Parents: Building Relationships with Your Child’s Teachers and Providers

What’s Inside…

- Benefits and barriers to effective communication
- Tips to building positive relationships
- How to tell if the partnership is working

As we all know, teachers spend a large part of each day with our children, but parents are always the child’s first teachers. They know their children best and can help teachers learn more about their child. Communicating and building a relationship with your child’s teacher is essential for the most optimal care of the child, as well as for seeing the “whole child.” A positive relationship between parents and their child’s teacher helps strengthen the adult’s knowledge of that child, build the child’s emotional strength, and provide more support systems for the children.

When families and staff communicate and share information about children it helps to build a trusting partnership. This partnership is most effective when there is a mutual respect for one another and the role they play in the life of the child.

In building a relationship with your child’s teacher, whether they are an infant, toddler, preschooler or a school aged child, there are many questions parents may be asking themselves. Such as, “What is our responsibility as parents in communicating with our child’s care or preschool teacher?” “Is there a particular role we should be playing?” “Are there parameters?” (brighthorizons.com). Research has shown that when parents are involved in their child’s education, at no matter what age, the child tends to be more successful. Working together helps the children learn and grow. “The relationships that families build with their child’s early care program make an important difference for both parents and children.” “The partnership is even more critical for families of children with special needs who experience additional challenges.”

SOURCE: brighthorizons.com & PIRC

Collaborative partnerships when children have special needs

For educators, it is important to understand that when a family learns that their child has a disability, they experience a range of emotions. Whether it be anger, denial, depression or acceptance, these are all common reactions faced by family members. Families of children with special needs often have their own perspective, as parents, about ways that educators can show support for their child. Parents can help educators to understand their family life, learn more about the disability, communicate frequently, and also work through some of the challenges along with the families. The development of collaborative partnerships between parents and professionals is too often unsuccessful. Therefore, we need to improve that family-professional relationship. This involves communication that is positive, understanding, and respectful among all members and includes parents, preschool special education providers, early intervention specialists, teachers, caregivers, and school district personnel. Communication should be clear, open, and honest. It should be positive and occur frequently. It should be about listening, coordinating information and sharing resources.

All parents face a number of decisions about the education of their child. Parents of children with special needs encounter additional decisions. That is why it is imperative that both the family and the child’s teacher/caregiver learn about the special education process so that everyone is and feels supported. However, some early childhood teachers may feel overwhelmed and even unprepared to have a child with special needs in their classroom. As parents, we need to understand that teachers may feel unsure and uncomfortable when discussing difficult topics with them such as, your child’s disability. They may feel awkward or even nervous. Remember to have patience with your child’s teacher as they may be uninformed about your child’s disability. They are eager for help and the opportunity to learn strategies and skills, along with practical tools to help your child succeed. Try to remember that you are partners in caring for your child. Your provider cares about your child. Try to remember how and what they might be feeling. Parents are the experts in their child and their child’s disability. Teachers are the experts in child development and education.

Source: Purdue University, Human Development Extension
Parent-Teacher Relationships

An essential part of effective communication is building family-school relationships. The manner in which this is done can have both benefits and barriers. Ideally we want a give and take relationship with our child’s early education teacher. One where we both can feel free to ask questions and share valuable information. Within this relationship, we, as parents, need time to build trust, build confidence in each other and feel secure that both sides are being honest. However, this parent-teacher relationship can also be a challenge for many reasons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Barriers</th>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Teachers and families respectfully share information about the child</td>
<td>♦ Differences in backgrounds—cultures, languages, and socio-economic statuses</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Families are more likely to share information when they feel they are listened to and understood</td>
<td>♦ Differences in experiences—a parent’s experience in school (positive or negative) sets up some expectations for their own interactions with school/teacher for their own child</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Families feel more involved in their child’s early development, experiences, and education</td>
<td>♦ Differences in viewing child’s needs—the school views the child (their learning and development) differently than the family does</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Teachers and families develop a shared understanding of the child</td>
<td>♦ Communication discomfort—families or teachers are uncomfortable about communicating their needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>♦ Family members may become more involved in their child’s education/early childhood program</td>
<td>♦ Need to feel valued—parents and teachers perceive that their perspective and opinions are not valued.</td>
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* SOURCE: Kids Matter Early Childhood

Is this partnership working?

Early childhood 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 professionals taking responsibility from parents. How can we tell if that partnership is working? Here are some of the indicators:

* Ongoing informal conversations about the child
* Parents and professionals bring tensions, issues and concerns out in the open
* Information is being shared on a regular basis
* Stress levels are reduced when there is a shared partnership
* A mutual level of comfort that brings about help and support related to the child
* More is learned about the students’ needs and how to meet them
* Positive two-way communication of all members of the child’s early childhood educational team
* Parents being encouraged to share information, voice concerns, ask questions, make requests and give constructive criticism

* SOURCE: raisingchildren.net.au
Tips to Build Positive Parent-Teacher Relationships

Practice good parent-teacher communication by addressing any issues or concerns as they arise. Waiting can sometimes make it worse so we need to express our thoughts and feelings appropriately.

Build a relationship with your child’s teacher right from the beginning. Introduce yourself, volunteer in the classroom if you have the time, and initiate regular contact.

Gain an understanding that we as parents may be concerned about the product of our children’s work while the teachers focus on the process of how our children learn.

Healthy parent-teacher communication and collaboration is a welcomed practice that should be part of every classroom from early childhood to high school. Parents have the right to and should request to receive updates from their child’s teachers. Communicating well is the key to having a successful relationship. Parents and early childhood providers have a shared responsibility for the education and socialization of children. Parents and teachers should have the information they need to help even our littlest learners.

Sometimes, communication can be difficult. However, you are the expert on your child. “By sharing your child’s strengths, needs, likes, and dislikes, you provide valuable information that professionals can use to help your son or daughter.” Be a teammate with your child’s teachers and remember that neither of you are alone in educating your child.

SOURCE: PACER.org How to Communicate Effectively with Early Childhood Professionals. Action Sheet PHP-c159
Sources


[brighthorizons.com](http://brighthorizons.com) (Family Resources) _Building Healthy Parent-Teacher Relationships and Creating A Positive Relationship With Your Child’s Child Care and Preschool Teacher._

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**While We Teach Our Children, They Teach Us.**

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**Workshops of Interest**

The ECDC can provide information and workshops on a variety of topics tailored to the interests and needs of parents and early childhood professionals. Resources are available on such topics as general child development, developmental issues for children with special needs, coping strategies, and specific disabilities.

**Workshops include:**

- Including All Kids
- Importance of Play
- Developmentally Appropriate Practices
- Early Childhood Development: The Meaning of Red Flags
- Supporting Social Emotional Development
- Challenging Behaviors
- Moving On: Transitioning Families (EI-CPSE) & (CPSE-CSE)
- What Are Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education?
- What is an Individualized Education Program (IEP)?
- Writing IEP Goals
- Getting Ready for Kindergarten

**Who We Are**

The Early Childhood Direction Center (ECDC) is a regional technical assistance center for the State Education Department providing information, referral and support to families, professionals, and community agencies concerned with young children birth to five. We are located at Syracuse University’s Center on Human Policy.

**ECDC services to families are free and confidential.**

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