

Parent-Caregiver Communication: Making it Work for Your Child

Volume 67

"It was the worst call I ever had to make." - Child Care Director

A director at a child care center had to call the mother of a 2-year-old and tell her that they couldn't find her son. Fortunately for everyone, the 2-year-old was with his mother. The mother was very apologetic. She had forgotten to sign him out when she picked him up. Once you decide on a family child care provider or a child care center, you want to make sure that you and your child care provider understand each other. There are steps you can take to encourage good communication and to minimize problems. It's also a good idea to take time to find out about the program's policies and procedures.

Promote Good Communication

The following are steps you can take to maintain positive communication.

- Help your child care provider get to know your child. Prepare an "All About My Child" sheet.
- Help your child care provider understand your family. Share information about:
 - Who is in your family;
 - How you celebrate birthdays and holidays;
 - Skills you can share;
 - What's happening at home that might affect your child's behavior (e.g., a new sibling, visits from relatives, illnesses, changes in the family).
- Follow procedures for signing your child in and out each day.
- Keep your emergency contact information up to date. Include information about everyone who is allowed to pick up your child.
- Read information from the program.
- Attend parent-provider conferences.
- Volunteer to help out when you can.
- Find out the best way for you and your child's caregiver to share information (e.g., in person, by phone, by email, or by writing in a shared notebook).
- Visit occasionally during the day.
- Be respectful. Understand that the caregiver has other demands. Ask, "Is this a good time to talk?"

Handle Problems Positively

Common issues are children's behavior, health and safety, concerns about your child's development, following procedures, and fees. The following strategies will help you keep the situation positive:

- Remember:
 - You have a common goal - you both want the best for your child.
 - You are showing your child how adults handle problems.
- Ask for a time to talk when you and the provider won't be rushed.
- Ask for clarification of the problem.
- If you are wrong, apologize.
- Restate the problem until you both agree on the description of the problem.
- Think about possible solutions and decide on a plan to solve the problem.
- Ask about what steps to follow if the plan doesn't work.
- Check the success of the plan regularly.
- Congratulate yourselves, or revise the plan.

Find Out About The Program's Policies And Procedures

The following are examples of items that can cause conflict if they are not understood. If this information isn't in your contract or parent handbook, make sure you ask the program about them.

Hours

- What are the hours of operation?
- Are there days the program will be closed? Do you need to find care for your child, or will the program help you find care?
- Does the program open late or close early when there is inclement weather? How will you be notified?
- Can you contact the program by phone or email if you are going to be late?
- If your family child care provider is sick or away, will your provider have a substitute? Will you need to find your own back up care?

Fees

- What is the tuition? When are you expected to pay? Are there additional fees?
- Are you charged for days your child is absent or you are on vacation?
- Are you required to give prior notice in writing when your child leaves the program?

Arrival and departure

- What are you expected to do when your child arrives or leaves?
- How does the program make sure that only people you have authorized will be permitted to pick up your child?

- What are the procedures if you want to visit during the day?

Health

- How will you be notified if your child has an accident or injury or becomes ill?
- How will the program notify you if a child or staff has head lice or a communicable disease?
- Will the program give your child over-the-counter or prescription medication? What about sunscreen, diaper ointment, or insect repellent?
- What is the program's policy about food?

Emergencies

- Does the program do regular fire drills?
- How does the program handle emergencies/ disasters? If necessary, where will your child be evacuated? How will you be notified?

Your child's day

- How many adults and how many children are in your child's class?
- Is there one caregiver who has the primary responsibility for your child?
- How will your child spend the day? What is the daily schedule? Is there a weekly plan of activities that reflects your child's interests and needs?
- What should your child wear? Is a change of clothes required?
- What are the discipline methods used in the program?
- Is there a homework policy for school-age children?

Special events

- How does the program handle birthdays and holidays?
- What is the program's transportation policy for field trips?

Transitions

- How does the program plan to move your child from one age group to another? How will you be notified?
- How does the program help you and your child prepare to move to a new program or school?
- Is there a dismissal policy?

Communication

- When are regular conferences scheduled?
- What is the best way for you to share information or ask questions?

Parent Participation

- Are you expected to volunteer?

Confidentiality policies

- How does the program protect your family's right to privacy and confidentiality regarding all health, behavioral and developmental records, and information concerning your child?

Additional Issues To Consider

Cultural and language differences can sometimes get in the way of communication. Think about whether you need to ask someone else to join the conversation.

If you are divorced or separated, work with your provider to decide how both parents can have the same developmental and behavioral information and program information.

For More Information

- NACCRRRA, [*Is this the Right Place for My Child? 38 Indicators of High-Quality Child Care*](#) is a user friendly booklet that contains a checklist of 38 questions that parents can ask to evaluate the quality of child care programs. The booklet explains why each question is important and how it relates to the quality of care.
 - **Your Child Care Resource and Referral agency (CCR&R)** agency has resources for parents about how to recognize high-quality child care. To find your local CCR&R, go to www.childcareaware.org or call Child Care Aware at 1-800-424-2246.
-