



Building Partnerships with Families

Children feel more secure in their child care setting when they see their family members and their child care practitioner in a respectful relationship. They also learn social and communication skills by observing the adults around them talking and solving problems together. Here are some ways to strengthen your partnership with parents in caring for their children.

Create a welcoming atmosphere

- Meet parents and children at the door with a **smile and a pleasant greeting** every day. Let them know you are happy to see them.
- Be aware of your **body language**; what does your posture and the way you move say about your attitude to families?
- Let families know that **your door is open**. Encourage them to participate in whatever way suits their schedule, their interests and their talents.
- Make your setting **comfortable for adults** by having adult-sized chairs and a place to hang their coats.
- Look for ways to **bring together the families** whose children you care for, for example at an annual picnic, regular potluck suppers, an outing to a special event in your community.

Communicate clearly and frankly

- **Share information** about the child's day. Did they nap well? Was their appetite good? Any special activities, events or outings? Information can be shared in conversation, in writing, or with photos.
- **Suggest topics of conversation** for parents with their children. For instance, "You may want to ask Joey about the bird we saw at the park

today." **Encourage families to do the same for you.** This strengthens the link between home and child care.

- **Listen** to what parents say and let them know that the information they give you about their child is important to you by acting on their suggestions whenever possible.
- Offer a **positive observation** about the child every day at pick-up time, even if it's been a difficult day. Share an amusing story or describe a new accomplishment. **Be specific.** For instance, "Mina put away all the blocks today," instead of "Mina was a good girl today."
- If you have something negative to report, use the "**sandwich**" **technique.** Start off with a positive remark, describe the problem behaviour, and finish by describing something positive the child has done. Express confidence that the problem behaviour will improve with time.
- Be aware that other people are listening, both children and parents. **Save sensitive subjects** for more private conversations.

Respect differences

- **Validate families' culture and language.** If families are of a culture different from your own, ask them to suggest materials and activities that you could use in your program that reflect their culture. Ask them to teach you words, simple phrases and children's songs in their language that you can use with the children.
- **Validate family diversity.** Look for ways to show a variety of family structures in your activities and stories: moving between separated

parents, living with grandparents, having two mothers, living with half-brothers and half-sisters, etc.

Build on strengths

- **Describe** back to families something you saw them doing well. For instance, you could say, "I noticed that you handled your daughter's frustration quite smoothly this morning. You really helped her start our program activities more easily."
- **Notice families' efforts and show your appreciation:** "I can see you're really working on the routine you decided on for leaving here in the morning. It's already making a difference."
- **Help families make the most of their strengths.** Ask, "Tell me about a time when you have fun together and things go well." Then look for ways to apply those same strategies and characteristics to make problem situations go better.
- **Avoid judging and blaming families.** If you find yourself thinking negatively about a family, reframe your thought from a judgement to curiosity: Ask yourself, "I wonder if there's some reason for their behaviour that I don't understand yet?" With this attitude, you will be more open to listening to them and they will be less defensive when talking to you.

It takes an open, respectful attitude and clear communication to build successful partnerships. On this solid base, you can work out common goals and share decision making with families. Together, you will be able to make the connections between home and child care that will enhance children's development.