

Offering Family Involvement Activities (R1.3a)

How Will it Help Children?

The family is where children prepare for school and for life. It is important that early educators work closely with families. This helps you know the children better and provide more individualized care and instruction. Offering family involvement activities is a good way to partner with families. Children gain much from this collaboration. The notion of *family* for the children may be wider than your own experience. In addition to biological and adoptive parents, other adults may be closely involved in a child's life. Include them also. Of course you always need written permission from the legal guardians or parents to do so.

Tips for Getting Started

- **Find out what the families in your program are interested in.** You can do this informally, through conversations with families; or formally through a survey tool.
- **Brainstorm ideas for family engagement.** You can do this in a group, among staff or with families, or on your own.
- **Consider a flexible schedule for the activities.** Some programs find that a morning “muffin and talk” time works for some families. Others host an end of the day event where children get a meal while their parents meet on a topic of interest, like *Good Bedtime Books* or *Preparing for Kindergarten*. It may be best to alternate morning and evening events.
- **Include activities that will help families extend children's learning at home.** Parents are not experts in early education and are very busy. They appreciate creative ideas from early educators to help them teach, entertain, and guide their children's behavior at home.

Activities that Involve Families

Examples of family involvement activities:

- **If you are an infant program, offer a session on how parents can encourage early literacy at home.** Bring in a community expert, a parent volunteer who has expertise in this area, or look up information about it from a trusted resource and present the information yourself.
- **Offer a book swap and literacy night.** Invite families to donate used books. Invite them to your program in the evening for storytelling and games, and allow them to pick out books donated to the program by other families.
- **If you do not have one already, consider creating a parent committee or advisory group.** Participating in an advisory is a great way to engage families. It is an opportunity to get to know parents outside the classroom. It is also preparation for young parents to learn how to be involved in their child's education when they move to elementary school.
- **Provide a variety of options.** In addition to events, have a regular schedule for distributing a one page “family resource” paper handout. Or it may be a link that you send via text or email, or that you post on your Facebook page. Not all parents will be able to attend events but they all should receive support from you.

Next Steps

- **Create a plan for involving families with activities throughout the school year.** Your plan may change and grow as you learn new things about the needs and interests of your families. It is a good idea to have a place to store your ideas. This will keep the responsibility for involving families front and center.
- **Your job is to offer opportunities.** Have reasonable expectations. Not all families will participate in your family involvement activities. Some parents may feel harried with busy schedules and work stresses. However, all families want help sometimes. They are happy to have you as a caring partner in the education of their child. The resources below will give you more ideas and tools.

Useful Resources

- **Books**

- Schweikert, G. 2012. *Partnering with Families. Winning Ways for Early Childhood Professionals.* Saint Paul, MN: Redleaf Press.

- **Websites**

- **Families.naeyc.org**

This section of the NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) website is user-friendly. It has many short articles on early childhood topics that are of interest to families with children 0-8 (discipline, child development, preparing for kindergarten, bedtime and mealtime, etc.). You can send electronic links to families or print one-page handouts to put in their folders.

- **Understanding Family Engagement Outcomes: Research to Practice Series. Family Engagement and School Readiness.**

Link to the resource: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/docs/schoolreadiness-pfce-rtp.pdf>