

Family Involvement Linked to Academic Success

Studies show children are better adjusted, do better in school, learn more and show the most improvement when members of their families are involved in their children's early education.

Family involvement is an ongoing process where families work together with caregivers or teachers to strengthen learning in the child-care environment and at home. Family involvement can take place in both public and private institutions that care for young children or any children, for that matter.

There are several ways family members can be involved in their children's educational process:

Families can act as a form of support to the program. For example, family members could donate money and items, sell things to raise money or solicit donations from local agencies and businesses.

Families can act as volunteers for a program. Giving of your time and talents to help caregivers and teachers in the child-care program is all it takes to be a volunteer.

Families can act as program advocates. By being an advocate for your child-care program, you are letting the needs of the program be known to local politicians and governing agencies. In addition, you are letting people know the importance of early childhood education.

Families also can learn by participating in the early childhood program. Good early childhood programs help you learn about child development and how to best encourage learning.

Early childhood educational programs that encourage family involvement have many of the same characteristics:

These programs make all family members feel welcome at any time.

The director and staff are willing to listen to ideas and, at times, implement them.

The center facilitates and encourages an active family advisory group. This group acts as liaison between the program and other parents, as well as a source of information and talent pool.

Correspondences to families and the center's policies stress the importance of family involvement and list opportunities for families to be involved.

Programs are conscientious about scheduling functions and meetings when all families may attend – keeping in mind that many family members work during the day.

Communication, both written and verbal, between caregivers and families is meaningful and frequent. Families are kept informed about what is taking place in their children's classrooms. In addition, caregivers frequently ask families about what is taking place in a child's home.

The child-care program produces a newsletter discussing events and happenings. The newsletter also may act as a vehicle for offering ideas for things families can practice at home.

The program offers ways for families to meet other families. For example, the child-care center may conduct a cookie party during the holiday season or a fall festival for all family members to attend.

Keep in mind that not all child-care programs are active facilitators of family involvement – but they may still welcome family involvement. Even if your child-care program has not asked for your assistance, that does not mean it does not want your help.

The LSU AgCenter experts encourage you to tell your child-care center director and your child's caregiver or teacher that you want to be involved in your child's education – and don't forget to ask what opportunities the child-care program has for family involvement.

The LSU AgCenter's "Be Child Care Aware!" educational program is designed to educate parents and child-care providers about quality child care. It is funded, in part, through a contract with the Louisiana Department of Social Services' Office of Family Support.