

How to Choose an Early Childhood Program that Promotes Family Involvement

If you are looking for an early childhood program that encourages family involvement you need to do two things. First, tell the program's director that you and your family want to be involved in your child's education while in the program. Second, ask what opportunities are available for family involvement in the program. Below are some questions that you can ask when looking for a program that encourages family involvement.

How does the program show that family involvement is a good idea? All family members, including parents, brothers, sisters, and grandparents should feel welcome in the program. Are program activities open to my whole family? Do program staff seem willing to listen to my ideas? Do the written materials from the program talk about family involvement?

How does the program respond to each family's needs? Every family faces its own set of challenges and programs should understand the individual strengths and needs of each family. Are meetings scheduled after work so that I can come? If meetings are at night, is child care provided? Do teachers speak any languages other than English? Will my child's teacher visit our home to get to know the family better? Are my family's holidays celebrated at my child's early childhood program?

How does the program let families know what happens during the day? Communication between home and the program is an important part of family involvement. Program and home activities should complement each other. Families need to know what children are doing in their programs. They may wish to reinforce some of these activities at home. Teachers or care givers need to know what children are doing at home so that program activities can take advantage of these learning opportunities. Are there regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences? Do teachers have "call-in" hours? Is there time to speak with teachers when I drop off or pick up my child? Is there a daily log book that tells me what my child did during the day? Is there a newsletter that tells me what is going on at the program?

How does the program offer ideas about how families can help children learn at home? Children are learning all the time, especially when they are home. But families often need guidance on how they can take advantage of these opportunities. Programs that value family involvement should provide ideas on how families support their children's learning at home. Is there a lending library where my children can get books to take home? Does the lending library have books on parenting? Does the program provide parenting tips on developing my child's language, art, and math skills?

How does the program encourage families to help at the center? Family members have many skills that programs can use. Can I share family stories with my child's class? Can I schedule a time to read stories with the children? Can I help plan field trips? Can I go on field trips with the class? Can I schedule a field trip to visit my place of work? Can I volunteer to help at recess or lunch?

How does the program support the whole family? Family involvement includes ways that programs support families, both at the center, and in the community. How does the program help me meet other families? Does the program offer coffee hours where I can meet other parents and make new friends? Is there a parent education center where I can get parenting tips and meet other families in the program? Some programs can even help parents find services in the community that they need.

How does the program value family members as advisors? Family members have good ideas and programs need to hear them. Does the program have a parent advisory board? Can I help interview new staff members? Can I help decide what happens during my child's day? Can I tell program staff how I think the program could be better?

How does the program respect and use parent expertise about their child? If your child has a disability, does the program ask you to provide training and information to the staff?

How much you choose to be involved with your children's program is up to you. The questions listed above can guide you as you look for a program for your child. Programs that value family involvement need to understand that your family is busy. Even if you can't commit to regular participation, you should feel welcome whenever you are able to help. Remember, no matter how small your involvement, your children benefit when the whole family is involved in their early childhood program.



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