

A Hands-On Approach to Nurturing the Parent Partnership

In these days of dual working parents and super-busy lifestyles, it's even more challenging to build relationships with families and involve them in your programs. When parents are active in their child's education, optimum learning is much more likely to occur, but there's also something in it for you. Not only are parents experts on their own children, they're also talented and can provide resources money can't buy. Nurturing a partnership with parents will strengthen and move your classroom and center towards excellence in care and education. Let's look at some simple ways you can create parent partnerships in your program.

- *PARENTS AND TEACHERS WORKING TOGETHER* - Parents have good ideas. They know their children well, have their best interests in mind, and have taken a giant leap of faith by placing them in your care. Listening to their collective voice is a wise thing to do.
- *PARENT SURVEY* - A survey will tell you how your program meets the needs of your families. Make the survey short, conduct it yearly, and provide some type of incentive so that parents will return it.
- *PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL* - Enlisting a group of helpful, concerned parents is one of the best ways to demonstrate that you want to create a true partnership.
- *COMMUNICATION CONNECTIONS* - Including parents in day-to-day activities creates a sense of belonging, a foundation for building trust and loyalty.
- *PARENT HANDBOOK* - Creating a handbook for easy reference is one of the most effective ways to communicate your philosophy and policies to parents.
- *Newsletters and Memos* - It's imperative to keep parents informed of what's happening. In newsletters and memos, everything can be shared from child rearing tips to the daily menu and field trip schedule. Even though some parents appear not to read what you've tirelessly written, think about the ones who do!
- *FAMILY VISITS* - A lot can be learned from visiting a child's home. This effort of reaching out can also break down barriers; families often feel most comfortable on their own turf.
- *ROLL OUT THE RED CARPET* - Make sure parents know they are always welcome. When parents feel welcome, and when they see you in action, their respect for you and what you do is reinforced.
- *BULLETIN BOARDS AND PICTURE ALBUMS* - Pictures are worth a thousand words. Place picture albums on a table depicting field trip excursions, story time, or the ice cream social.
- *TAPPING INTO TALENT* - Parents generally love to offer a helping hand, especially if they feel appreciated for what they do well.
- *PARENTS AS VOLUNTEERS* - Parents, grandparents, even older siblings are often willing and able volunteers. Working parents may not be available to assist in the classroom or chaperone a field trip but may be happy to repair books or cut out shapes for the flannel board. Make sure parents know that little things mean a lot, and resist the temptation to burden a helpful parent with too much volunteering.

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