

Child care is an important part of life for many families. Child care not only promotes growth and development in children, but it also helps to strengthen families and communities. Child care providers are an important family resource for support and child development education.

Creating a Positive Relationship

Children benefit most when parents and providers work together to plan and provide care. In a partnership, child care providers bring their knowledge of children's educational and developmental needs and parents bring the knowledge of their children's strengths, needs, and interests. Together, parents and providers develop goals that are best for each child within the child care setting.

Positive relationships between parents and providers are created by two-way communication, a feeling of trust, sharing of goals and needs, providing information and resources, and having opportunities to make joint decisions about the care children will receive. A successful partnership between parents and providers will have some of the following qualities:

- Parents and providers share information on a daily or other regular basis.
- Parents trust and feel at ease with the child care program.
- There are many options for parents to be involved in activities in the child care setting.
- Providers are always asking parents for input and feedback on the program.
- Children are doing well and happy within the child care setting.

Ways to Communicate (What it May Look Like)

- Regular emails or notes are being sent between parents and providers.
- Parents and providers meet on a regular basis to discuss the child's progress and development in the program.
- A daily notebook goes back and forth from home to the program - providers and parents write notes to each other about the child or any other issues or concerns.
- Telephone calls are made when concerns arise or when there is an issue that needs addressing.

Benefits of a Partnership

When the parent-provider relationship is working at its best, there are many ways to add to the overall development of children and to provide family-centered services. A successful parent-provider partnership is good for everyone.

- Children have support in their daily activities.

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- Parents benefit when providers and staff understand and respond to their children's needs, and provide information and resources that helps them.
- Providers benefit by having the much needed input, support, and involvement of parents for their program.

What Parents Can Do

Parents want the best for their children. When placing a child in child care, many parents often go through a period of worry because they are concerned about their child's well-being. Some of the concerns and questions parents may ask themselves are--Will the child care provider like my child? Will she understand my child's moods? How can I be sure my child will be happy there?

These are all normal concerns. Parents know their children better than anyone else. So when other people are caring for their children, they realize no one can care for them in the same way. This will always be true.

However, there are ways parents can ease some of their concerns before and after choosing a child care provider.

When Choosing a Child Care Provider:

Parents should ask about and look for the following:

1. Do they provide the kind of activities you want for your child?
2. Do you agree with their style of discipline?
3. Are there any program policies you may need to ask about?
4. Do they encourage parent involvement? If so, what kind?
5. Are you as a parent comfortable with the provider?
6. Do you think your child will fit in well?
7. How do they prefer to share information? Is that similar to your style?
8. How do they interact with other children?

Helping A Child Care Provider Get to Know Your Child:

There are many ways you can help a provider get to know your child and your expectations for child care. Here are a few:

1. Make a one page diagram of your child - place a picture of your child in the middle of the page with your child's name and age. Draw lines from the outer edges of the picture and form small boxes around the picture with different categories, such as Favorite Foods (apples, pizza), and Favorite Activities (painting, building). This is a fun and creative way to let a provider know about your child.
2. Share photos of our child with the provider and tell her about each one.
3. Have a talk with the provider about what your hopes are for your child while in child care.
4. Volunteer to help out in the program whenever you can. Let the provider know you support the program.

What Providers Can Do

In both a center and a family child care home setting, child care providers play a big role in creating partnerships with parents. Parents need to be a key part of the child care program and providers can help make this happen.

To foster a partnership with parents providers can:

- Learn as much as possible about the children in their program and get to know their families as well. Learn about family rituals and routines and how they interact with one another.
- Encourage open communication with parents. Be a good listener and avoid making judgments.
- Be sensitive to cultural and family differences. Reflect cultural diversity in the program with a variety of materials, toys, books, and activities.
- Encourage and find ways to include parents in program activities and program decisions. Invite them to participate in classroom activities. Ask their opinions about program improvements.
- Host a family cookout and have the children's families bring a dish to share with everyone. Encourage other adults who are important in the children's lives to come as well, such as uncles, aunts, grandparents, and so on.
- Make sure each child has a special area in your program and invite families to come and decorate that area with artwork, pictures, drawings, or other items that are reflective of that child's family and home life.
- Create and give out a newsletter to families on a regular basis letting them know about upcoming events at the program, resources in the community, and news and trainings that involve program staff.

This article was prepared by Child Care Aware®, a program of the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA).