

Family Involvement
(Workshop facilitated by program director during staff meeting)

Family - those who are most responsible for the child's long term growth and development. This includes biological and non-biological caregivers who perform parenting duties, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and older siblings.

Family involvement - is an ongoing process. Families teach their children through what they say or don't say, what they do or don't do, and what they believe or don't believe. Some involvement is formal and occurs in planned activities or interactions. Some involvement is informal and occurs at home and during the course of everyday life. It is important to recognize and value family supports.

Family involvement benefits children - we recognize that families have lives that include other areas such as self, family and social maintenance and development. Programs that seek to involve families include the varied needs and interests of families and individuals and recognize that involvement will vary for each person. Successful family involvement is a part of every staff person's job. Every contact between staff and families can communicate and reinforce the values of the family's involvement. It is the responsibility of every staff person to reflect on the messages they are communicating. It is the responsibility of management to prepare and empower staff as the supporters of parents.

The vision for family/staff partnerships

Staff and families have a wealth of knowledge from their personal lives and day-to-day work. It is important to provide and utilize opportunities that encourage staff and families to communicate their knowledge and support their partnership.

Program Directors Can:

(Information borrowed from The Head Start Vision)

- Support families and staff as primary educators, nurturers and advocates for children.
- Provide opportunities for every family and staff member to have a significant positive experience in the child care program.
- Ensure that every family and staff has opportunity to be involved in making policy and program decisions.

Staff Meeting Activity

Materials: Sheets of newsprint labeled Experience & Suggestions, markers, individual blank paper, and pens

Individual reflection:

- On a sheet of paper write staff on one side and families on the other side.
- Think about your experiences in the program.
- On the side titled staff, list significant experiences in the program that have provided opportunities for you to contribute to children's learning, program policymaking or program decisions.
- When your list is completed turn to the side titled families.
- Now make a list of opportunities you have provided for parents to have significant experiences in the program that contribute to children's learning, program policy making or program decisions.

Group Discussion:

Use easel paper to record staff experiences and suggestions.

1. What were some of your most significant experiences in contributing to children's learning?
2. What significant experiences in contributing to children's learning have you provided for parents?
3. What opportunities have you had to be included in policymaking or program decisions?
4. What opportunities have you provided for parents to be included in policy making or program decisions?
5. What suggestions do you have to increase staff participation in contributing to children's learning, program policy making and decisions

What steps can we all take to encourage staff and family involvement?

Ground Rules For Staff/Family Partnerships

- ❖ Together we are stronger
- ❖ Focus on strengths
- ❖ Be mutually respectful
- ❖ We are all equal partners
- ❖ Take off your judges hat
- ❖ Be aware of your feelings and be open to the feelings of others.
- ❖ Be careful not to interrupt
- ❖ If you don't agree, first listen, before sharing your ideas
- ❖ Tension is OK in a partnership, hidden agendas are not OK
- ❖ Be committed to sticking with the family/staff partnership.

Family/Staff Partnerships A Different Perspective

Traditional Perception of the Parent/Teacher Role

Parents cooperate

Teacher focuses only on the child's needs.

Meetings are held at teacher's convenience

Parents are unassuming, agree to everything that teacher suggest or ask for.

Teacher has the ideas, assigns activities for parents to do at home.

Teacher assesses child and reports the child's development to the parent.

Parents & teacher look at staff as the experts, "professionals" who should know all the answers.

Staff use technical jargon.

Family/Staff Partnership Role

Family and staff collaborate

Family and staff keep discussions open on the child in the context of the family.

Family and staff work together to meet at times that fit each other's schedules

Families and staff ask questions, seek to understand, share ideas, focus on what makes sense and will benefit the child/family.

Family and staff problem solve with each other for creative ideas and identify functional activities that work for the child/family in their daily routines.

Staff ask family about child and collaborate on the assessment.

Staff help the family to recognize their own strengths and expertise. Families and staff value and share each other's important perspectives and feel it is appropriate to collaborate with partners and seek out resources when families identify the need for other services.

Staff speak in understandable terms and explain technical terms that are used with the family.

Building a Successful Partnership with Families

Principles of facilitation:

- Consider all members of the partnership.
- Never embarrass or put each other on the spot.
- When in doubt ask questions and talk about it.
- Remember the family has the final decision.

Building Blocks:

- Prepare family members by informing them of your partnership policy during the first meeting.
- Send out written information ahead of time, so parents can stay informed.
- Invest the time in building a good working relationship with every member of this partnership, (families and co-workers).
- Share information with families and each other.
- Always be respectful of confidentiality.

If members of the partnership are protective of "turf":

- Observe carefully what messages are being sent.
- Build relationships - work to discover fears, concerns, and needs (self and others).
- Recognize all for their contributions to the partnership.
- Create questions that invite partners to look at things a new way.
- Decide to learn from the past and start over.

Partnership meeting agenda:

- **Build a collaborative description of the child –
non-categorical, conversational style, with all partners contributing
to a visible list of the child's strengths and concerns.**
- Determine what are priority issues for the child/family.
- Invite questions and clarification.
- Develop a plan of desired approaches that the staff and families can work consistently on in both of the child's environments.

4 Factors That Figure into the Caregiver-parent Relationship

1. Possessive feelings

Parents may feel like they are the only ones capable of caring for the child. May have unexpected feelings about other peoples involvement with their child.

Teachers also get attached to the child and develop feelings of protection and investment. (How often do we refer to children as "my children"?)

2. Parent's expectations of what they should be doing with their child.

Some parents are not always clear about what kind of child care they want for their child or whether they should be working.

These feelings make a critical difference.

3. Normal anxieties people have around the time of separation.

It's not unusual that parents worry about their children's safety or if their child will love the caregiver more than them

4. Defensive feelings about being judged

Both parents and teachers are devalued in the important contributions that they make to society and the work development. However both receive very little recognition for what they do. Parents often feel that teaches are judging them while teachers often feel judged by parents.

Stronger Teacher-Parent Relations

1. Learn about the normal range of feelings

When teachers are feeling annoyed or negative towards parents stop and think about whether there is a problem or if these are normal feelings related to attachment.

Understand that these normal feelings are positive. Good teachers usually have feelings of attachment for the children that they work with.

It is usually very helpful if teachers can talk to each other about their feelings. The most helpful person to talk to is someone who can see things through both the parent's and the teacher's eyes.

2. Remember parents also need people to talk with about their feelings. This can be staff or other parents. When children present challenges it is helpful for parents to have someone they can talk to , to figure out what's going on and to determine if this is typical or a concern.

3. It helps if people can see problems as outside themselves, as situations to be resolved.

Viewing things from a teamwork or partnership advantage rather than us against them is more likely to clear up difficulty than encourage more problems.

4. Teachers can be the experts who share their resources or those who dispense information from a lofty position. Making a parent feel competent is a way of being an expert. This approach is much more constructive and builds a partnership between parents and teachers.

5. What are some opportunities that you may have to help parents feel competent?

- Talking the same language
- Asking their advise
- Using Daily reports

Looking at Family Strengths Family Development Activity

Our work with children demands that we development "bifocal vision" that enables us to see two different levels at the same time. In this view we can see the child's strengths as well as the areas that need to be developed.

Seeing the strengths in parents can support our work with their children. It does not mean that we ignore the problem but we identify underlying strengths that contribute to parent's competence in meeting their family's needs.

Information That is Important to Our Partnership
(Open-ended questions for staff and family)

1. Let's keep open communication about your child at home and at the center.
 - How are things going for your child?
 - How do we describe your child?
 - How is your child sleeping during the day and at night?
 - How is your child eating and home and at the center?
 - What would be good for all of us (family/staff) to know about your child?

2. On most days, what goes well and what is difficult for family/child/staff?
 - What makes a "good day" good?
 - What makes a "difficult day" difficult?
 - Are there times of the day that are better than others?
 - What are the hard times of the day?
 - Where do we spend most of our time with your child?
 - What is important to you in this relationship?
 - What is difficult for you right now?
 - How can we support each other?

3. What would be helpful for you and your family now?
 - What kind of help is helpful in our partnership?
 - What would you like us to work on now?
 - What visions do we share for your child?
Family would like to see.....
Staff would like to see.....
 - How can we work together?

4. Is there anything else you would like to talk about?