



Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Developing Reciprocal Relationships with Families

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Developing Reciprocal Relationships with Families

Making developmentally appropriate decisions for a child in a class means knowing all about an individual child. One key to knowing all about a child is knowing about his/her family. By involving the parents in a discussion about their child and listening to what they have to say, not only is the teacher able to gather important information about that child, but the teacher also lets the parent know that their opinions and views are valued. Parents often have key bits of information that can help support the teacher in making programming decisions for an individual child.

By the same token, frequent communication from the teacher to the parent related to the goals and objectives of the program, as well as the daily activities, helps to support the parent in interacting with their child about their day and build on those experiences. It is also important to share practical ideas on ways they can support their child's growth and development across all domains at home.

The Creative Curriculum (Dodge, Colker and Heroman, 2002) offers these ideas for communicating with the family:

- Daily or weekly bulletins
- Telephone calls
- E-mails
- Class website
- Thank-you notes
- Journals that travel between home and school
- Notices regarding specific information

Most families want to have a close relationship with the staff working with their child. Unfortunately, many parents run into logistical barriers, such as the time an event is scheduled or lack of transportation, that prevent their participation. (Hyson, 2008). A teacher can show how much he/she values parental relationships and input by always welcoming parents in the classroom and providing a variety of ways at different times so that all families may participate.

Some ways to involve families include:

- Inviting them to **share their culture** through a cooking or art project or a short presentation.
- Inviting them to **share a talent or information about their job.**

- **Supplying materials for the class**, either through the collection of “junk” such as used boxes, old buttons, egg cartons, etc., or purchasing items necessary for special projects.
- **Helping to create materials** such as games to be used in the classroom, sewing items for the dramatic play area, or recording stories for the listening center.
- **Parent/Child activity days/nights**: Create events focused on supporting parent/child interactions through literacy, math and social-emotional skills such as supplying the materials necessary for them to create a family picture page to hang on the classroom wall to ease the transition in to school.
- Having a **parent council** that provides input into policies and practice at your site.

Sometimes difficult situations arise that teachers must navigate through in order to keep the relationship with the parent positive and supportive. In the book *From Parents to Partners: Building a Family-Centered Early Childhood Program* (Keyser, 2006) the author suggests the following tips for productive problem solving meetings:

- Listen, listen, listen. Ask open-ended questions so you can reflect back to the parent what you are hearing.
- Restate and reframe the parents’ ideas.
- Acknowledge the parents’ efforts and strengths.
- Ask the parents what they would like to have happen.
- Give child development information as appropriate.
- Refer the parent to resources.
- Make a plan to check back with the parent.
- Thank them for sharing with you.

A Connect module with videos showing ways to interact with parents is available at <http://community.fpg.unc.edu/connect-modules/learners/module-4> Some of the handouts that accompany that module are attached to this section of the packet.

The following pages provide ideas for actively engaging families.

Partnership-Oriented Practices: Examples and Applications

Beginning ground: Developing an initial friendly relationship

Middle ground: Making shared decisions

Firm ground: Addressing challenging issues

Enhanced Communication			
A. Enhanced communication: Building on basic communication skills to dignify each child and family by honoring their uniqueness in terms of their family history, present circumstances, and future possibilities.			
Examples	Applications		
	Beginning ground	Middle ground	Firm ground
1. Encouraging families to tell their stories and listening to identify unique hopes, dreams, strengths, needs, and preferences.	Asking families open-ended questions about the people, places, and activities that are important to them.	Incorporating into conversations with families references to stories that they have shared in the past to let them know that you have listened to them, and taking into consideration what they have shared with you.	When discussing challenging issues with families, encouraging them to share additional family stories that relate to the challenging issue.
2. Reframing differences of opinions, values, or perspectives without judgment, and defining rationales of families' different opinions, values, and perspectives.	When you have opinions that differ from those of families, listening to their perspectives first without sharing your own opinions.	Sharing your opinions with families and seeking to find common ground.	When dealing with challenging issues, seeking families' input on topics when there are substantial differences that need to be openly addressed.

Handout 4.1

High Expectations

B. High expectations: Having confidence in the child's and family's future possibilities, as well as confidence in one's own competence in actualizing positive outcomes.

Examples	Applications		
	Beginning ground	Middle ground	Firm ground
<p>1. Building on a child's strengths (what the child does well and enjoys doing) throughout all instruction and interactions and incorporating a strengths-based orientation into practices.</p> <p>2. Conveying to families one's own beliefs about the significant goals that the child will be able to accomplish in the future.</p>	<p>Asking families what they see as their child's strengths and sharing your observations.</p>	<p>Sharing with families that often people place too much emphasis on the child's needs and that you would like to also focus on the child's strengths.</p>	<p>When sharing difficult news, reminding families of the family's and child's strengths that will help the child through difficult times.</p>
	<p>Celebrating with families as the child meets milestones.</p>	<p>Giving families information about research-based interventions that have been used to help children in similar circumstances succeed.</p>	<p>Letting families know that that the timeline for reaching some of the anticipated goals will likely take longer than expected, but that you remain firm in your belief that their child will be able to be successful in the long-run.</p>



Respect			
C. Respect: Regarding families with esteem and demonstrating that esteem through actions and words.			
Examples	Applications		
	Beginning ground	Middle ground	Firm ground
1. Identifying and incorporating cultural values into decision-making.	Listening to families with particular attention to the fact that what families share with you may reflect cultural values.	Asking families what is important to know about their culture, celebrations, and customs, and showing genuine interest.	Examining how cultural differences may be contributing to differences of opinion about the child's program, and discussing ways to find options that are responsive to families' cultural values.
2. Identifying the family's preferences for interaction with practitioners, and then interacting with the family and child accordingly.	Asking how you should address members of the family.	Making a joint decision about how often to communicate about how an intervention program at the preschool is generalizing to the home setting.	Letting the parent know that you have not heard back from the last several emails you have sent, and inquiring if a different form of communication would be preferable.



Commitment

D. Commitment: Providing a sense of assurance that the relationship with the family and child is “more than an obligation;” rather, it represents devotion and loyalty to the child and family and a shared belief in the importance of goals being pursued.

Examples	Applications		
	Beginning ground	Middle ground	Firm ground
1. Being flexible to accommodate the changing needs of the family and child.	Holding meetings at times and places suited to families’ needs and availability whenever possible.	When addressing behavior problems, exploring with the family mutual changes, both at home and in the program, to resolve the problem.	Demonstrating how disagreements or differences of opinion do not interfere with your commitment to the family and child.

Equality

E. Equality: Ensuring that families have roughly equal power as practitioners in making decisions.

Examples	Applications		
	Beginning ground	Middle ground	Firm ground
1. Sharing power by supporting families as equal partners in helping their child to be successful now and in the future.	Asking families’ opinions about goals for the child.	Brainstorming a wide range of strategies for achieving goals with the family, and making decisions that will meet the unique needs of their child.	Involving families in all decisions about the child (for example, the decision for referral for a comprehensive evaluation).



Advocacy			
Advocacy: Speaking out and taking action in pursuit of finding just solutions to problems.			
Examples	Applications		
	Beginning ground	Middle ground	Firm ground
1. Informing families of their rights and supporting them to be effective advocates.	Asking families how they have been involved in educational decision-making in the past.	Sharing tips with families for how they can be more effective advocates.	Sharing with families local resources for developing advocacy skills, and pointing out the positive benefits of involvement.