

You also have things to do to get ready for a child's first day. You will need to put the child's name on a cubby and cot or crib. Add the child's name to the sign-in list. Put the family's name on the parent bulletin board. Make a cheery welcome sign. These little touches can help a child and family feel welcome and make the transition to your center go smoothly.

When the child and parent(s) arrive, greet them warmly. Parents may react in different ways to leaving their child. Every family is different. Some adults may find it very difficult to leave. Others will know just when to say goodbye to their child. Still others would prefer to rush out the door and not deal with their own or their child's feelings about this major change in their lives.

All parents will benefit from your support and understanding during what may be for them a difficult time, even if they treat it casually. You set the tone by being calm and friendly, welcoming the parent and the child alike.

During those first few hours, the child may have a lot of difficulty getting used to the new people and surroundings. Watch carefully and take any steps necessary to make the child and the parent feel a part of your program.

Parents of very young children, or of those who are enrolled in a group for the first time, may want to stay a full day and then gradually decrease the number of hours over the next week or two.

Some parents do not have the luxury of that much time and some children do not need this kind of a transition. Talk with the family about the best arrangements for everyone involved. Saying goodbye is not easy, but it is not in the best interest of child or family to prolong it unnecessarily.

If a parent must leave a clinging child in tears, you are responsible to comfort the distraught child. After the child has calmed down, be sure to take a minute to call the parent and offer reassurance that the child is now feeling more comfortable. Let the parents know that it is okay for them to call and check on their child. Then, at the end of the day, again describe how the child settled into the day.

Communication with Parents


Each day, you and the parents will need to exchange information about important events that occurred since you saw each other last. Take just a few minutes when the child arrives and again when the parent returns to fill each other in on what is happening with the child.

If parents do not have the time to spend even a few moments in casual conversation, you might want to arrange a time when you can call them to talk about how their child's day has been. Or if parents are always in a hurry, jot down a quick note about the day's events and pin it to the child's backpack. You will need to find ways to share information about the child with the parents.

If you have a large program with many staff members, written notes between teachers and parents may be essential. If caregivers change between arrival and pick-up time, work out a system that is easy to use and allows everyone to feel well-informed about the children. The system should work for both parents and staff.

Advising Parents of Their Child's Individual Progress

WAC 170-295-2080 states that you must have written documentation signed by the parent in each child's file stating that you have "advised the parent of the child's progress and issues relating to the child's care". This may include documentation that they have received written observations or assessments, reviewed a child's portfolio (a collected sample of their work), or attended a parent-teacher conference. You can contact your local resource and referral agency or community and technical college for more information about developmentally appropriate assessments of children.



Best Practice: Parent-teacher conferences are held at least once a year to share information with parents about their child's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development.

Bulletin Boards

Your program will benefit from having a central information area in an entryway or main hallway where parents pass through. You may want to display all your information on a bulletin board somewhere near the sign-in/sign-out sheets.

In addition to things you must post for licensing (WAC 170-295-7080), you may want to post the following items for parent interest:

- ◆ General announcements, upcoming parent meeting, field trip, or parent conference schedule
- ◆ Payment envelope or driver sign-up sheet for field trip
- ◆ Copies of newsletters
- ◆ Names and pictures of staff (and the hours they work)
- ◆ Photo display of recent center activities
- ◆ Names of new children just starting your program and their parents
- ◆ Credentials of staff
- ◆ Accreditation of program
- ◆ Memberships in education or professional associations
- ◆ Information concerning child or family health (immunization reminders, product safety, healthy recipes, etc., and
- ◆ Designated area for parents to post information.

Note: Getting an important message to parents can be difficult. Many parents are busy and in a hurry to get to work or home at night. The parent who drops off the child may not be the same parent who picks up the child at night. Announcements should be big, bright, and posted where parents can be sure to see them.

Do not assume that letting the parents know once means they will remember. Strongly encourage parents to mark upcoming events on their calendar. Send home a calendar with center events, dates, and reminders of upcoming events.

Inviting Parents to Observe

Inform parents that they may visit your center at any time (this is required by licensing). You can suggest good times to visit or observe a special activity, or times that are least disruptive to the children.

Some centers use a handout covering observation guidelines. Talk with parents before their visit about what they would like to see. Allow parents an opportunity to talk to a staff person about what they observed and ask questions.

Newsletter

A good way to get information to parents routinely is through a monthly newsletter. It can cover a variety of topics, such as:

- ◆ Summary of activities children have done in the past month
- ◆ Suggestions of activities that parents can do at home with their children
- ◆ Notes from staff members about things that have happened in their rooms
- ◆ Announcements about activities planned for the month to come
- ◆ Ways parents can help out
- ◆ Important dates for parents to mark on their calendars
- ◆ Pats on the back for parents who have helped out recently
- ◆ Child care information parents might find useful (such as discipline techniques, sack lunch or snack recipes, or illness prevention), and
- ◆ Gentle reminders about center policy.

Parent Meetings

Parent meetings may be a mix of business and topics of interest to your parents. For example, you might want to have meetings devoted to:

- ♦ Common parenting problems (getting children to bed or getting them to eat healthy foods are high interest topics)
- ♦ Teaching children about personal safety
- ♦ Developing an anti-bias perspective, or
- ♦ Behaviors to expect at different stages of development and how to respond to them.

Note: Name tags are a good idea at parent meetings. Have parents write down not only their own name but their child's. Parents can start to associate the names of their children's friends with the faces of their parents.

Not every parent get-together needs to be a business meeting. You might want to organize social events. Picnics in the park offer a fun and informal way for families and staff to get acquainted.

Parent-Caregiver Conferences

You may want to schedule conferences to share child-related information with parents. Organize ahead of time points you want to cover. Always begin the conference with a positive comment or two about the child. Things you may want to include in the conference are:

- ♦ Specific observations or assessments of the child's social, emotional, intellectual, and physical development
- ♦ Activities the child enjoys and particular skills they are working on or have mastered
- ♦ A discussion of typical developmental ages and stages and expected behaviors
- ♦ Any concerns you or the parents have, and
- ♦ Goals you plan to concentrate on in the near future.

Also, let parents know they can contact you and/or their child's provider at any time.

Parent Involvement in Your Program

Most parents will not volunteer unless they know you want their help. If you want to get the parents involved, give them a list of ways they can participate in your child care center. These include:

- ♦ Be on the advisory board
- ♦ Be a child care helper (parents who are regular volunteers receive the same orientation you give all staff members)
- ♦ Be a lunch helper
- ♦ Help prepare materials
- ♦ Contribute to topics children are currently exploring (fossils from home, books, or stamp collecting)
- ♦ Help with repairs
- ♦ Share their cultural heritage or travel experiences in cooking projects, clothing, songs, slides, books, or special objects
- ♦ Help with holiday celebrations
- ♦ Contribute their time and skills to special projects such as art, music, dance, cooking, weaving, or woodworking
- ♦ Help with trip planning, organization, or driving
- ♦ Help with fund-raising, or
- ♦ Attend a parent work night.

Note: Parent involvement improves the quality of your program.

Special Communication Needs of Parents with Infants

Parents of infants need to know how much and when their child ate, how many diaper changes they had that day, and when the child took naps. You might want to use the Infant Daily Report found on the following page to keep track of this information and then tuck it in the child's bag when it is almost time to go home. Translate the chart into all the languages spoken by families in your program.