

early years are learning years

Parents as partners in children's learning

Parents and teachers may look at young children's learning from different perspectives, but they share a common goal: making sure that children receive the best possible education. Mutual respect and communication between programs and families takes advantage of both perspectives to provide children with the kind of care and education that will help them thrive.

Today's family members and caregivers have many responsibilities and time constraints. It takes extra effort on both sides to build strong partnerships.

Tips for caregivers and teachers:

- Listen carefully to parents—they are experts on their own children, too. Families can provide important information on a child's behavior outside the program or classroom.
- Be sensitive to different cultures and child-rearing beliefs. Never make judgements on parenting styles; always make an effort to respect the family's values and beliefs.
- Share pertinent information about the child on a daily basis, especially in programs caring for infants and toddlers. An established system for keeping records and reporting to parents about each child is key to good communications.
- Welcome parents into the program or classroom. Ask parents to drop by for lunch or snack, or arrange after-work events like socials or pot-luck dinners. Working around parents' busy schedules sends a message of being sensitive to families' needs.
- Communicate with parents about children's assignments or activities ahead of time. This will allow parents to set time aside for working with their child or coordinate family schedules with school expectations. Parents also appreciate regular, meaningful progress reports early in the year with time and recommendations to help prepare children for the next levels of their education.
- Don't jump to conclusions. If you have questions or concerns about your child or the early childhood program, speak directly to your child's teacher, caregiver, or program supervisor. Don't panic or merely commiserate with other parents when questions arise.
- Remember that many teachers or caregivers have families of their own, and may share similar responsibilities and time constraints. Be as respectful of their time as you wish them to be of yours.

Many early childhood programs today are working hard to become more "family-friendly," providing newsletters to parents that focus on staff members and professional development, ensuring one positive phone call per child each semester, or even providing voice mail for parents to leave messages after working hours. Programs may demonstrate strengths in different ways, but working together with parents remains crucial. When teachers or caregivers make the extra effort to include parents in program activities, and parents take the time to attend and participate, children benefit from the best possible learning experience.

Tips for parents:

- Listen carefully to what your child's teacher or caregiver has to say. Remember that they spend a significant amount of time with children and share expertise about their development.

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