

Parent Aware Tip Sheets

Parent Surveys

Why is conducting parent surveys valuable?

Caregivers and parents exchange information on a regular basis. Through informal conversations, conferences, newsletters and written notes caregivers and parents share information about the child, the child's development, and how the program works.

Parent surveys provide an opportunity for the program to collect a different kind of information. Surveys usually have an evaluative component. They are developed to help the program understand how well the needs of the families are being met and how the family members' perceive the program. High-quality programs conduct annual surveys of the families using the program.

What type of information can you collect on surveys?

These surveys may collect information about all or some of the following:

- The program's hours of operation
- The program's mission, philosophy and curriculum
- The program's policies and procedures
- The program's facility, equipment and environment
- The success of the program in meeting children's needs

How should you setup your survey?

Survey information can be gathered using open-ended questions or multiple choice questions. Open-ended questions allow family members to respond in a variety of ways and to share the information of greatest interest to them. However, it can be time consuming to read and respond to the large amount of information generated by open-ended questions. Multiple choice questions are faster to tabulate but they limit the topics and responses family members can address. Multiple choice questions may be answered with: Yes, no, always, sometimes, never, to a great extent, to some extent, or not at all.

Data can be gathered using paper surveys or an electronic survey tool such as Survey Monkey®. Paper surveys are useful because they can be completed by all families and can be adapted to many languages. Electronic surveys are helpful because they can be tabulated quickly; however, they may not be accessible to families who do not use electronic communication or have Internet access.

What are some questions you could use?

Providers and program staff members should develop survey questions that address the areas on which they need parent feedback. The following questions are only examples:

Policies and procedures:

- Do the current hours of operation meet your needs?
- Do you understand the illness policy?

- Are you able to easily decide if your child is well enough to attend the program?
- Are the terms of our payment policy clear? Are you always sure when fees are due and how much the fees are?
- Which of our policies would you like more information about?

Program and Curriculum

- Does our curriculum meet the needs of your child?
- What aspects of our curriculum do you feel your child most enjoys?
- In what areas do you feel we could strengthen our curriculum?
- Do you feel your child is challenged by our program?
- How would you describe our curriculum to others?

Satisfaction with the Program

- What about our program do you most value?
- What about our program would you like to change?
- How can we better meet your child's needs or the needs of your family?
- Would you recommend our program to others?

How can you use the feedback you gather?

Developing and implementing a parent survey can be very useful. However, the survey is most helpful when the feedback is used for ongoing program improvement. That means that the provider or program staff must not only read the survey information but also make plans to implement changes. For example, if the parent surveys show that family members do not understand the policy for excluding ill children, the caregivers must create new materials that better explain the policy. If the survey shows that parents are looking for a stronger literacy component, caregivers must look for and adopt a new reading curriculum or enhance the program's library and add a read-aloud session to the daily schedule. Creating an action plan to respond to feedback is a challenging undertaking.

- Look for trends in the survey feedback. What are many or most families looking for? Where is there agreement in the survey feedback?
- Look for conflicting feedback. Some parents want one thing while others want the opposite. Is there common ground in the points of view?
- Look for what can be done easily and quickly. What things will take more time or resources that are not available right now?
- Is communication the issue? Are there things that parents want that you are already doing but are not communicating?

How should you share the results?

Once the results of the survey have been gathered and plans for improvement are being developed, work is not yet finished. When parents complete a survey they also expect that the results of the survey will be shared. In a newsletter article or a short letter to family members, describe the overall results of the survey and some plans to address feedback. There is no need to describe every response; just share general trends. Be careful to keep individual responses or feedback that is clearly linked to one person confidential. For example, if someone does not relate well to one of the caregivers, this personal information would not be shared with all of the families.