

Parent Aware Tip Sheets

Routine Communication with Families

Why is it important to create a good relationship with families?

The relationship between caregivers and the parents of children enrolled in care is important for a number of reasons. First, a positive relationship facilitates the exchange of information that is vital to the care of children. Second, when parents and caregivers have a positive and productive relationship it is easier to navigate the challenges that might arise during the child's time in care.

Caregivers and parents are modeling for children the way in which relationships are formed and maintained over time. When parents and caregivers work together, children receive better care and they feel more secure. Like all relationships, the relationship between caregivers and parents requires consistent communication. They cannot count on young children to provide needed information.

What are you going to talk with families about?

Caregivers and families typically communicate about:

- Specifics about the program – mission, philosophy, languages used, curriculum, events, etc.
- Details of daily care – meals, activities, children's wellness, etc.
- Children's development – skills, challenges, goals for future activities, etc.
- Parent education topics – guidance, child development, school readiness, transition to kindergarten, etc.

How can you communicate with families?

Every child care provider/early educator or program develops its own ways of communicating important information. To some extent, this depends upon the preferences of the caregivers and the family members. Caregivers should consider the languages spoken by family members. Whenever possible, have written documents available in the families' home languages.

The following communication methods are commonly used in high-quality programs:

Written Policies

Most programs or providers create a document describing policies that govern the program. This document usually includes information about at least the following:

- Business policies – fees, due dates for payments, hours of operations, etc.
- Adult-to-child ratios
- Guidance policy – how challenging behaviors will be addressed
- Language policy – what language or languages will be used in the program
- Parent involvement – how and in what ways parents are expected to be part of the program
- Illness exclusion – what symptoms prevent children from attending the program, when a child can return, etc.

Daily Notes and Announcements

In addition to informal conversations, many programs use written communication to share information with family members. Daily notes may include at least the following information:

- Time of meals and what the child ate (for infants this includes times when bottles were given and the amount consumed)

- Time when diapers were changed and the number of wet and soiled diapers
- Length of naps
- Activities the child participated in and enjoyed
- Any signs of illness or behavior changes
- Upcoming events or special instructions for the next day.

Written communication has the advantage of creating a record for caregivers and family members. Also, written notes make it easier for one family member to share information about the child's day with others.

Daily Informal Conversations

Caregivers have opportunities each day to build relationships with family members through informal conversations. When parents drop their children off or pick them up there is an opportunity to exchange information. Caregivers and parents can take advantage of this time to learn more about the child and each other. For example:

At drop off:

- How did the child sleep?
- Has the child had breakfast?
- Is the child in good health?
- Are there any medications or special instructions for the day?
- Is there any special contact information for the parent for the day?

At pickup time:

- What special things happened during the day?
- Did the child nap well?
- What did the child eat for lunch or snack?
- Was medication given?
- Did the child play outdoors?
- Any illnesses among others in the program?
- Any special instructions for tomorrow?

Informal daily conversations seem simple; but these regular exchanges build familiarity and trust. Through these conversations caregivers and parent learn to count on one another and to value the contribution each brings to the care of the child. Also, each gains information that makes the care of the child easier and more effective.

Bulletin Boards or Displays

When information pertains to all of the children in the program, caregivers often use a public display such as a bulletin board. Caregivers might post the following for families to review:

- Group lesson plans
- Announcements about field trips, special visitors, show and tell days, etc.
- Menus
- A short description of the day's activities
- Documentation showing children's activities and children's learning in the program (pictures, work samples, etc.)
- Information about community resources, community events, family involvement or educational opportunities.

Only information that is public should be shared on bulletin boards. For example, information about children's medical conditions, special family situations, or payment of fees should not be posted in a public area.

Newsletters

Many programs or providers create a newsletter to share with families and to market their program. Newsletters can be simple documents copied on 8 ½ X 11 paper or elaborate documents commercially produced.

Newsletters offer a different kind of communication because articles can be carefully planned and provide more in-depth information than a short note. Newsletters often include:

- A calendar of upcoming events such as field trips or special visitors
 - The program's philosophy, mission or curriculum
 - Announcements of fund-raising activities or community involvement
 - Articles about people in the program – a teacher, a newly enrolled family
 - Guidance for parents – children's development, school readiness, community resources, etc.
- Like other written communications, newsletters are convenient for family members because they can be reviewed at any time and they can be shared.

Electronic Communication

Increasingly programs and providers use electronic communications to share and exchange information. Caregivers and family members may use websites, email, and social networking such as Facebook®. Electronic communication is very convenient because it can be produced or updated quickly and exchanged among many people.

Programs and providers using electronic communications should take care to protect confidential and sensitive information just as they would with paper documents. For example, photos of children should never be posted on websites or social media sites without express written permission from families. And children's identifying information (name, birth date, address, phone number) should never be shared on public websites or social media sites.