






Ideas for Helping Parents Feel Welcome, Accepted, and Valued¹

Ideas to Get You Started.....

1. Create a Parent Comfort Corner.

Provide parents with a place to gather when they drop off or pick up their children. A **Parent Comfort Corner** sends the message: “*You’re welcome here; make yourself comfortable and stay awhile.*” Try any or all of the following suggestions for setting up your **Parent Comfort Corner**.

-  Locate the **Parent Comfort Corner** in an area that is somewhat removed from the program activity areas, yet is close enough for parents to view and listen to what is going on in the program if they would like to do so. Make a banner or poster that labels the area **Parent Comfort Corner** or another name which would be just right for parents in your program.
-  Provide a small table and chair where parents can pause to write a note, fill out a field trip field trip form, write a tuition check, etc. Provide a small jar of pens (perhaps imprinted with your program’s name, address, and phone number). Consider setting up a coffee pot with hot water and a basket of supplies for instant coffee and tea on the table. To help cover expenses, provide a jar for donations if needed. *Note: If hot water is provided, be sure to locate the pot in a safe place where it will not be in the path of children as they go about their work and play.*
-  From time to time, provide special treats in the **Parent Comfort Corner**.....after work snacks made by the children in a special cooking club, Monday morning donuts on the first Monday of every month, etc. Again, provide a voluntary donations jar if necessary.
-  Depending on space available, provide two or three comfortable chairs or a small couch where parents can sit and relax or chat with another parent. Use folding chairs if space is shared.
-  Set up a **Parent Bulletin Board** in the **Parent Comfort Corner**. Include information about your program, information about community events and parenting. Also include photos of families as well as selected feedback forms and other forms inviting parents to contribute ideas, share compliments or concerns, etc.

¹ Excerpted with permission from Roberta L. Newman, *Building Relationships with Parents and Families in School-Age Programs, 2nd Edition, Revised*. New Albany, OH: School-Age NOTES, 2008. (Originally published in conjunction with Work/Family Directions, Boston, MA, AT&T Family Development Fund.) Pages 111 – 113.



Provide a basket of magazines related to family living and child rearing. Subscribe to one or two magazines and/or write staff and parents to contribute recent back issues when they are finished with them. Remove back issues monthly. Be sure to save pertinent articles for your files and displays!

Other Ideas for a “Parent Comfort Corner”.....





2. Display a “Family Friendly” Poster at the Entrance to Your Program

Publicize your commitment to being a “family friendly” program by prominently displaying a “family friendly” poster in a place where parents will be reminded of your commitment every day. See ***Creating Family Friendly Posters*** in **Section Two: Assessing the Needs, Interests, and Concerns of Parents (Tools to Use in Your Program)**.

Other Ideas for Publicizing Your Commitment to Having a “Family Friendly” Program.....









3. Make a Practice of Extending a Friendly Greeting to Parents Every Day.

Studies have shown staff often pass up the opportunity to establish positive relationships with parents when children are brought to or picked up from the program. This happens because staff are so involved in other important activities they forget to look up and say a friendly “hello.” Here are a few ideas to help you maximize opportunities to make parents feel welcome, accepted and valued in your program.

-  Learn parents’ names. Make a commitment to greeting them with their names and a smile whenever they come into the program.
-  If you have a large program and several staff, consider assigning one staff member to act as a **Parent Greeter** at arrival or dismissal time. This can help insure that all parents will be acknowledged and welcomed every day. In addition to acting as a greeter, this staff member can serve as a facilitator who helps parents that need information, need help locating their child’s belongings, want to make an appointment to discuss ideas or concerns, etc. Rotate this responsibility among staff members so that everyone has an opportunity to interact with parents. (Remember, just because one person is assigned as an official greeter doesn’t mean that other staff shouldn’t smile and say “hello” as parents arrive.)
-  Whenever time permits, take a moment to have an informal exchange with parents. Ask them about their day or their weekend, extend a compliment, or inquire about a special family event their child has mentioned to you (arrival of a baby, acquisition of a new pet, visit from grandma, a recent trip or family celebration).
-  Remember interesting, funny, or clever things children say and do during the day and take a moment to share them with parents at the end of the day.

Other Ideas for Insuring Parents Receive a Friendly Greeting Every Day.....

4. Provide Opportunities for Parents to Connect with Their Children's Experiences in Your Program.

-  Host an annual open house to familiarize families with your program. If possible, provide child care services as an encouragement for families to attend.
-  Offer periodic orientation meetings for families who join your program throughout the year. Set a regular schedule for orientations so that parents have an opportunity to participate within a few weeks of their child's entry into the program. Informal orientations can be offered as breakfast or after work sessions. If possible, make child care available during orientation meetings.
-  Publish a regular **Parent Newsletter** (once or twice a month) that contains information about planned activities, field trips, special events, quotes and stories by the children, and other news about the program which would be interesting and useful to parents. Consider having children help with the newsletter.
-  Invite parents to meet briefly with you after their child has been enrolled for a few weeks. Share examples of what children do in the program, encourage parents to ask questions, and invite parent suggestions and participation in the program. Acknowledge that parents know their children better than anyone else and encourage them to share their knowledge with you. Conduct follow up conferences with parents to share observations of children's development at least once a year.
-  Have each child assemble a **Portfolio** with samples of his/her work and play. In the **Portfolio**, include art work, photos of children involved in program activities, poems written by children, other writing samples, etc. Share **Portfolios** with parents periodically. If a video camera is available, video children's participation in activities and loan the tape to parents to help them get a close look at what the program is like.
-  Invite parents to participate in program activities (field trips, clubs, special activities related to their interests and talents).
-  Invite parents to help you locate resources to support program activities (recyclable materials, people with talents and skills to share, etc.)
-  Invite parents to make recordings of themselves reading, singing, or talking to their child. Make the recordings available to children during the day.

- ☞ Invite parents to share family traditions by coming in to cook family recipes with the children, sending in photos of family celebrations or trips, helping plan a special program event related to their cultural traditions, etc.
- ☞ Encourage interested children to keep an illustrated journal of what they do each day. Remind children to share their journals with parents periodically.

Other Ideas for Helping Parents Connect with Their Child's Experiences in Your Program....

5. General Ideas for Helping Parents Feel Welcome, Accepted, and Valued.

- ☞ Work with the children to plan and host a ***Parent Appreciation Day*** (or night or week). Children can make special badges for their parents to wear all day, cook a special meal or snack, make “warm fuzzy” gifts, perform songs and skits, etc.
- ☞ Write personal notes to parents when they help out in some way. When appropriate, extend a public “thank you” in your ***Parent Newsletter*** or on the ***Parent Bulletin Board***.
- ☞ Keep parents well informed in advance about any policy or procedural changes that will affect them (changes in hours or days of operation, parking procedures, fees, etc.). Eliminate unpleasant surprises!

Other General Ideas for Helping Parents Feel Welcome, Accepted, and Valued.....