

Over 50 Ideas to Involve Families in Your Child Care Program

Research findings support parents as their child's first teacher and that family involvement links the educational setting and home. Children whose families are actively involved in their education learn more quickly. Both children and families will develop a more positive attitude towards education and its value. Lifelong learning begins at birth and continues through each stage of life and is directly related to involvement by families.

Quality child care is essential in stimulating early learning. When families and providers work as a team in setting goals and identifying individual needs of children, the children become more secure, confident and self-assured. Children who display these characteristics tend to excel and achieve more in educational settings.

The following are suggestions to assist you in getting families involved in your program:

Getting to know you (Develop ways to understand your families' strengths, interests and needs)

- Use parent interest surveys
- Invite family members to lunch with their child (and you)
- Visit each child's home
- Celebrate birthdays
- Offer coffee, tea or newspaper in the morning
- Display family photographs
- Use family recipes for lunch and snacks
- Plan social events
- Celebrate holidays and traditions
- Maintain a bulletin board displaying activities children and parents do at home
- Plan a grandparent/parent day

Communicating (Create policies, procedures and activities which enable two-way, ongoing communication)

- Develop formal written contracts
- Develop parent handbooks
- Develop program philosophy
- Develop & send newsletters with family input

- Develop a family information board/corner
- Create a family involvement committee
- Hold quarterly parent conferences
- Develop a parent/child enrollment packet
- Provide a family suggestion box
- Facilitate family advisory meetings
- Maintain an open door policy
- Use family feedback forms
- Work together to prevent/resolve conflicts
- Send notes home
- Make telephone calls about happy events as well as concerns
- Provide family orientations or open houses
- Develop a professional portfolio
- Plan fund raisers together
- Greet family members at drop-off and pick-up times

Program Activities/Curriculum (Involve family members in your daily program, either at your program or at the family's home)

- Plan field trips together
- Plan curriculum together
- Develop on-going child/family books
- Plan for family volunteer time (share talent)
- Develop literacy take home kits
- Provide toy lending
- Videotape children during the day for families to play at home
- Plan visits to families' work locations
- Plan educational/developmental goals together
- Plan for family cleanup/preparation days
- Ask for families to donate materials for arts/crafts & dramatic play areas

Supporting Parents (Furnish resources which help families raise their children)

- Set up a family information library
- Post information on community family education resources
- Provide families with referrals to community resources
- Provide time and space for families to talk with each other
- Provide home safety checklist
- Furnish information on immunizations

- Provide an assortment of free brochures on community resources and child development
- Maintain/share development logs
- Provide designated time for children or family to telephone each other
- Tape children singing or doing finger plays for families to play at home
- Arrange for take-home dinners or dry cleaning services
- Discuss children's strengths with their parents
- Express appreciation for families' efforts at home
- Celebrate the end of the week with a special treat

The above suggestions are just some of the ways to make families feel welcome and an essential part of your program's success. Most important is for you to understand the necessity and advantages of working in partnership with families so that each child has the best chance to learn and grow.