

Parent-Professional Partnerships

Partnerships between parents and child care professionals ensure better results for everyone. However, it isn't always easy to make partnerships happen.

Why are partnerships difficult?

Most services have policies about relating to parents, but putting those policies into practice is often challenging. Sometimes professionals think they are doing parents a favour by taking over responsibility for the child. Occasionally family day carers describe their work as taking other people's children into their own family and treating them as their own. Some people working in child care services assert that they have more influence over children than their parents do. Not only are these views inaccurate, but they are detrimental to children's well being. The child care experience is not a substitute for growing up in a family, and children's services professionals are not taking the place of parents and do not have more influence on children than their parents do.

Partnerships in children's services have many of the same characteristics that business or personal partnerships do. These include mutual respect; trust; sensitivity to the perspective of the other, or empathy; on-going open "both-ways" communication; common goals that are clear and agreed on; teamwork; absence of rivalry and competition; recognition and valuing of the unique contribution and strengths of the partner; and shared decision making.

Sometimes partnership is confused with parent involvement, which typically involves parents helping out by doing such things as coming to working bees, raising funds, going on excursions, or being on the management committee.

In some services there is a lot of parent involvement but no partnerships. Partnership involves sharing power, and the focus of a partnership is the child, not the service.

What helps?

Partnership is respect in action. Where there is partnership:

- There is ongoing informal conversation about the child, usually at drop-off and pick-up times.
- Parents and professionals feel free to get tensions, issues and concerns out in the open and talk about them.
- Professionals find ways of connecting with parents, letting them in on their child's day, ways that go beyond simply displaying the daily or weekly program.
- Professionals share all the "good news" there is about the child.
- Parents' focus on their child is accepted and seen as desirable, as professionals appreciate that a parent's job is to be passionate about and a strong advocate for their own child.
- Parents are encouraged to share information, voice concerns, ask questions, make requests, and give constructive criticism. Professionals take seriously what parents think and what parents want.
- Professionals operate with confidence, willing to negotiate but at the same time clear about their bottom lines, confident enough to persevere in the face of obstacles, and open to others' perspectives.
- Expectations are individualised just as they are with children.

The cornerstone of high quality in children's services is when there is absolute clarity that the most valuable thing an early childhood professional can do for a child is to strengthen the parent-child bond and increase parents' appreciation and valuing of their child.

This Parent Fact Sheet is available in different community languages and can be downloaded for printing from the Early Childhood Connections website.

www.econnections.com.au



An initiative of

