

## ***Establish a Family Resource and Energy Exchange (FREE) A Tool for Helping Parents Share Resources<sup>1</sup>***

**FREE** is designed to help parents connect by sharing various kinds of resources. Parents can save money by exchanging resources such as outgrown children's clothing, toys and games children no longer use, household items, etc. Items no longer needed by one family may be just the thing another family is looking for. One of the main goals of **FREE** is to make it possible for parents to exchange items at no charge. Anyone who contributes items to **FREE** may take out items contributed by others. In addition to exchanging clothing or toys, **FREE** can also provide a network for creating support networks (baby-sitting co-ops, telephone chains and ride exchanges for use in emergencies). Other uses of **FREE** might be to help parents exchange ideas (e.g. favorite recipes, birthday party ideas) or services (e.g. cake baking, flower arranging, car washing, assembling toys or furniture, etc.). Here are some suggestions for organizing a **Family Resource and Energy Exchange**:

☞ **Recruit two or three parents to help set up FREE and determine operating policies and procedures.** Encourage these parents to play a major role in the ongoing management of the network.

☞ **Survey parents to determine what kinds of items and/or services they are interested in exchanging.** Start **FREE** with the most popular items and services; add others as you go along.

☞ **Determine operating policies and procedures.** (Keep policies and procedures as simple as possible so that parents will find the network easy to use.) For example:

- Will contributed items need to be stored or will there be a designated time each month when items can be contributed and taken out? How and when will you dispose of unclaimed items? (Give away to another organization? Contribute to the school-age program?)
- If storage space is a problem, could you develop a "catalogue" listing items and services parents have contributed, rather than having items brought to the program?
- How many items or units of service do parents need to contribute in order to use **FREE**? Will value be assigned to items and services? OR, if parents contribute a minimum number of items or units of service, will they be allowed to use any of the network services for a specified time? Will you issue credits or coupons to contributing parents to "spend" in the network?
- Will ongoing records of donations and exchanges be monitored?

☞ **Set aside one area of the Parent Bulletin Board to publicize FREE.** Also, include stories about the **FREE** in your **Parent Newsletter**.

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpted with permission from Roberta L. Newman, *Building Relationships with Parents and Families in School-Age Programs, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Revised*. New Albany, OH: School-Age NOTES, 2008. (originally published in conjunction with Work/Family Directions, Boston, MA, AT&T Family Development Fund.) Page 121.