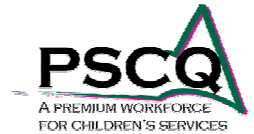




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Encouraging parent Involvement in the Program

General overview

Within Children's Services settings there is often references to the importance of positive parent staff relationships. The principles of parent involvement being implemented into action focuses on what professionals need to know about children and families, how to translate that information into plans and how to work with families to ensure that the child's experience is the result of shared decision making.

All services do have brief daily contact between parent and staff. However there are differences between communication, involvement and participation.

- Communication is the act of imparting and receiving information
- Involvement provides the opportunity for parents who so desire to be included in the centre's activity
- Participation is involvement where parents are active in matters of policy. Participation includes making decisions, contributing to the service's philosophy and having ideas agreed upon and implemented.

Getting parents involved with a service can sometimes be a daunting exercise. All parents are different with different needs, ideas and individual perspectives of how much they want to be involved. However, we may assume that most are interested in their children and seek to do their best for them. Parents should not be judged by the staff on the quantity or quality of their involvement. The level of involvement by parents will vary for varying reasons which may include:

- The family life, work commitments, a multiple number of organisations and several children within the family create daily demands which can be exhausting.
- Parents may feel relieved that they have found a good service and pleased to leave that care up to the experts. They may read all the service's information, notice board but have no desire to be further involved.
- Some parents may not be aware of what to expect from the centre and feel that any involvement may be interfering
- Parents may have had poor past experiences where too high an expectation or efforts resulted in little appreciation.
- Involvement may be requested at times when families have other chores to do or wish to utilise their spare time to devote to their family.

Suggested strategies for encouraging parent involvement

- Allocate time for staff to plan parent involvement.
- Link parent involvement with the service philosophy and overall goals for the year.
- Allow staff to individually discuss feelings about parent involvement.
- Identify the needs, resources, experiences of staff and parent to determine the specific aims of parent involvement.
- Ensure that the involvement has a level of variety and informality. Some parents may not respond to formal requests unless they can see how it directly benefits their own child.
- Give parents a choice of the nature and the amount of involvement as well as the time they are able to give.
- Communicate regularly with parents about their child in the context of the care being provided to assist parents to understand the services aim for parent involvement. Requesting parents to participate in a working bee out of the blue may not really make sense and may not seem relevant to their own family/child care needs.
- Convey information about the service through notice boards and brochures to allow parents to see why your service is special and why your goal of parent involvement is important.
- Notice board for parents need to be labelled “*Parents*” so parents realize this information is meant for them.
- Notice boards and brochures need to flow in a logical manner. They need to be bright and interesting but not too busy. Precise and succinct information gets the message across.
- Be aware of what words are used and avoid jargon.
- Review notice boards/ brochures regularly. Notice boards especially become stale and unnoticed if left the same for a long period of time. Observe how often parents are at the service will give the service a good indication of how often the notice boards needs changing. Create a policy based on this information.
- Once having developed a display or brochure ask an independent person who knows little about your service to read it. This will pick up errors and show whether what your are trying to say is understood.
- Space on a noticed board should also be allocated for day to day messages. This will contribute to parents gaining a “big picture” understanding of the service as a whole.
- All handbooks should include information of parent involvement including the rationale for it.

References:

- Keyser Janis “From Parents to Partners” Redleaf Press 2006
Waters Joan “Making the connection” Lady Gowrie Child Care 1996

Recommended Reading:

- Herr J & Libby Y. “Creative Resources for Bulletin Boards” Gryphon House 1997