

Module 6: Building Relationships with Parents and Colleagues

Section A: Parent and Teacher Communication

Introduction

Communication is one of the critical elements of a successful early care and education program. As an early childhood professional your abilities to use written and verbal communication are part of your daily job responsibilities. From welcoming parents and children in the morning to saying good-bye at pick-up time, your day will be filled with verbal interactions and conversations with parents, children, and other staff. Writing notes to parents, completing lesson plans, and completing documentation are just a few of your responsibilities that require written communication. In this section you will learn the basics about communicating with parents. It is important to keep in mind that each center will have their specific staff responsibilities for parent communication so remember to check with you Center Director about their expectations.

Learning Objectives

After you complete this section you will be able to:

- List the required licensing postings and interactions that apply to parent communication.
- Explain 2 ways teachers can communicate with parents.
- Summarize the rationale for maintaining confidentiality.
- Summarize how diversity impacts relationships with parents.

Guiding Your Learning

As you work through this section reflect on your experiences in working with parents (customers). What type of contact do you think you will have with your parents? How will you interact with them? What do you think is your most important responsibility in communicating with parents?

NOTE: The information contained in these sections are partial summaries of the DHS Child Care Licensing Regulations, are not intended to replace or provide an official interpretation of the Arizona Administrative Code and Arizona Revised Statutes for Child Care Facilities.

Summary of Key Arizona Child Care Licensing Regulations

Article 3 Facility Administration

R9-5-302 Statement of Child Care Services

A. A statement of child care services is development by the center administration and provides a description of programs offered, hours of operation, contact information, policies and procedures for enrollment, disenrollment, tuition payment policies, guidance policies, parent participation in program activities, description of educational program and activities, parent access to the center and other policies and procedure. Parents may request a copy of the document from the center.

R9-5-303 Posting of Notices

A. One way centers communicate information to parents is by posting relevant center information including the facility licenses, Director's name, fees, weekly menus, important health notices, and licensing related communication.

R9-5-504 Supplemental Standards for 1-year-old and 2-year-old Children

Communication with the parents of 1 and 2-year-old children includes a consultation to develop an individual toilet training plan for each child. Part of the plan includes assurance that a staff member does not force toilet training on any enrolled child.

R9-5-502 Supplemental Standards for Infants

Parents can request daily documentation of each infant's activities, bottles, feedings, and diaper changes.

R9-5-507 Supplemental Standards for Children with Special Needs

A written plan must be developed for a child with special needs by a team of staff members, the enrolled child's parent, and the health care providers. The plan is to be completed within 30 days of the child receiving child care services and revised on a yearly basis.

R9-5-514 Accident and Emergency Procedures

If a child enrolled at a center requires medical treatment by a health care provider due to an accident, injury, or emergency at the child care facility the parents must be notified immediately. The parent will be given written documentation of the incident that includes date, time, and location.

R9-5-515 Illness and Infestation

Parents are required to receive written notification of a communicable disease or infestation.

Communication

Communication between parents, child care center administration, and teachers creates a foundation for developing trust and collaboration that will support the growth and development of the children in your program. Communication provides center staff with information on the enrolled families and provides the family with an understanding of the center philosophy, policies, learning program, activities, and events. Formal, informal, written and verbal communication are essential in sharing information that keeps everyone informed.

Formal Communication:

- Required Arizona Child Care Licensing Regulation postings: Center contact information, menus, health notices, tuition fees, daily infant information sheet
- Parent Handbooks: information on center policies, procedures, program philosophy, and other information
- Enrollment Forms: provide information on the child and family
- Daily communication or weekly notes on each child
- Daily schedules and weekly lesson plans
- Parent teacher conferences
- Accident and incident reports
- Newsletters

- Relevant notices regarding center activities, events, or announcements
- Anecdotal notes that document observations of children. their learning, and activities

Informal Communication

- Informal communication between parents and teachers provide the background on the child's culture and family that assists the teacher in planning for each child based on their interests and needs.
- Daily verbal communication between the parent and the staff.
- Sharing of relevant daily information about the child at home and at school.
- Phone calls to parents to provide information on the child.
- Email to parents that provides individual information about the child or shares information about a center activity or event.

Talk to your Center Director about what formal and informal methods of communication they use.

Parent Communication

Communication and interaction between parents and the classroom teacher should be continuous and ongoing. If good communication is not established it will lead to misunderstandings between the teacher and parents. Teachers in child care programs have the opportunity to talk with parents or a family on a daily basis. Open, positive communication about the child's learning, development, and daily activities should be the focus of conversations. Daily interactions allow teachers to learn from the parents and parents to learn from the teachers. Children benefit from the partnership that develops when teachers and parents share information about the child and center activities.

Suggestions for facilitating communication with parents:

- Be courteous, open, and honest. Refer parents to the Center Director when you do not know an answer to a question.
- Remember that you are an early childhood professional. Your job is to deal with typical childhood behaviors. Share positive items about the child so the families leave feeling good about selecting your center.
- If there is a problem with a child's behavior speak with your center director to see if there is anything the center could be doing differently to encourage better behavior. If the environment is appropriate, meaningful activities are being provided and positive guidance techniques are being implemented and the child is still struggling with behavior issues, then it is time to speak with the parent. Ask your Center Director on how these situations are handled in your program. Look at communication as an exchange of information. If a child is having an issue at the center, the parent has probably encountered the same behavior.
- Develop your listening skills. Learn to listen for the feelings behind the words. Parents are not always rational when they believe their children are being mistreated.
- Use effective communication skills and apply a problem solving approach and attitude when talking with parents.

- Try to talk to each parent on a daily basis at arrival and pick up times. A good way to initiate a quick conversation that can provide information about the child is to ask how the family is doing. If you are busy, be certain to have eye contact or otherwise acknowledge their arrival or departure with a wave or smile.
- Make parents feel welcome whenever they are in the classroom.
- If you have access to a computer at the center, email is a great tool to keep in touch with parents. Make sure that you are not emailing when you should be supervising children.
- If you have an issue to discuss with a parent it is better to communicate face to face than through email or a note. ALWAYS let your Center Director know if you will be talking to a parent about an issue or problem.

(Adapted from *Infants, Toddlers, and Caregivers* by Gonzalez-Mena and Eye)

Talk to your Center Director about the ways teachers communicate with parents and about expectations of parent and staff interactions.

Parent Relationships

Building relationships with parents can be one of the most rewarding aspects of being an early childhood teacher. Although each center has a philosophy on parent-teacher relationships, the early childhood profession recognizes the significance of developing relationships based on mutual respect and concern for the well-being of the child. The development of respectful and reciprocal teacher-parent relationships involves developing interactions that are balanced, connected, and interrelated (Moore). Although parent-teacher relationships are based on the child's placement in the teacher's classroom, it is not uncommon for parents to view center staff as an integral part of their child's life and seek to establish a positive relationship with the classroom teacher and other staff who interact with their child. The perspective of parents and teachers as partners in the child's learning is based on the development of mutual respect and trust.

Developing a trusting and respectful relationship in an early learning and care program is based on the following general parent expectations. Parents want a child care program that is:

- **Reliable.** Parents want safe and consistent care for their child.
- **Confidential.** Parents have the expectation that information about their child and family will not be shared with others.
- **Responsive.** Friendly staff that is open and responsive to parent comments and concerns and follow up on commitments.
- **Reassuring.** Staff who are courteous, knowledgeable, confident, competent, and professional.
- **Empathetic.** Staff demonstrate caring for the children, an understanding of different perspectives, are sympathetic to the challenges of parenting, and respect individual differences.
- **Honesty and Integrity.** Parents professionals working with their children to be honest, ethical, and demonstrate integrity.

Parents should be provided with up to date information on center activities, policy changes, and events. Changes that involve families and the children are communicated and explained to the parents. ***If you do not have an answer to a question, refer the parent to the Center Director.***

Confidentiality

Confidential information is the personal details about our lives that we may not want to share with other people. Our address, phone number, birth date, educational background, and medical conditions are examples of confidential information that is private. Early learning and care programs ask enrolled parents to share confidential information about their child and family as part of the enrollment process. Families will also provide information on children who have special needs, such as an allergy, or special circumstances, such as a special custody arrangement, or a medical condition as part of the enrollment process. Enrollment, health, medical, family and other information on children is kept in individual files and maintained in a safe and secure location. Children's files should only be accessed by staff who need to be aware of the child's personal information.

As an early childhood professional you will have access to confidential information about the children in your classroom. As a professional, it is your responsibility to protect the privacy of the children, their families, other staff members and the center. As a professional, the sharing of information regarding others, events, situations, or problems that may occur in the center must be kept confidential. Confidentiality includes not talking to friends or family or engaging in conversations in public places with other staff members. Confidential information regarding the events at the center, center operations, children, parents, or other staff should not be shared through email, Facebook, or through other electronic or social media. Maintaining confidentiality is an important responsibility that helps to establish trusting relationships and create a positive environment for everyone.

Talk to your Center Director about the confidentiality policies and expectations at your center.
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Differences in Perspective

It is important to recognize the changes in society that have affected families and early learning and care programs. Twenty years ago child care centers provided services to the "traditional" two parent working family. Today single-parent families, adoptive families, remarried families, blended families, and grandparents raising grandchildren are all part of early learning and care programs. At the same time family roles have become more flexible. Mothers may be the major salary/wage earner, fathers may have taken on the role of the homemaker, and other family members may be assisting in the care of the children and the home.

In addition to the differences in family structure and roles, increasing cultural diversity is creating change in child care programs. Today it is less likely that parents and teachers will share common beliefs and values. Early childhood teachers and parents may have differences in language, culture, and values that can present challenges in developing effective relationships. Parents may feel intimidated or hesitant to engage in conversations or develop a relationship with teachers in situations where they

speak a different language, lack education, or are at a different socio-economic level. Each of these situations may involve differences in how parents raise their child which has the potential to conflict with the values of teachers.

It is essential for professional early childhood teachers to develop attitudes of acceptance of other beliefs and perspectives. There are many ways to raise a child. However, many of the basic goals of parenting are the same in all cultures. Many of the differences are in the emphasis of or the ways to achieve the basic goals of raising a child (Klein & Miller). The critical element in a child care program is the well-being of the children. Parents and families are the child's first and most important teachers. Respecting their beliefs and values is vital in creating an environment that promotes each child's learning and development. Although it may take additional effort, communication is the key to creating understanding and building partnerships with parents. You may not always agree with parent's values and beliefs but it is your obligation as a professional to respect them.

Strategies for Creating Partnerships with Parents

- Establish open communication when you first meet parents by introducing yourself and explaining your classroom program.
- Learn parent names or others that will be dropping off or picking up the child.
- Develop collaborative relationships with parents based on two-way communication and sharing specific information about their child.
- Use parents as valuable and accessible resources on cultural heritage and diversity. Parents can share their culture with the children in a variety of ways including sharing foods, language, customs, and children's activities.
- Welcome and include parents in the center and classroom activities and events.
- Collaborate on learning and developmental goals for children.
- Acknowledge parental choices and goals for their children and respond with sensitivity and respect to parent preferences and concerns.
- Share information and knowledge about the child's development and learning as part of the daily communication and parent-teacher conferences.
- Provide resources for additional services and programs for children.
- Respect each child's culture and family by reflecting diversity in the learning environment by adding toys, books, decorations, and activities.

Talk to your Center Director about the ways that parent partnerships are developed at your center. Does your center have any parent events during the year such as a Fall Harvest Festival, Spring Carnival, or a Holiday Music Celebration? These events are a great way to connect with parents and their extended families.

Parent Questions and Concerns

At some point all teachers will encounter a parent who has questions or concerns regarding the care of their child, concern about events at the center, or is angry about a situation. In many instances you may not be able to resolve the situation for the parent. Referring the parent to the Center Director is the best way to assist the parent in resolving the concern. If the concern is a classroom situation, such as a missing coat, listen to the parent's concern and help the parent find the coat. When situations escalate, directing the parent to the Center Director or the administrator in charge is the best way to resolve the parent concern.

Talk to your Center Director about the center policy and procedure for handling parent concerns or complaints.

Applying Your Knowledge

How does this information affect your work with young children?

- Parent -teacher relationships are a critical factor in the child's development.
- Developing parent relationships is a vital factor in a child care program's success. Parents make the decision to enroll and to continue to attend the child care program.
- Communication is the key to developing relationships and understanding differences in perspectives.
- Positive parent-teacher relationships respect differences and focus on the child's development and learning.

Check Your Understanding

- ✓ Name 3 written forms of parent communication required in Arizona Child Care Licensing Regulations.
- ✓ List 2 ways that parents and teachers communicate.
- ✓ Explain why daily teacher-parent communication is important for a child's development.
- ✓ Explain the reasons for confidentiality.

References

Keyes, C. R. (n.d.). Parent-teacher partnerships: A theoretical approach for teachers . *Clearing House on Early Education and Parenting*, Retrieved from <http://ceep.crc.uiuc.edu/pubs/katzsym/keyes.html>

Moore, K. (n.d.). Policies and practices: Establishing reciprocal relationships with families. *Scholastic*: <http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/policies-practices-establishing-reciprocal-relationships-families>

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Module 6-Section A Worksheet

Name 3 written forms of parent communication required in Arizona Child Care Licensing Regulations.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

List 2 ways that parents and teachers communicate.

1. _____
2. _____

Explain why daily teacher-parent communication is important for a child's development.

Explain the reasons for confidentiality.
