September 8, 2007). Original ideas are blended with edited material from this article).