

# Involving parents in school and child care

**Involving parents in the care and schooling of their children helps parents, teachers and children themselves. Most importantly, children have better academic and social outcomes when their parents and teachers work together.**

## Parents and teachers in partnership

Research tells us that:

- If their children have an emotional or behavioural problem, parents frequently turn to teachers for help.
- When parents feel comfortable in the school environment, it makes them more likely to ask for help or support related to their child.
- Parents who get involved are more likely to understand and support any particular approaches that are being used with a child and will support these strategies at home.
- Parents who get involved take a greater role in their child's education and activities around schooling, which leads children do better academically and socially.



School partnerships are about focusing on the child. They are about considering the needs of both the school and the family in creating the best environment for the child. They aren't about schools taking responsibility from parents.

## Benefits of parent involvement

### For children

- Children perform better at school when their parents are involved in their education.
- Children settle better into school programs when their parents are involved.
- Children feel valued and important when their parents take an interest in their lives.
- Children observe and learn positive interactions through watching others interact.

### For staff

- Staff experience a higher level of job satisfaction in an environment that encourages listening, respect and appreciation.
- Staff stress levels are reduced when staff and parents work in partnership.
- Staff can develop important social skills when they communicate with parents.

### For parents

- Involvement gives parents the opportunity to discuss their child's interests with staff and to have some input into the program.
- Parents who are familiar with a program feel more comfortable about raising concerns and negotiating solutions with staff.
- Positive partnerships with staff can relieve parent stress.

## Keeping in contact

For child care and school professionals working with parents, **sharing information** is a great way to set up a partnership. Interaction between teachers and parents can help with a child's development and wellbeing. The way this interaction happens has a major impact on how parents relate to you as a teacher and to your organisation.

A good initial message to parents is that **teachers know children** as individuals and are interested in them.

When talking with parents, tell them about what your school or child care service does and why. Talk about your approach and what you hope to do for their child. It's a good idea to begin by asking parents some basic questions. For example:

- What are parents hoping to get from the school or service?
- What are the child's interests, strengths, likes and dislikes?

- How would parents like to be kept informed about their child and day-to-day happenings?
- What kind of information might parents like to support them?
- In what ways do parents think they might like to be involved?

### Before school begins

- Welcome all parents and incoming students by sending a welcome greeting.
- Learn about the students and their families.
- Establish positive communication with all families, and give some information about yourself as a teacher.
- Let parents know about your philosophy and teaching practices.
- Set out classroom policies and inform parents when and how it's best to reach you.
- Invite parents to a beginning school meeting.

### Notes home and positive calls

- Send home 'good news' messages about all students' behaviour and progress.
- Call parents to tell them something positive their child has done.
- Perhaps choose one parent per day and make contact either by phone or letter. After this, parents will be more receptive if you need to call with a concern.
- Keep a record of regular communications with all parents.
- Formally recognise any help of parents (through newsletters and notes home).

### Weekly classroom newsletter

- The more you can tell parents about news from the school, the better your partnership will be.
- Send home a weekly newsletter informing parents about classroom activities and any upcoming events.
- Newsletters can be used to invite parent participation in the classroom.
- Make sure newsletters are translated for any parents who speak English as a second language.

### Other ideas

- Set up regular informal meetings for parents and teachers. Perhaps once or twice a month parents could come along with a packed lunch and join you for an informal question and answer session.
- Go on home visits. These are an opportunity to meet families in their familiar surroundings. They give children the chance to see their parents and teacher working together.

Schools can increase the involvement of parents in many ways, including things like participation on committees, attendance at special days and events, taking part in programs, and helping out with events such as excursions and fetes.

### How to tell if a partnership is working

If parents are really involved in their child's life at school or child care, you can expect:

- ongoing informal conversations about the child
- parents and professionals to bring tensions, issues and concerns out in the open
- professionals to find ways of connecting with parents and letting them in on their child's day
- parents' focus on their child being accepted and viewed as a positive thing
- parents being encouraged to share information, voice concerns, ask questions, make requests and give constructive criticism
- professionals working with confidence in the face of obstacles yet remaining open to others' perspectives.

### More to explore

The National Quality Framework for early childhood education and care

Working with carers and teachers

Building a relationship with your child's school

Parent-teacher interviews

Choosing your child's school

Communication between home and school for teenagers with autism spectrum disorder

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**See references**