Supporting Family Involvement in Children’s Learning

Best Practices for Nonformal Educational Settings

CYFERnet
Children, Youth and Families Education and Research Network
Families are children’s first and most important teachers.
What do you think family involvement means?

Many people think family involvement means:

- Making cookies for a childcare center’s bake sale
- Attending a teacher conference for a kindergarten student
- Selling gift-wrap for an elementary school’s fund-raiser
- Checking homework for a third grader
- Serving on a middle school hiring committee
- Chaperoning a high school dance
Why encourage family involvement?

Family involvement has **positive effects** on children’s:

- Academic achievement
- Behavior in school
- Attitudes about school and work
- Grades
- Scores on standardized tests
- Attendance
- Homework completion
Types of family involvement

- **Volunteering**: helping in the program or with program-related activities
- **Parenting**: establishing home environments that support children’s learning and development
- **Communicating**: engaging in two-way communications about children’s progress and program activities and policies
Types of family involvement

• Supporting learning at home: helping children learn outside the classroom
• Decision making: participating in program decisions
• Collaborating with the community: integrating school, community, and family resources to enhance programs, build partnerships, and support children’s development
What motivates families to become involved?

- Knowing they can make a difference in children’s lives
- Believing they are participating in something successful
- Feeling respected
- Feeling that their time and efforts are acknowledged
- Receiving training and guidance
- Receiving practical support
What hinders families from becoming involved?

• Administrative and staff barriers
  – Feel no need for family involvement
  – Fear loss of authority
  – Disrespect families
  – Feel that encouraging involvement is not the program’s responsibility
  – Fail to understand diverse backgrounds of participating families

• Family barriers
  – Lack time, money, or emotional resources
  – Feel involvement is not part of their responsibility
  – Feel the program does not welcome their involvement
  – Feel disrespected by staff
  – Hampered by language or cultural differences
Best practices for programs

1. Developing policies and procedures that support family involvement
2. Supporting staff interactions that promote family involvement
3. Fostering communication
1. Developing policies and procedures

- Affirm the value of family involvement in the program’s mission statement
- Assign a staff member to serve as family liaison
- Establish procedures for recommending changes or airing concerns
- Reserve positions for family members on decision-making boards
2. Supporting staff interactions

- Train staff about the importance of family involvement
- Train staff about effective ways to handle complaints and criticisms from families
- Allow time for staff to promote family involvement
- Provide money for staff to put family involvement ideas into action
- Recognize and reward staff who promote positive family interactions
3. Fostering communication

• Provide all information in appropriate languages and at appropriate literacy levels
• Schedule family events at various times
• Schedule meetings where family members can ask questions and express opinions
• Post information on a centrally located bulletin board

• Use technology (such as a phone tree or a website) to reach out to families
• Photograph or tape events for family members who cannot attend
• Provide a lending library of educational materials that reflect the diversity of the families served
Best practices for staff

- Meet and greet families and children in a friendly manner
- Share something about yourself—your family, your hobbies, your interests
- Get to know the family—its members’ backgrounds and experiences
- Show concern for the child—his or her progress, strengths, goals
- Show concern for the family and respect for its participation
Encouraging Diversity

- Learn about the cultures of the children in your program
- Get to know the family members
- Make sure that programs reflect the cultures of the children who are served
Summary

• Family involvement helps children succeed
• Many forms of family involvement are valuable
• Programs can encourage family involvement through
  – Developing policies and procedures
  – Supporting staff interactions
  – Fostering communication

• Staff can encourage family involvement by
  – Meeting and greeting families and children
  – Sharing something about themselves
  – Getting to know the families
  – Showing concern for the children
  – Showing concern for the families
Training evaluation

• By sharing your honest opinion, you’ll help us to continually improve our programs
• Please provide feedback on the program and on the trainer
• Evaluations are anonymous