



Cooperation with parents: first encounters, ways to start and lay good grounds for cooperation

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Importance of the Family-Teacher Relationship

- Family-teacher relationships are essential:
- for learning about the children from an additional and valuable source (families and teachers each have unique knowledge about a child, for example, the parent unconditionally loves the child as an individual, but the teacher gets a chance to view the child in terms of a whole group)
- for promoting children's emotional health (it is important that the child does not lose her own culture while becoming part of the mainstream culture, since cultural identity and family connectedness are crucial for emotional health)
- for helping children deal with difficult problems that may have lifelong consequences (when there is a secure relationship between the family and teachers, they may inform one another)

First encounters

- Preschool/kindergarten offers many benefits
- But going to preschool does come with its fair share of emotions, for both the parent and the child
- For a kid, entering a new preschool environment filled with unfamiliar teachers and kids can cause anxiety
- The main source of anxiety around entering preschool is that they have absolutely no idea what to expect
- They have spent the first months/years learning the rules and routines of their family life and they are completely unfamiliar with the new rules and routines they will encounter
- Parents might have mixed emotions about whether their child is ready for preschool
- For parents the main source of separation anxiety is worrying that their child will feel abandoned

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Barriers to Positive Family-Teacher Partnerships

- 1. Differences in backgrounds.** The family and teacher come from different cultures, languages, and socio-economic statuses.
- 2. Stress** for both, families and teachers (e.g. long hours and little flexibility at work reduce the time available for teachers to work on family communication and for parents/caregivers to relate to school)
- 3. Differing Values.** The family and teacher lack a mutual set of values.
- 4. Differences in viewing roles** of the school for the child between the teacher and the parent or caregiver.
- 5. Types of experiences.** Prior experiences with families/teachers have set up differing expectations.

Barriers to Positive Family-Teacher Partnerships


6. Notions of openness. Lack of openness to outsiders entering their territory (home or school)

- **7. 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.

8. Communication abilities. Teachers or families lack the ability to identify and communicate key experiences, ideas, or issues.

9. Communication discomfort. Families or teachers are uncomfortable about communicating their needs, or do not have enough fluency in the language.

10. Need to feel valued. Parents and teachers perceive that their perspective and opinions are not valued.




11. Differences in viewing child's needs. The school views the child (learning and development) differently than the family does. For example: behavior issues are handled one way at home and another at school


- **Teachers should be aware to these issues to help them recognize potential blocks to productive home/school relationships**

Building relationship with parents

Communication and availability of information is crucial

- Annual open houses – parents and children can visit kindergarten before enrolling and meet teachers, surroundings etc.
- Adaptation period – parents can stay with their children in the group first days for support, this is also opportunity for short `face to face` communication with teachers
- Everyday communication “at the door”- did they eat, sleep, what they were doing that day

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- **Newsletters** can include items such as quotes from children, children's artwork, book suggestions for families, words to songs or finger plays, photos showing what the children are doing, recipes, and calendars.
 - **Handbooks.** Parents should have a copy of the school policies clearly outlined. Having handbooks in languages appropriate for the families helps to reduce misunderstandings (e.g. when a child is too sick to be at school and why)
 - **Family bulletin board.** Teachers can use bulletin boards to post pictures of what occurred at school that day, displays with photos of all children and their families or perhaps displays that also include teachers and their families.
 - **Notes.** Notes from the teacher may be formal or informal. Why not send artwork home with captions, child's words, or other information

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- **Email**. If the parents have access to a computer, email can be a very fast and easy form of communication.
 - **Phone conversations**. When a teacher calls home, parents immediately think there is bad news. It is helpful if teachers take the time to call with good news about each child within the first few months of school.
 - **Group visits**. Taking field trips to family members at work/home communicates to parents that getting to know families is an important part of the agenda for the teacher, the school, and the other children.
 - **Workshop with parents**. Opportunities for family members to be part of the classroom and build a sense of community
 - **Social events**. Invite families and school personnel to get to know each other in a social setting such as a breakfast event, tea party. Teachers should look for creative ways to make the event as useful as possible to those invited.
 - **Parent-teacher meetings** – especially at the beginning of the school year with crucial informations about program, daily routine etc.
 - **Asking parents for help**

Conclusion

- Successfully building positive relationships with parents requires that teachers take note of barriers and utilize a variety of communication techniques to overcome them. It is through communication that acceptance of others occurs
- Children learn from both, preschool teachers in school and parents at home. A proper co-operation between teachers and parents is a key for a healthy child growth and early childhood education
- Home and school share a mutual interest and responsibility in the child's total living and without co-operation of home and school, they can not be successful in raising and educating the child

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