

How to Organize a Homework Help Workshop for Parents

A Step by Step Guide

Helping children with their homework is a challenge for any parent, especially in a language that is not spoken at home. Learn how to organize a workshop for parents sharing invaluable homework tips from experienced parents. An information and resource evening is a modular theme that allows you to assemble topics you believe will most interest parents.



DEVELOPING A PLAN

If you plan to host more than one event in the school year, you can structure them to offer content that is suitable to the time of year. For example, early October is ideal to help parents gain basic French pronunciation skills early in the school year.

Here's a list of ideas for topics and modules:

How to Help with French Homework • French Pronunciation for Parents • Reading with Your Child • Online French Resources • Help with Dictée • Local French Literacy Resources • French Camps & Activities • French Television & Radio

Here is a list of event module names:

Parent Survival Night • French 101 for Parents • French Grammar 101 • French Pronunciation for Parents • French Immersion Support Night • French for the Summer

TIMING

A good strategy to keep your audience engaged is to select one main topic complemented by 1 or 2 shorter topics. Or choose one main topic or keynote speaker, followed by break-out sessions for more specific topics. For example parents of younger children can meet with a teacher for primary grades and parents of older children can meet with junior teachers.

- You will likely get maximum participation in early fall and early in the New Year with enthusiastic parents and children returning to a 'fresh start'. Another opportunity is after report cards have gone home. Planning for early fall will require work in June or September.
- Check around with parents about the best weeknight for your event. You are competing with local sports and community groups every evening, but some evenings might be better than others for your local school(s). Try to avoid Mondays and Fridays. You will also need to schedule your event based on venue availability.
- A 7 p.m. start seems to work for many parents. It allows enough time for a quick dinner, and for them to get home early enough on a busy weekday night. Plan for a one to two-hour event. Be sure to include time at the beginning for arrival/registration and at the end for questions and a survey if desired.
- Providing childcare can increase turnout and make it much easier for parents.

THE AGENDA / SCHEDULE

A typical agenda for a one-hour workshop:

7:00	Arrival/Drop off Children/Register or Sign in
7:10	Brief Introduction
7:15	Presentation 1 (20 – 25 minutes)
7:35	Presentation 2 (15 minutes)
7:50	Presentation 3 (10 minutes)
8:00	Closing/Questions/Departure

- Depending on your topics, you may need to extend your schedule to 90 minutes and add a 15 minute break.
- There are always latecomers. Start on time if you can rather than keeping your on-time parents waiting.
- If you offer childcare services, allow extra time for parents to drop off children and get them settled.
- Show a video or slide presentation in your seating area before the event (e.g. “Proud of Two Languages Video” available at www.cpf.ca). This gives parents something to do while they are waiting and can make them feel more comfortable.
- Including a French movie or other French entertainment for children will help make the event more interesting for the kids and may entice them and influence their parents to attend.

CONTACTING SPEAKERS

Depending on your chosen topics, these workshops can be conducted with volunteers and volunteer teachers, or you may include keynote speakers.

- Use volunteers to present topics where possible and appropriate.
- For certain topics such as dictée, homework or other curriculum topics, it is best to invite a French Immersion teacher from a school in your region to be the presenter. You should be prepared to assemble and assist with presentation material and handouts (see “Parent Resources” section at www.on-cpf.ca for existing materials that may be used).
- If your school board has a French Second Language Advisory Committee member or a French Second Language coordinator, consider inviting him or her. If there are changes or new French programs or resources to announce, this speaker will most likely be eager to come.
- If you are interested in creating more awareness for CPF in general, contact the branch office to request slide presentations and complimentary CPF brochures to distribute.
- Suggested speakers: French teachers, public librarian, local French tutors. For more ideas see “Getting Outside Help”.

GETTING OUTSIDE HELP

- Camps/Activities: owners/operators of local area French camps and activities
- Local Librarians/Bookstores: owners with French books/expertise in French books
- Exchange Organizations: request a representative to speak at your event about student exchanges.
- Contact your local francophone community
- Parents: who have recently traveled to a French-speaking region (i.e. Sudbury, Quebec, New Brunswick, France) who have interesting photos and stories to share
- Students: secondary school or older students who can talk about the value of their French language education and what helped them to succeed in their younger years
- Other Interesting Organizations: www.tfo.org ▪ www.ocol-clo.gc.ca ▪ www.bonjourquebec.com
- Google Search: using the search engine google.ca, simply google “French in Hamilton”, for example

SECURING A VENUE

- Start early to secure a school gymnasium or similar venue for your workshop! You will want to find out what schools are available for your desired date as many schools are used in the evening for other local groups.
- Choosing centrally located schools may also increase turnout. Don't make it too far for many parents to travel.
- You will need a permit to use a school. Contact your school board's permit department for the application form. Ask for the non-profit rate to pay for the gym, plus a classroom if you need space for childcare.
- In some boards, no-cost permits are available for events that the school principal takes parts in.
- If you are a CPF Chapter member, you may request a "certificate of insurance" to provide proof of insurance from CPF to the school board. Find the PDF form on the CPF Ontario website at www.on-cpf.ca under "Chapters".
- School boards vary in policies/fees, so ask about extra charges to set up chairs or tables. If you have volunteers who will set up chairs, you will not need to pay extra fees. Recruit high school volunteers to help in lieu of community hours.
- Inquire about the availability of audio video equipment such as a laptop, LCD projector, DVD player, microphone. You may be able to borrow these from the school. Ask for the code to access the internet.
- Find out about access to the school to ensure that you can get into the gym to set up ahead of the event start time.

GARNERING SCHOOL AND BOARD SUPPORT

Workshops for parents work best with support from your school council, teachers, principal and administration. If you have a CPF Chapter in your area, be sure to involve them in your plans to help communicate with CPF members and stakeholders in the community. There may not be a need to seek board support; your principal can offer guidance in this area (i.e. special permission to bring in outside speakers). Invite your school board's French Second Language coordinator to attend.

- Request space in each school to place small posters and flyers.
- Explain to the school principal that you are looking for support in promoting the workshop to parents. Provide the principal with a short blurb that can be included in the school newsletter.
- Consider extending an invitation to your local trustee to use this workshop as an informational session and chance to meet parents.

PROMOTION TO PARENTS

Effective promotion to parents is critical to your success. Wherever possible, you should use multiple methods of promotion including verbal, print and electronic communication. Here are some suggestions:

- Develop a schedule for promotion that starts 60 days (or more) before the workshop and communicate at least 3 times leading up to the event.
- Tap into your school council's email database of parents. Send an email message about your workshop weeks in advance, followed by two reminder messages (one week prior, one day prior). Post your event on the school's website, calendar, and several times on your school's Twitter and Facebook page.
- Keep a schedule of school council meetings to include mention of the workshop in the minutes. Use the school's P.A. system to announce the event and, if applicable, include information on children's activities.
- Ask your local CPF Chapter or branch office to email an invitation to local CPF members on your behalf.
- Develop and print a flyer for your event (contact the branch office for a template) and have them sent home at least 2 to 3 weeks in advance. Insert the flyer in the school's newsletter. Post flyers on bulletin boards.
- Reach out to feeder schools to invite families who have registered their children to start the French Immersion program the following year. If possible, add your workshop to the community newspaper.

ASSIGNING TASKS

Don't try to run the workshop single-handedly! By creating a list of specific tasks, you can more easily assign tasks to volunteers. More tips:

- Develop a very detailed 'To Do' list that includes tasks for one-month prior, one-week prior, the day prior and the day of the event.
- Recruit volunteers and explain the specific roles you are looking for including the total time commitment required.
- Accept help! Even if volunteers cannot fill the exact role, find a role for the volunteer if possible. Some tasks can be done from home, by email or by phone.
- Consider asking volunteers to meet at the event very early (e.g. 90 minutes prior). Have them bring their children and provide a movie for the kids to watch while you meet with volunteers to go over everyone's role and what to expect.
- Feed your volunteers and their children. If you buy pizza for the pre-event meeting, you look after your volunteers and their kids, allowing them to remove 'Get dinner' from their list of to-dos that evening. Pizza may be a draw for high school volunteers.
- Depending on the expected turnout, you will need 5 to 10 volunteers to run your event smoothly.

TRAINING VOLUNTEERS

- Make sure your volunteer presenters are comfortable with public speaking. You will want to meet or connect via email with all of the volunteer and guest speakers ahead of time to review what they will present, what materials they have to show, and the equipment needed (screen, LCD projector, internet, microphone, etc.).
- For other volunteers, be sure to go over the tasks required and make sure they know what to do. Think of questions that might come up from parents and provide these answers in written or verbal form.
- Don't assume a new volunteer will just know what to do. Consider a quick demonstration of things like greeting parents and taking parents to the childcare area. This also allows parents to ask questions more easily.
- Consider enlisting a volunteer to take pictures at the event. It is difficult to take pictures when you have other responsibilities. Taking pictures adds a nice touch to your workshop and can be used to promote your next event.
- Try to stay calm. It is easy to get stressed when your turnout seems slow, a presenter is late or weather turns bad. Try your best to focus on the parents who do come and take a deep breath.
- Smile! And remind everyone else to smile. It is contagious.

STEPS TO RUN THE EVENT

1. Arrive early and make sure the gym or other areas rented are set up. Meet school staff and caretakers.
2. If you are feeding your volunteers, make sure the food has been ordered and arrives on time.
3. Meet with volunteers and go over the night's agenda, roles and responsibilities.
4. Conduct remaining set up such as chairs/tables/childcare area/audio visual equipment/internet access.
5. Set up the registration table with handouts, CPF brochures, tip sheets, CPF membership forms, etc.
6. TEST all A/V equipment and get your presentations 'cued up' where possible.
7. Meet childcare staff and explain the set up. Be sure to show them the nearest washrooms for children.
8. Ensure everyone puts on a nametag and that all signs are posted (including washroom signs for adults).
9. Have pens handy and pads of paper or loose lined paper.
10. Set up cash box if you are selling the "Keys to French" (CPF's French grammar tools).
11. Coordinate set up of refreshments (if you are having a break).
12. Welcome parents as they arrive. Direct them to the presentation area, play video/slide show if desired.
13. Start on time. Ask the audience to put their hand-held devices on "silent mode".
14. Welcome parents/introduce presenters/introduce others as needed (e.g. school principal).
15. Keep an eye on the time. If presenters go over, gesture to speed up or interject ("Wow Karen, this is excellent information, but we are running a bit tight on time and we'll need to conclude for tonight...")
16. Conclude with thanks to the volunteers, speakers and audience for attending, open up questions if time allows and request completion of a survey if desired. Collect completed surveys.
17. Clean up.
18. Thank your volunteers. Conduct ad hoc discussion of impressions
19. Pat yourself on the back! You did a great job!

POST EVENT MEETING

In most cases, you should be able to have an ad hoc discussion during clean up. This is good time to get first impressions from volunteers. Try to ask every volunteer for impressions including both positive and negative observations.



- Many volunteers will be inclined to provide mostly positive feedback. Try asking for one area you think should be improved. This should help you strengthen your next event.
- In the days following your event, consider calling or emailing each volunteer for more feedback on your event.
- Conduct a debriefing session at your next Chapter meeting and document the notes for the next event's planning session.
- Tally surveys and make the results available to your volunteers.
- Please submit photos and a brief article about your event to the branch office so it may be included in CPF Ontario's electronic messages to their membership.

THANKING THOSE INVOLVED

It goes without saying that you need to thank volunteers. "Thanks" is good. But explaining to a volunteer how her / his contribution made the event successful in a specific way is even better. For example: "Lisa, it was so great that you were here to welcome parents. I know that every parent felt at ease with your warm welcome at the front door."

- Be sure to extend a thank-you to each volunteer in a personal manner.
- For outside speakers, consider presenting flowers as a thank-you.
- Clean up time can be busy and everyone is rushing to get home. Consider extending your personal thanks by phone or email after your event if you don't get a chance to say enough at the event.

MORE TIPS AND THINGS WE'VE LEARNED

Parent Networking: It remains a tough challenge to encourage parents to freely network. Many parents will not engage in conversation with parents they don't know.

Night of the Week: Parents often forget about Monday night events over the course of the weekend.

Late Arrivers: Parents will always be late. Try to stay on time. Do not wait for latecomers to start, if possible.

Handouts: If possible, post workshop handouts and links on your school's website. Rather than passing out handouts during the session which takes time and adds noise, consider providing the complete set of handouts as parents register. Colour-coding them helps parents follow along (i.e. "Refer to the BLUE sheet").

Lots of Help: It is ideal to have lots of volunteers to assist in welcoming parents, so don't skimp in this area. Some parents may be new to the school, so it's nice to have a volunteer very close to the door who can warmly welcome parents. Have several volunteers at the door, in the childcare area, and at least one in the main room.

Signage: Make sure the venue includes lots of signage including a "welcome" poster at the front door, arrows and signs to the washroom for adults, the registration desk and to the gym or presentation area.

Surveys: It's a good practice to create and conduct a survey with your attendees. Keep it simple and allow for extra comments. Tally the results to see areas for improvement or get new ideas for future events.

Prizes: Consider offering door prize draws at the end of the evening. Prizes can include French books/games, or donated items such as restaurant coupons.

Topics: Parents of primary students are usually eager to attend and generally seek tips on homework help and French resources. To attract parents of older children, the challenge is to find relevant, age-appropriate topics (French volunteer/work programs, student exchanges, tips on how to motivate your tween/teen).