

Early Care and Education: Parent Involvement

When families are involved in their child's early education and form strong partnerships with their child care provider, it makes a significant positive impact on the child's growth and development. This partnership is even more crucial for families of children with special needs who experience additional challenges.

Relevance:

- Families are important partners in a child's early care and education.
- Parent involvement is a critical factor for enhancing a child's early learning experiences.
- Parent involvement happens through school and family partnerships and parenting practices.
- Parent participation in their child's early education program sets the stage for continued involvement in the school environment and sends a message to the child that education is valued and important.

Actions to Take:

- Read with your child.
- Extend learning in the home through hands on activities such as arts and crafts.
- Spend time playing with your child to support their social and emotional development.
- Talk with your child about their day.
- Network with other parents.
- Establish regular communication with your child's teacher.
- Participate in orientation sessions.
- Visit and observe your child's classroom.
- Attend program activities.
- Participate in parent meetings and trainings.
- Volunteer to assist with classroom and/or program activities.
- Participate in parent/teacher conferences.

Good Practices:

- Care providers should engage in effective communication with families.
- Early childhood programs can provide volunteer opportunities for parents and include them in program decision making.
- Early childhood programs can promote the empowerment of parents, teaching them to be advocates for their children.
- Families can be provided with opportunities for learning at home.
- Parents should establish home environments that support children's learning.

Basic Facts:

Evidence based research indicates that parent involvement in a child's early care and education is a predictor for future academic success and social development. The Harvard Family Research Project found three types of family involvement that promote positive outcomes for children: parenting, home-school relationships and responsibility for learning.

The first, parenting, includes the attitudes, values and practices parents embrace as they raise their children. High quality early care and education programs value parents input and recognize the strengths and needs of individual families. Parents can help programs understand these individual differences by sharing information about their family through open communication. Children who experience parent-child relationships that are nurturing and responsive are more likely to have successful school experiences.

Home-school relationships are the formal and in-formal ways that families and schools interact with one another. Early education programs that let parents know about classroom activities and provide parents with ideas for supporting their child's education at home promote extended learning opportunities. Research shows that parents who frequently communicate with and participate in their child's early education program have children who exhibit positive social relationships and perform well in the preschool environment.

Responsibility for learning is a component of parenting that refers to activities that take place in the home and community. Parents can foster their child's learning by talking with them about their day, reading to them and taking advantage of natural learning opportunities at home and in the community.

There are additional ways that families can support their child's learning. These include taking part in home visiting programs, parent-teacher meetings and parent leadership roles. The relationships that families build with their child's early care program make an important difference for both parents and children.

Resources:

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) www.naeyc.org

CONNECT Helpline: 1-800-692-7288 - Assists parents who have questions and/or concerns about their child's development.

Child Care Works helps working parents who may be eligible for assistance for child care expenses if they meet the income guidelines. Helpline: 1-877-4-PA-KIDS www.dpw.state.pa.us/ServicesPrograms/ChildCareEarlyEd

Family Involvement Makes A Difference, Spring 2006, Harvard Family Research Project, Harvard Graduate School of Education

Early Childhood Digest: Family Involvement in Early Childhood Programs: How to Choose the Right Program for Your Child, National Institute on Early Childhood Development & Education www.ed.gov/offices/OERI/ECI/digests/98may.html

Pennsylvania Family Centers offer a menu of services including home visits, group meetings, developmental assessments, resources and referrals to support parents in meeting their children's educational, health and development needs.

www.dpw.state.pa.us/ServicesPrograms/ChildWelfare/003670967.htm

Pennsylvania Head Start provides home and center based programs for families of preschool aged children. www.paheadstart.org

Parents as Teachers programs provide the information, support and encouragement parents need to help their children develop optimally during the crucial early years of life. www.parentsasteachers.org

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