

THREE Starter Kit



Program Description

We all deal with the same group of parents doing all of the work. You can count on them, they make themselves available, and they accomplish the work that we ask. But what about the other hundreds of parents that haven't experienced the benefits of volunteering in the classroom, at an event, or have stopping in for lunch with their child? Many parents experiences at the school have been a parent/teacher conference or disciplinary issue, or attending an after school event. And let's make an effort to reach out to get dads involved and make them aware of the benefits to their child. Tackling these issues are not impossible. Dee Keywood and Kris Thompson, two parent volunteers, started Three for Me, a grassroots program to help school and parent groups reach out to parents in new ways and welcome them to get involved.

What is *Three For Me*?

Three For Me is a promise, a promise from parent to school and a promise from parent to child. By signing a promise card, parents commit to volunteer three hours of their time to the school. Whether parents make copies for a teacher, have lunch with their child at school, read to children, file in the school office, help at a parent group or any non-profit group event, or bake cookies, every act of service is important. In addition, there are many opportunities for volunteerism, even in the home. If a parent works and has limited availability, the parent group or will take the role to find activities those parents can do from home to fulfill their promise.

Why is *Three For Me* Important?

Parents play an important role in the life of a child. Involvement in their child's education at both school and home is vital. By asking parents to sign a promise card, schools give those parents a reason to be there. The next step is to be sure that volunteer information is available to parents. Also, when parents come to school, it is important that they feel their time is well spent. We help by providing information that helps you organize and raise awareness about your volunteer needs. We help you step by step to implement the program by following the guidelines and tips.

The End Result

Thirty years of research clearly show that parent involvement in schools improves student achievement. To reach their potential, students need parents to take an active role in their education. Schools are working hard to provide a high-quality education for every child. But they can't do it alone. Parent involvement is critical to creating great schools. *Three For Me* will help your school reach volunteer hours that you never thought possible once the promise card is signed. Parents

that have never volunteered at your school will take that first step into the building to read to a child or listen or help at a parent group function.

Communication is Critical

Three for Me brings school into home and family into school, where families receive the most direct communication of their child's school experience. Families also see firsthand the impact of their involvement on that experience. We communicate the *Three for Me* message—that a little volunteering goes a long way—through school events, enrollment booths, Back-to-School and New Student packets, posters, flyers, newsletters, community sponsors, and *Three for Me* logos on all school volunteer badges. Teachers and parent group committees send notes personally thanking family members for their participation. Send home a questionnaire asking parents what they would like to do, what their availability is and any special talents that they might share with the school. Provide a list of parents that can only volunteer from home to every teacher, so that they can make a phone call or send a packet of things *to do* home to those parents. Reaching out to working parents is just as important as stay at home parents. *Three For Me* will facilitate the parent/teacher connection.

Parenting and Student Learning

Three for Me involves families in positive school experiences. The involved family member is a more effective parent. Volunteers also learn effective parenting skills by observing effective teachers. *Three for Me* participants earn time through parent group programs that provide volunteer training, much of which enhances parenting. For example, *Learning for Life* trains its volunteers to model and teach appropriate interpersonal behavior, such as honesty, active listening, and respect for others. Our upcoming *Three for Me* parenting workshop will provide specific parenting tips and research on the impact of family involvement on child development.

Actions always speak louder than words, and children are the great imitators. Children see their parents participating in *Three for Me* and learn that their parent's care about school and that they, the children, should, in turn, care about school. Children also learn how to make and keep commitments. Furthermore, children who excel in school have families that show interest in school.

Three for Me is volunteerism in a non-threatening format. By making a specific commitment, family and community members are far more likely to volunteer. Also, a volunteer-coordinating network increases participation. This year our school's volunteer hours are up 50 percent, and parent group membership is up 25 percent.

Kick-off Ideas

The most effective way to kick-off Three For Me is during a family and teacher attended event. For instance, a back-to-school picnic, back-to-school night, student/parent orientation, and parent/teacher conferences, are just some examples of highly attended events. Truly, any well-attended family event is the perfect

setting to begin this program. Make sure that teachers and staff are prepared to support and encourage parents to participate in the *Three For Me* program.

Now What?

You kicked off Three for Me at your Open House...now you have a huge pile of signed promise cards. Now What? Here's one of the keys to the success of Three for Me at your school: It's your job to "plug" parents into your school. Prepare a Volunteer Sign up Form and send it home with every child to give to their parents. List all of the areas that you need help (to see a sample Volunteer Sign up Form, go to www.three4me.com and click on the Helpful Forms link at the left). Tell parents that you want to "connect parents and get them plugged into the school with the help of this form. Here's the next big step: When you get the forms, have a group of people in place that like to talk to people, and ask them to contact every person that returned a Volunteer Sign up form AND "get those parents plugged into your school." At our school, for example, we have 40 committees! We had 10 chairpersons. When our volunteer sign up forms were returned, we started calling those parents. After we were about half way through the stack, we had 89 Co-Chairpersons happy to be on committees. Did we stop once we filled the Committee needs? No, we continued to contact EVERY person that took the time to sign a promise card and return a volunteer sign up form. Why? Because parents matter to us...Three for Me plugged them into our school and we will reap the rewards of those phone calls and the contact that we made with parents. Who is the "we," the children! Parents have to know that they count!

Promotional Ideas

Visuals sell products! Promote, promote, promote. The Promise Cards...ask parents to make that three-hour promise to their child. That's the BIG one. Have a banner made at a local sign shop with the logo and promoting the message, "A little volunteering goes a long way at (your school name)." Make posters promoting Three For Me and hang around your school. Include information and volunteer ideas in your school newsletter. Highlight a Three For Me family in your monthly newsletter. Send home monthly flyers listing volunteer needs not just with the parent group, but needs that your teachers or staff might require. Offer volunteer choices from home, with the child, and special events. Use the logo on the school volunteer and visitor badges (this will be a great reminder to parents). Call your local apparel company and have polo shirts made with the logo for your school group officers to wear at events. If you have a message board, use it by placing Three For Me parenting tips on it monthly. Post volunteer opportunities in your school directory. Keep a running list of volunteer needs and jobs in the main office and include teacher's needs as well. If a parent drops in to volunteer, the list is immediately available. Remember to put the Three For Me logo on every thing that deals with parental involvement and volunteerism in your school.

Reward Your Volunteers

Recognize your promise keepers by starting a Walk of Fame. Place a special cut-out with the volunteers name in a main hallway. Send home a certificate with the child that congratulates the parent for keeping their promise. Thank Three For Me Promise Keepers in your newsletter or on a bulletin board at your school.

Recognize your volunteers at school functions or meetings. Take a photo of each parent that reaches their promise and hang the photos in a special display. Have special activities for your Three For Me participants, such as parenting workshops, coffee and donuts, a Three For Me Derby Race, a special movie night at school, or any type of activity that parents would enjoy.

Sustaining the Program

To sustain the program you must always have volunteer needs and communicate them clearly to parents. Your parent group has a promise to fulfill, too; to utilize a volunteer's time in an effective and positive manner. If a parent gives you their time, you must make it worth their while. Your group has to commit to helping find positive ways for parents to volunteer, communicate those needs, reward them, celebrate and track your results. A second way to sustain the program is to offer parenting workshops. Choose your topics wisely by asking parents what they are interested in; saving for college, forum with the principal, teacher led group explaining curriculum, etc. Offer free childcare to encourage parents to attend the workshop. Remember to communicate the success of *Three For Me* in your monthly newsletter. Let parents know how many volunteer hours were given each month, list new "Walk of Fame" parents that met their commitment of three hours. Tell their stories and the difference that it is making their lives, their children's and the schools.

Tracking your Results

The volunteer hours that we encourage, track, and report to the school district reflect the importance our families place on their ability to volunteer at school. This testament advocates open-school policy. *Three for Me* also provides family members with real opportunities to serve in policy-making bodies. For example, some *Three for Me* participants might earn their hours by attending school board meetings or serving as representatives to the school district forum, which debates school issues and effects policy.

Two ways to track your volunteer hours:

Manually: A volunteer sign-in sheet should be in a convenient area in your school main office for parents to sign-in and out. In addition, they should note the volunteer activity (see sample Volunteer Sign-in Sheet). Several volunteers can rotate tallying up the volunteer hours on a simple excel spreadsheet on a computer. It is important to track hours individually so that you are able to reward those reaching their three-hour promise. This method can be tedious and time consuming. We have found that rotating the tallying monthly between volunteers makes it more manageable.

Computerized: Replace the volunteer sign-in and out sheets with a computer and spreadsheet program that can track volunteer hours. If you are computer minded, there are several volunteer tracking and coordinating software programs available from the web.

Three for Me Tools and Files at www.three4me.com

Easily customize the Promise Cards and Certificate with your school name. Also, Three For Me Cut-Outs for Walk of Fame, Three For Me logo, Three For Me Volunteer badge, Volunteer Sign-Up Sheet and many more helpful forms are all at your fingertips.

Visit our website at www.three4me.com or email us at three_4_me@sbcglobal.com.

Three for Me Helpful Hints

1. Get the support of your principal, school staff, and parent group to start Three for Me.
2. Put together a Volunteer Coordinating Committee. This team will implement Three for Me and handle all volunteer communication and needs.
3. Train your Volunteer Coordinating Committee to contact volunteers and get them “plugged-in” to an activity.
4. Set up the Volunteer Sign-in Form on the front desk in the main office.
5. Copy Volunteer and Visitor Badges and place in nametag holders.
6. Print and cut promise cards (card stock, any color).
7. Kick off Three for Me (parents sign Promise Cards) at a highly attended school event or function at the beginning of the school year.
8. Three for Me Promise cards and parent group membership should occur together.
9. Parent group collects Promise Cards and starts database to track volunteer hours.
10. Return the signed Promise cards to parents with the Three for Me Introductory Letter, Volunteer Sign-up Form and Committee Descriptions.
11. Survey parents using the Parent Involvement Survey.
12. Make copies of Walk of Fame Cut-Outs for parents reaching three hour goal.
13. Assign volunteers to key in volunteer hours from the Sign-in forms in the office, into a spreadsheet (or keep handwritten totals if a computer is not accessible).
14. Volunteer Coordinating Team should contact EVERY volunteer immediately, and plug in Parents to their positions of interest. Volunteers like the “personal touch.” Backpack flyers don't always get noticed.
15. Train your volunteers for certain jobs, if needed.
16. Send Thank You notes to volunteers in a timely fashion.
17. Create special events for dads; they are a missing link in many schools.
18. Print Three for Me Certificates towards the end of the school year.

19. Write in all volunteers that reached their three hour goal, include volunteer hours, if you choose and send home with the children. Ask teachers to remind children to thank their mom, dad, grandparent, etc., for volunteering at their school.
20. Consider a volunteer luncheon the last month of school to thank parents.
21. Survey all chairpersons about their events and volunteer needs at the end of the school year to better prepare for the next year.