Partnerships with Families and Communities

Creating effective partnerships between schools, parents, and communities isn't just a nice idea. It's a necessity.   Davies, 2000

Partnerships in education build bridges between families, communities, and schools. As children interact with the people, places and things associated with the family, the immediate community, and beyond, they extend their horizons to develop the attitudes, skills, and knowledge they need to become effective citizens.

In order to provide the best possible education, schools must partner with families and communities. True partnerships are based on mutual respect. Teachers respect and value parents' knowledge and insights about their children. Parents respect and value teachers' knowledge and insights about the learning process and understanding children's educational needs. In a school-family-community partnership, all members of the community recognize changing family needs in order to raise children in an environment that provides the conditions for health, safety, and learning.

Every adult has a stake in the education and welfare of children. It is essential for adults to build bridges in order to work together so children are healthy and safe. It is important to provide children with a rich and supportive learning environment. Schools, families, and community members must recognize these common goals and work together for the sake of children.

How to Build Partnerships that Work: Davies' Three Basic Principles

Successful partnerships are based on reciprocity. This means that all those involved in the partnership—school, family, and community—have overlapping responsibilities for children's learning. Each needs the help of the others in formal and informal structures.

Developing effective partnerships is a democratic process. Partnerships should recognize the different interests, races, religions, and educational status of its participants, and should be prepared to resolve conflicts through the democratic processes of mediation, negotiation, and compromise.

Effective partnerships provide a variety of opportunities. A comprehensive program of partnerships will include such elements as parent education, family support, volunteer activities, good communication, opportunities to participate in decision making, and strategies that foster children's learning at home and in the community.

From: Davies, D. (2000). How to build partnerships that work. *Principal 80*(1)

School-Family-Community Partnerships

A family-centered perspective is essential to the success of the school-family-community partnership. The importance of involving parents in the education of their children cannot be overestimated. Teachers must always remember that parents are the child's first teachers and that a partnership between home and school benefits children, families, and teachers alike.

The unique cultural, ethnic, and language aspects of each community, as well as its rural or urban nature, offer both opportunities and challenges for establishing responsive partnerships. Teachers and administrators must not assume that a lack of parental involvement means non-caring. They must work to understand the barriers that keep some parents from being more involved in their child's education.

Family-friendly schools must reach out to parents and the community to develop multiple ways to work together so everyone benefits and feels valued. Davies (2000) offers five recommendations to help principals build partnerships with families and the community:

Five Recommendations

Look first to your teachers. Teachers are the most important link in the success of any partnership effort. They can provide guidance for families on setting realistic expectations, monitoring and helping with homework. And selecting appropriate books and learning materials. Unfortunately, many partnerships are developed with little or no teacher input. Instead, teachers are told to "just do it," which can doom the effort from the start.

Principals should seek teacher input and encourage teachers to develop their own learn-at-home materials for parents to use. Because parent-teacher conferences have been proven to be an effective way to build trust and cooperation among the partners, they should be held at least twice a year, last at least a half-hour, and focus on student work. The fleeting teacher-parent conferences traditionally held during open houses don't contribute much.

Make your school family-friendly. There is good evidence that schools that are friendly and welcoming to family members have an easier time creating successful partnership programs. Here are some ways schools can create a family-friendly environment:
- Establish a parent or family center within the school
- Offer good, frequent, and user-friendly communication
- Provide good after-school programs that involve parents and community organizations
- Organize social activities for teachers and families
- Provide parent education and family literacy programs
- Have programs that link families to needed health and social services

Obviously, these programs will be more successful if they are accompanied by a friendly and respectful attitude that can be communicated in many different ways; smiles, pleasant greetings, signs and decorations that recognize the different languages and cultures in the community; and a clean, bright, and inviting ambiance.

Reach into your community. If educational equity is the goal, then school and parent leaders must reach out to those in the community who are considered hard to reach. Here are three practical ideas suggestions:

- Train volunteer parents and community residents to visit families at home, where they can provide information about school programs and services, offer ideas about how to help children study at home, answer questions, and respond to requests.
- Go where the people are. Reach out to parents and other family members in community settings supermarkets, hairdressers, churches, mosques, fast food restaurants, social service agencies, and health clinics. In these informal settings, it may be easier to talk to them and listen to their concerns.
- Work with health and social service agencies. This means making information and services more accessible by offering them at the school, an agency, or a convenient community setting.

Seek increased responsibility by families. For any school-family-community partnership to be successful, all three must be accountable. But all families sometimes need help, and many who live in poverty or in unstable settings need more help than others. Principals don't have to be social workers to help these families meet their child-rearing responsibilities. By engaging the help of public and private community agencies and organizations, religious institutions, and employers, the school can work within the community to offer supports and strengthen the ability of families to do the right thing by their children.

Understand that a partnership is a two-way street. School success and community success are linked. Schools reflect their communities and vice versa. Principals can take the lead in connecting education with the community's economic and social development. In this regard, schools and their staffs have much to offer to the community: access to physical facilities, such as computer labs, gyms, meeting rooms, and playgrounds; access to the expertise, talents, and skills of teachers and administrators; students who serve the community through service projects; and training in computer and Internet use for community members.

Schools also are employers, who can hire local residents, and purchasers, who can buy from local merchants. They also are neighbors who can join neighborhood projects such as crime watches, cleanup campaigns, neighborhood gardens, food banks, and cooperative purchasing. Partnerships work best when the relationship represents an exchange of benefits between schools and community organizations.

For schools to really close the educational gap, they need to develop partnerships and implement programs that are carefully designed, with input from all affected groups, that are consistent with the principles outlined above, and faithfully executed. With strong leadership from the principal, this prescription can produce successful partnerships that will change the culture of the school, benefit all participants, and help all students achieve at higher levels.

Six Types of School-Family-Community Involvement

Based on her research identifying six types of school-family-community involvement, Joyce Epstein has developed a framework to assist the development of partnerships and strengthen support for learning. Schools may use the framework to guide their decisions about practices that will help achieve goals and meet the needs of students and families. Each type presents unique opportunities and challenges for expanding the ways schools, families, and communities work together.

- Parenting
- Communicating
- Volunteering
- Learning at home
- Decision-making
- Collaborating with the community

Parenting
Schools provide assistance to families in relation to families' basic obligations to:
- Ensure children's health and safety
- Acquire parenting and child-rearing skills based on understanding child development.
- Supervise and provide guidance for children at each age level.
- Provide positive home conditions that encourage learning and appropriate behavior in school.

Communicating
Schools have a basic obligation to:
- Communicate about the Primary Program.
- Communicate children's progress.
- Communicate in a variety of formats such as memos, reports, conferences, telephone calls, newsletters, informal conversations, e-mail, and websites.
- Communicate frequently so information is timely and in a language understood by all parents.
- Provide oral and written translation in other languages, as needed, to reach all parents.
- Encourage parents to communicate openly to share information and express concerns.

Volunteering
Families help schools when they:
- Volunteer to assist teachers, administrators, and children in the classroom or other areas.
- Come to school to support children's participation in the arts and other school events.
- Attend school workshops and other programs for their own training and education.
Schools encourage volunteerism when they:
- Create flexible schedules and multiple ways for parents to volunteer.
- Match talents and interests of parents to needs of students and teachers.

Learning at Home

Parents support schools and children's learning at home when they:

- Encourage and model positive attitudes toward learning and the school.
- Provide support for learning that is responsive to children's needs and interests.
- Supervise and assist children at home with homework assignments and school-related activities.
- Initiate conversations and activities to support and extend learning related to children's schoolwork.
- Communicate with teachers to exchange ideas and information about ways to best support children's learning.

Parent involvement is the participation of parents in every facet of the education and development of children, from birth to adulthood...Parent involvement takes many forms, including the parent's shared responsibilities in decisions about children's education, health and well-being, as well as the parent's participation in organizations that reflect the community's collaborative aspirations for all children.

National PTA Board of Directors, 1990

Decision-making

Schools and communities provide parents with opportunities to:

- Assume decision-making roles in the PTA/PTO, advisory councils, committees, and other parent organizations.
- Taking advocacy or decision-making roles at the district and state levels.
- Participate in advocacy groups or evaluation teams that work for school improvement.

Collaborating with the Community

Schools establish partnerships that are mutually beneficial for children, families, communities, and schools when they:

- Coordinate access to resources and services for all families, children, and the school with businesses, agencies, and other groups, such as health care, cultural events, tutoring or mentoring services, before-and-after school programs.
- Provide services to the community, such as recycling, food pantries, access to school libraries and computers.

Using the work of Epstein and others allows families and schools to build upon a variety of options for parent involvement. The school welcomes participation at whatever levels families choose. Schools are encouraged to build upon the strengths of families and support the efforts of parents to become more involved in their children's learning.

Family-school interactions must be well-planned, and, at the same time, consist of both planned and spontaneous opportunities. A true family-school partnership is ongoing, purposeful, and reflects the vision shared by families and schools for children.

Home and school are of primary importance in the lives of children. Each provides unique and essential support for children's learning. Combining and coordinating the efforts of families and schools creates a powerful force that results in high quality programs for children.

School Attitudes and Actions that Encourage Parent Involvement

Teachers and other school personnel who work with children in the primary program should:

- Involve parents in setting goals for their child's learning program; parents who have ownership in the planning will assume more ownership in the follow-through.
- Value parents' opinions, concerns, ideas, and visions.
- Recognize that parents care very much about their children.
- View parents as key contributors to their child's school experiences. Consider parents' resources and talents when planning day-to-day activities for children.
- Find ways to collect information from parents that can be used for developing the child's learning program. For example, home visits, interviews, phone calls, and contributions to the child's portfolio.
- Share information about how children learn and child development as it relates to the classroom setting.
- Involve parents actively in parent-teacher conferences. For example, joint conference planning, pre-conference phone calls, and interviews.

- Talk regularly with children and encourage them to share information with their parents.
- Communicate regularly with parents about the Primary Program through the children and through print materials, phone calls, home visits, informal parent gatherings, and parent education workshops.
- Use problem-solving strategies with parents.
- Appreciate and respect family values which may be different from their own.
- Refrain from criticism and judgment, both publicly and privately, in school facilities such as the teachers' lounge and other settings.
- Maintain a warm, friendly, open, and responsive school climate that encourages parents to spend time at school.
- Provide opportunities for parents to interact with other parents and school personnel. For example, family rooms, parent discussion, and support groups.

Parents are encouraged to:
- Advocate for their child's needs by becoming involved in their child's learning.
- Model and demonstrate enthusiasm for learning.
- Create an environment supportive of learning.
- Take an active role in communicating information that may benefit their child's learning at school.
- Take advantage of daily learning opportunities with their children, reading, parent-child conversations, and family outings.

- Support their child's growth and learning in all five goal areas: aesthetic and artistic development, intellectual development, physical development and well-being, and development of responsibility.
- Become knowledgeable about the Primary Program.
- Take part in classroom activities and support other school events.
- Support their child's growing independence and decision-making skills.
- Advocate for policies which guarantee quality experiences for their children.

Sharing Information about the Child

Informal Conversations

Conversations which parents, teachers, and children have on an informal basis are among the most natural and successful ways of sharing information. They provide opportunities to:
- Share current information about the child and upcoming activities
- Share personal anecdotes and insights
- Give reassurance about the child's efforts and development

Informal Notes and Messages

Written informal communications can include:
- Personal notes
- Home-school communication books
- Classroom news bulletins
- E-mail correspondence

Telephone Calls

Parents and teachers may call one another to:
- Keep in touch
- Share news of importance to the child
- Plan how to support some aspect of the child's learning
- Establish a partnership role

Individual Conferences

Conferences are an opportunity for:

- Parents to share information and insights about their child's development and interests at home
- Teachers to share information and insights about the child's development and interests at school
- Setting goals for the child's learning
- Making plans to support the child's learning

Some teachers encourage children to take part in conferences as a way of helping them understand their learning and to become more responsible for their own progress. Each school and teacher sets the schedule for individual conferences, and parents can request a meeting any time.

Collections of Work

Establishing collection systems to store information about what a child can do provides a basis for ongoing assessment and evaluation. Consider:

- Dated samples of drawings and writing
- Copies of reports and projects
- Photographs
- Audio and video tapes
- Computer disks
- Student self-assessments

Anecdotal Reports

The anecdotal progress report describes the child's development in relation to the goals of the Primary Program. It is intended to provide information about the child's individual progress. It may precede or follow a parent-teacher conference. Anecdotal reports give information about:

- Accomplishments (what a child can do)
- Attitudes and interests
- Learning needs
- Future learning goals and plans for support

Sharing Information about the School and Classroom

Newsletters

Newsletters are one way schools establish ongoing communication and can solicit parent reaction and input as well as provide information about:

- School and classroom activities
- Upcoming events and activities at school and in the community
- Student success stories
- Samples of student work

Parent Evenings and Open Houses

Parent evenings are a time to get a sense of the school and classroom atmosphere. This can be a time for parents to:

- Learn about the goals the school has for all children
- Find out what children are learning as well how they represent learning
- Look at their child's work

Informal Visits

Although the school is the usual place for parents and teachers to exchange information, some teachers plan informal get-togethers in other settings such as:

- Classroom outings (picnics, walks)
- Homes
- Community facilities

Classroom Study

Many teachers provide parents with information about what has been and what will be the focus of classroom learning experiences. These provide information about:

- Themes to be explored
- Classroom projects
- Special activities
- Curriculum plans
- Field trips
- Web sites

Classroom Visits

Classroom visits can be arranged through the teacher to provide:

- Children with a chance to see their parents and teachers cooperating
- Opportunities to talk
- Parents with first-hand opportunities to observe their child in the school setting

Families as Advocates and Policy-makers

Families, teachers, administrators, and other school staff benefit from working together to solve problems, exchange views, influence other decision-makers, and advocate for children. Parents who, individually or in groups, are willing to advocate for their own children or for other children are true friends of the school, not adversaries. Individuals who are willing to be involved need a variety of options for their involvement, training, support, and encouragement. Not all parents wish to be involved in the same role or same degree at all times. Because of the large number of working parents and other changing family demographics, schools need to explore new and creative ways to work together. This partnership needs to be forged through effective and frequent communication. Opportunities for supporting families as advocates, decision-makers, and policy-makers include:

- Establishing a dedicated phone line for families to deal with emergencies, rumors, and sensitive issues

- Encouraging all teachers to communicate frequently with families about curriculum plans, expectations for homework, grading policies, and how families can help

- Directing families' concerns, questions, and complaints to appropriate staff

- Informing families of their rights regarding access to school records, due process in disciplinary actions, and participation in special education decisions

- Setting up teacher-parent conferences upon request

- Providing in-service training or other opportunities to help teachers communicate and collaborate with families

- Notifying families promptly if their children have academic difficulties or behavior problems

- Notifying families immediately if their children do not arrive at school and if unexcused absences are becoming a pattern

- Conferring with families on the choice of classroom settings and/or teachers

- Publishing a handbook for families that covers current policies on discipline, absences, dress standards, and parent and student rights

- Obtaining family input when developing new policies or programs

- Scheduling regular parent-teacher organization meetings

- Encouraging families to approach the principal on their own initiative to question school policies or procedures, aside from situations that affect only their child

- Informing and enlisting the help of families immediately when problems occur at school which involve community concerns

- Establishing procedures for dealing with sensitive issues

- Giving families representation on committees for curriculum development, school accreditation, assessment procedures, and other topics

## Developing Community Involvement in School-Family-Community Partnerships

Community Involvement

People develop commitments to causes, organizations, and activities for which they have had some responsibility. An undisputed finding of educational research is that the active engagement of the learner and the involvement of families and the community enhance learning.

In communities across the nation, broad-based community involvement has resulted in increased academic achievement, improved school climate, and more effective communities.

Community Education Goals

In the community education model, the school functions as a support center for the network of agencies and institutions committed to meeting community needs and expanding learning opportunities for all members of the community. Using *schools as community centers* is a cost-effective, practical way to use one of the community's largest investments, its school buildings.
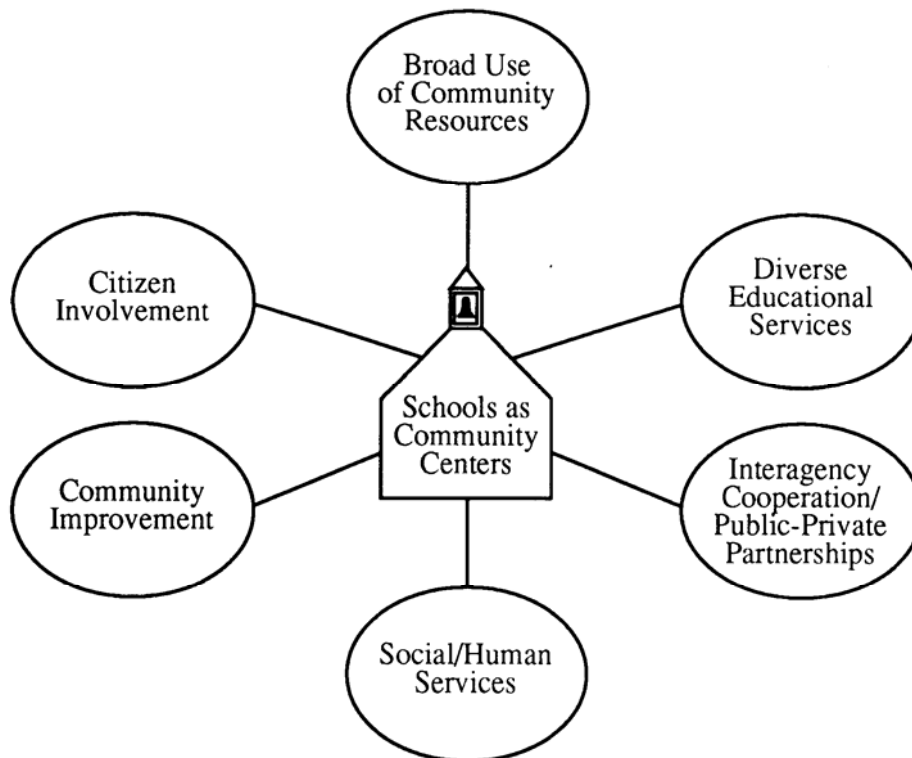
By providing ***diverse educational services***, community education helps meet the varied learning needs of community residents. Class instruction in a variety of skills helps meet the needs of business and industry. Child care services for preschool and school-age children help parents who cannot afford or lack access to private services.

Programs that respond to the needs of adults who wish to gain new skills, improve existing skills, or who just like to keep on learning help a community become a learning community. By tapping the abundant expertise that exists in any community, community education helps bring the concept of "everyone learns, everyone teaches" closer to reality.

Through ***interagency cooperation and public-private partnerships***, communities reduce duplication of effort, and overall effectiveness is improved through teamwork. Businesses and private agencies provide services not affordable in the usual tax-supported budget.

In return, schools, in cooperation with other community agencies, address such community problems as illiteracy and substance abuse, which adversely affect the community's business environment and quality of life.

Through ***community improvement efforts***, many members of the community can be engaged in litter control, recycling, beautification, and improved education and recreation services. Each community improvement effort can make the community more attractive to both current and prospective residents and businesses

Through ***citizen involvement***, the process of community problem-solving is restored to its rightful place: to those people closest to the problem, who understand it best.

When a broad range of ***community resources*** is used for learning, the role of the total community in the process of educating the citizenry is acknowledged. Young people learn from and with community elders. Our schools become places where learning and living meet.

Principles of Community Education

Community education provides local residents and community agencies and institutions the opportunity to become active partners in addressing community concerns. It is based on the following principles:

- **Self-Determination**
  Local people are in the best position to identify community needs and wants. Parents, as children's first and most important teachers, have both a right and a responsibility to be involved in their children's education.

- **Self-Help**
  People are best served when their capacity to help themselves is encouraged and enhanced. When people assume ever-increasing responsibility for their own well-being, they acquire independence rather than dependence.

- **Leadership Development**
  The identification, development, and use of the leadership capacities of local citizens are prerequisites for ongoing self-help and community improvement efforts.

- **Localization**
  Services, programs, events, and other opportunities for community participation have the greatest potential for participation when brought closest to where people live. Whenever possible, these activities should be decentralized to locations of easy public access.

- **Integrated Delivery of Services**
  Organizations and agencies that operate for the public good can use their limited resources, meet their individual goals, and better serve the public by establishing close working relationships with other organizations and agencies with related purposes.

- **Maximum Use of Resources**
  The physical, financial, and human resources of every community should be interconnected and used to their fullest if the diverse needs and interests of the community are to be met.

- **Inclusiveness**
  The segregation or isolation of people by age, income, sex, race, ethnicity, religion, or other factors inhibits the full development of the community. Community programs, activities, and services should involve the broadest possible cross-section of community residents.

- **Responsiveness**
  Public institutions have a responsibility to develop programs and services that respond to the continually changing needs and interests of their constituents.

- **Lifelong Learning**
  Learning begins at birth and continues until death. Opportunities for formal and informal learning should be available to residents of all ages across a wide variety of community settings.

Results of Community Education

Communities that formally adopt community education as a way of community life have the tools to attack many difficult problems. These communities exhibit the following characteristics:

- Someone has an official leadership role in coordinating the various community and school efforts.

- Volunteers help deliver community services.

- Businesses work in partnership with schools to improve student learning as well as to expand economic development.

- Agencies and institutions cooperate to deliver improved services to the total community.

- Public school facilities are used by community members of all ages.

- Parents are involved in their children's learning and in school governance.

- Community resources are used to enhance and enrich the school's curriculum.

- Educational alternatives are available for students with special problems and special talents.

- Opportunities for lifelong learning are available for learners of all ages, backgrounds, and needs.

- Large numbers of citizens are participating actively to help solve community problems.

When these characteristics are observed, positive results are not far behind. These results may include:

- Schools and other community agencies are more responsive to parents and other community members.

- An improved learning climate and increased student achievement are evident in schools.

- Broad-based community support exists for schools and for other community agencies.

- The community works together to try to solve its problems.

As America strives to improve its schools, it's imperative that all elements of the community work together to assist students and educators. Quality education is an investment in the community; but everyone—parents, business leaders, church leaders and others-have a role to play. Helping students learn is a community affair.

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Lew Armistead, President,
National School Public Relations Association

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Resource Materials for Communicating with Parents

The following materials can be used when communicating with parents about children's learning and development. As teachers develop materials, presentations, and conferences, they can use this information as a guide while personalizing their messages to parents and children. Information might be developed into a series of newsletters, workshops, or incorporated into existing formats. Whatever the setting, it is best to use the information in a meaningful way taking care not to overwhelm parents. Teachers must first know their children and families, then work with them to identify their informational needs. In this way, teachers and schools respect the prior knowledge of parents and their decision-making abilities.

Supporting Learning at Home: Ideas for Parents

The section on Widely-Held Expectations provides a summary of children's development over time in the five goal areas. In schools, teachers use these Widely-Held Expectations to assess children's development and to plan instruction. At home, parents and others can support and encourage the child as a developing learner in a number of ways.

Aesthetic and Artistic Development

Keep a variety of art, modeling, and craft materials on hand. Provide paper of different sizes and colors, including construction paper, newsprint, gummed paper, wrapping paper, aluminum foil, and other recycled materials. You might start a collection of pencils, crayons, felt tip markers, chalk, modeling clay, scissors, glue, transparent tape, used wrapping paper, pictures from old greeting cards, sticks from ice cream treats, bits of cloth, yarn, ribbon, egg cartons, buttons, twist ties, pipe cleaners, and other materials. Encourage your child to spend time exploring their use. Ask what he or she enjoyed most and discovered about the materials.

Encourage your child to accompany musical selections with homemade instruments. If possible, show your child how to record and listen to music using an audiocassette recorder. Remember, this music making will be child-like. Encourage your child to explore sounds and rhythms and to tell you about them and their production.

Attend musical performances, concerts, and recitals with your child. Sing and play selections to be performed before hand. Ask your child what he or she remembered and enjoyed about the performance and why.

Use simple comments that show you recognize and appreciate your child's efforts. For example, "Your painting reminds me of the fun we had at the beach."

For family fun, play pantomimes or charades. One person acts out an action while the others guess what is being done. For very young children, use familiar actions such as eating an ice cream cone or raking leaves. Older children might enjoy more complex miming reflecting the senses, thoughts, or feelings.

Provide an assortment of old clothes, accessories, and other props for your child to play "dress up" and act our various roles. Also, keep assorted fabrics and ribbons of different colors and textures for your child to use with dance.

A radio or tape recorder your child can use independently may provide music. Use an assortment of music types to broaden your child's listening experience (nursery rhymes, children's songs, marches, tangos, jazz, popular, classical, religious).

Puppet making is suitable for most levels of development and can be simple (stick, paper bag, or paper plate puppets) or complex (sewn puppets or marionettes).

Encourage your child's thinking by asking questions and helping to seek answers. Always encourage your child to ask questions. When there is no clear answer, say things such as "What do you think?" and "Where can we go to find the answer?"

When going for a walk or drive, encourage your child's observation skills by commenting on and asking about the larger environment (sky, mountains, forest, water) as well as the smaller, more intricate environment (leaves, flowers, grasses, bugs, pebbles).

Social and Emotional Development

Read and discuss books about friendships. Talk with your child about friends. Ask questions such as "What do you think a friend is?" and "What do you like about having a friend?" Other questions might include "How do you think friends act with each other?" and "What can you do to meet a new friend?"

Even if it is not done perfectly or takes a little longer, encourage your child to perform daily tasks such as getting dressed, making a simple breakfast, or setting the table. It is important for your child to feel successful in participating in family routines.

Provide opportunities for your children to make personal decisions about clothing choices, healthy snacks, family menus, story times, and other matters.

Participation in volunteer activities such as community, recreation, or hospital functions helps your child recognize the kinds of contributions that can be made. Seeing themselves as helpers can contribute to children's self-confidence.
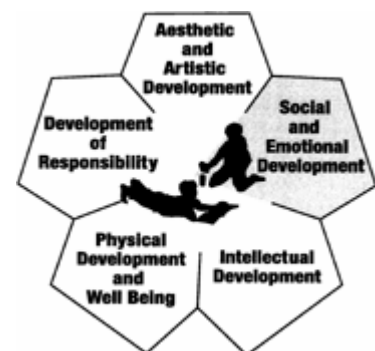
Give positive reinforcement for your child's dreams and goals, regardless of how impossible they might seem. Say, for example, "Those are fascinating ideas. I can see you thought this out yourself."

Help your child create a "me" poster or collage using drawings, photographs, and magazine pictures. Help your child decide where to display the poster and comment on your child's special qualities.

Children may enjoy writing to a pen pal from another country as a way of developing a new friendship.

Your child also may enjoy some form of organized activity that provides opportunities to meet others. Ask your child to talk about personal preferences and then support your child's decisions about such activities as dancing, art or music lessons, organized sports, and boys' or girls' clubs. Discuss how these decisions will affect your child, you, and other family members in terms of time for friends and hobbies, providing rides, changing meal times, and any other pertinent points. Provide gentle guidance in terms of what you already know about your child's regular activities.

Sharing special times is crucial in the development of your child's self-image. Being hugged and held by a parent, settling in comfortably with a favorite story, walking to the park, working together to complete a task, and sharing thoughts and feelings are all important activities which contribute to your child's development.

Set reasonable limits and maintain stable routines your child can anticipate. For example, meal times, family commitments, reading stories, television viewing, and bed times.

It is not always easy to maintain a positive approach or to avoid focusing attention on non-productive behavior. However, with an informed and honest approach, you are showing your child how to deal effectively with issues or problems as they arise. For example, "Paul is playing with the shovel now. Let's see what else you can find to play with until it's your turn." Communicate with your child about the behavior you expect. For example, "Let's paint on the newspapers so there won't be spills on the floor."

Intellectual Development

When you read to your child on a regular basis, you also model that reading is important in your life. If you build up and maintain a home "library" that contains books of interest to all family members, your child will have access to a wide variety of reading materials. You also might want to visit the public library on a regular basis. Young children like books with large print and many illustrations, and often like to hear stories again and again. It is important to read to your children from books you yourself consider to be important. Continue reading to your children once they learn to read independently!

During regular family activities, provide opportunities for your child to organize, classify, and use easily remembered information. For example, when unpacking groceries, ask your child to put all the fruits, canned goods, and frozen items together. When doing the laundry, ask your child to help sort clothing into whites and colors, work and play clothes, or into other interesting categories. You can also suggest sorting kitchen cutlery, school supplies, coins, tools, shoes, and other objects.

If possible, provide a plain calendar with large squares to write messages. Discuss special days and record comments to help your child remember appointments, special events, and other important dates and activities.

Make sure your child's day is not planned out entirely. Free play is important. Provide time, space, and materials for your child to create personal projects.

Help your child become aware of what he or she is doing through language by putting words to actions. For example, talk through the process of tying shoelaces. Use appropriate language, but play word games such as rhyming and synonyms. Playing with language is not "baby talk." This is how children learn.

Provide opportunities for your child to gain a variety of experiences. The more experiences they have, the more personal knowledge they gain. "Memorized" knowledge may be soon forgotten, but outings such as walks, car trips, special family events, sporting events, camping trips, picnics and visits to the beach, library, museum and fair all provide experiences that enable children to make connections and see how ideas and events relate to one another.

Provide encouragement for activities, for when your child says, "Let me try!" or "Can I do that?" Always ensure your child's health and safety first.

Encourage your child to talk about personal experiences by asking questions such as: "What do you like about this?" "What did you not like about this?" "Would you recommend this to a friend?" "What do you think would happen if…?"

Physical Development and Well-Being

Encourage your child to attempt new and interesting activities. Provide encouragement and support, but if the activity poses a real safety hazard, explain this to your child.

Play games or sing songs that help your child to identify body parts (head, shoulders, knees, and toes).

Expect your child to move from one activity to another. It is normal for children to find it difficult to sit still or to stay with one activity.

If you become involved in games with your child and your child's friends, avoid elimination games where someone is "out." Suggest games that include all players and do not focus on scores and winning.

Children like to have life-size outlines of their bodies traced on paper. Encourage and help your child to draw eyes, nose, mouth, clothing, and to locate and name body parts.

Ask your child to share ideas about safety rules when playing a game or using equipment.

Your child may enjoy being part of a team or group. Encourage a team or group activity that helps your child remain active into adolescence. If you are involved in organized team sports, model the kind of behavior you would like your child to exhibit.

Provide access to different kinds of music during playtime. This can add enthusiasm to your child's movements or soothe or relax after strenuous play.

If possible, make an at-home obstacle course with your child to provide opportunities for crawling, jumping, running, and hopping.

Maintaining a balance between free exploration and excessive risk taking is not easy. When experimenting with a new activity such as learning to ride a bike, try not to over-use phrases such as, "Be careful!" or "You might get hurt!" Do provide background for the activity in terms of the safety rules and how to use equipment.

Demonstrate and discuss your ideas about safety procedures in everyday life (crossing the street).

Demonstrate and discuss your ideas about nutrition (eating a balanced meal).

Development of Responsibility

When arguments occur between your children or their friends, help them become their own problem-solvers. Ask questions such as, "What do you think the problem is?" or "What are some ways you can think of to solve this?"

Share newspaper and magazine articles with your child. Find articles that tell of events affecting children and families in other places. Follow what happens. Ask questions such as: "How do you think they feel?" "What would you do if you were in this situation?" "Do you think they need some help?" "Who could provide that kind of help?" "Is there something we can do about this?"

Your child may enjoy participating with you in a community group.

Keep a family photo album for your child and you to look at and talk about. Talk about your child's heritage. Attend cultural and ethnic celebrations and festivals to introduce your child to the heritage of others. Talk about the similarities and differences.

Your child may enjoy writing to a pen pal from another country as a way of developing a new friendship and knowledge of another culture.

Encourage family members to show appreciation for one another by extending courtesies such as sending notes. Very young children can dictate the notes which then can be placed in lunches, on the refrigerator, or passed out at supper-time.

Talk about how stress can lead to conflict. Discuss ways in which your child can handle conflicts, problems, fights, and arguments.

Take your children on nature walks. Encourage them to use their senses (seeing, listening, smelling, touching, and tasting, if appropriate).

Encourage your child and your family to examine your own practices that affect the world around you.

Talk to your child about what to do in emergency situations. Rehearse these situations from losing mittens to calling the police.

Talk about how each family member contributes to the well-being of others in the family, in the community, and in other groupings.

The consequences of family decisions affect everyone. Give your child opportunities to make choices.

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