

PORTFOLIO DEVELOPMENT IN SCHOOL-AGE PROGRAMS

Involving Parents in the Portfolio Process

(Excerpted with Permission from R. Newman. *Creating Portfolios with Kids in Out-of-School Programs: IDEAs for Communicating with Parents and Enhancing Program Quality*. Cape Charles, VA: Newroads Media, 2005. Page 63 - 66)

Develop a Plan for Involving Parents in the Portfolio Process

Very often, parents of school-age children do not have opportunities to observe their children as they participate in program activities and experiences. Parents come and go quickly at drop off and pick up time. And, in some programs, where transportation is provided or where children walk to the program, parents may rarely see their children in action in the program. As a result, parents frequently feel out of touch with how their children are learning and developing during their out of school hours.

Portfolios are an invaluable tool for sharing information about children's development with parents. They are also invaluable tools for helping parents connect with the program and learn the many ways in which the program is supporting their child's growth and development. As parents become more aware of their children's experiences in the program, they are more likely to share their own knowledge and insights about their children's strengths and talents. They may also contribute ideas about things they would like to see included in Portfolios and may share things children have created at home that illustrate developmental progress in various areas.

In order to ensure that Portfolios are meaningful and useful to parents, it is important for staff to help parents understand the purpose of Portfolios and how they will be used in the program. The following steps will help parents recognize the benefits of Portfolios to their children and set a positive tone for parent participation in the Portfolio process.

1. Send a Letter of Introduction to Portfolios to Parents. Depending on the program's Portfolio Policy, the specific contents of the letter will vary for each program. SEE ATTACHED SAMPLE LETTER WITH SUGGESTED COMPONENTS FOR INTRODUCING PORTFOLIOS TO PARENTS.
2. Host a Portfolio Orientation Meeting with Parents. If possible, host a brief meeting to introduce Portfolios to parents. Choose a convenient time and location and provide treats, performances by children, or other incentives to *encourage parents to attend.* (NOTE: *If it is not feasible to host a Portfolio Meeting, use the following information to prepare a newsletter article or detailed memorandum to follow the Letter of Introduction to Parents.*)
 - a. *Give a brief overview of the purpose and use of Portfolios as described in your Portfolio Policy.*
 - b. *Review the Developmental Checklist and discuss how staff will use it to conduct observations and guide the creation of Portfolios.*

- c. *Display (or describe in a newsletter article) a sample Portfolio that you have prepared as an example (using a fictional child as subject).*
 - d. *Discuss ways parents can be involved, such as:*
 - i. *Sharing information about children's interests and things they enjoy doing at home.*
 - ii. *Suggesting items they would like to see included in Portfolios.*
 - iii. *Talking with their children about what to include in Portfolios.*
 - iv. *Sharing projects or artwork children make at home for inclusion in Portfolios.*
 - v. *Reviewing Portfolios (at home or in conferences) and providing feedback.*
 - vi. *Talking with children about their accomplishments and goals after reviewing Portfolios.*
 - vii. *Making suggestions about program changes based on developmental needs reflected in Portfolios.*
 - viii. *Contributing an audio and/or video tape for use in recording their children's creations and performances.*
 - e. *Review Permission Forms (if required in your program): Permissions Related to Written Observations, Photo Releases, Audio and Video Tape Releases.*
 - f. *Let parents know the schedule for implementing Portfolios and when parents can expect the first opportunity to review their children's Portfolios.*
3. Keep Parents Informed About Portfolios Throughout the Year or Session. *Include announcements about Portfolios on your parent bulletin board and/or your program newsletter. Remind parents that you are conducting observations of children in action and that you and the children are collecting items for Portfolios and encourage them to make suggestions or contributions of things children do at home.*
4. Conduct Portfolio Sharing with Parents. *Follow through with plans to share Portfolios with parents.*

(HANDOUT: *Involving Parents in the Portfolio Process, continued*)

Sample Format for Parent Letter (Send on Letterhead)

DATE _____

Dear Parent:

(INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH)

Your child is growing and learning every day in the _____ program. We know you would like to know more about how your child is developing talents, interests, abilities, and interests during the out-of-school hours. To help you connect with your child's experiences in the program, we are starting a new Portfolio Project.

(WHAT PORTFOLIOS ARE PARAGRAPH)

Portfolios are collections of materials that illustrate an individual child's growth and development during the program hours. They include staff descriptions of a child's participation in program experiences and samples of work done by the child. Each child will have a Portfolio and work with staff to select items to include in the Portfolio. As a parent, we hope you will also make suggestions about the kinds of things you would like to see in your child's Portfolio.

(HOW PORTFOLIOS WILL BE USED PARAGRAPH)

After a few months, children will have wonderful collections of materials that reflect the many ways they are building on their abilities during the program. We will be excited to share these results with parents.

(COMMENT HERE ABOUT HOW YOU WILL SHARE PORTFOLIOS ACCORDING TO YOUR PORTFOLIO POLICY – e.g. WILL YOU SEND THEM HOME FOR REVIEW? WILL YOU ARRANGE CONFERENCES? OTHER?)

(OPTIONAL - REQUEST FOR PERMISSION PARAGRAPH, IF APPLICABLE).

As part of the Portfolio Project, staff will be conducting observations of each child and preparing written observation documentation. Staff and children will also be taking photographs and making audio and video tapes to document children's work and play. Please sign and return the attached Permission Forms, which will allow these materials to be placed in your child's Portfolio.

(OPTIONAL - INVITATION TO AN INFORMATIONAL MEETING PARAGRAPH)

We hope all parents will want to be involved in the Portfolio Program. Please come to an informational meeting to learn more about the Portfolio Program and how it will benefit your child and you. Plan to join us on (date, time, place).

(CLOSING)

Watch for more news about the Portfolio Project in the next few weeks.

Cordially,

*School-Age Child Care Staff
XYZ School-Age Program*

Sample Photo Release Form*

Photo Release

I/we the parents(s) and/or guardian(s) of _____ grant permission for photographs of our child to be used for informational and professional development purposes by _____
Program's Name

I/we hereby represent that I/we have the legal right to issue such consent.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name (print) _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name (print) _____

* Excerpted from Shores, Elizabeth F. and Grace, Cathy. *The Portfolio book: A Step-by-Step Guide for Teachers*. Beltsville, MD: Gryphon House, 1998.