

V. FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

PROGRAM STANDARD V.A. THE CHILD IS VIEWED IN THE CONTEXT OF THE FAMILY AND THE FAMILY IS VIEWED IN THE CONTEXT OF ITS CULTURE AND COMMUNITY.

Research tells us that the quality of the relationship between infants and toddlers and the people who care for them everyday affects their development in all areas. Furthermore, a parent's bond with their child is influenced by relationships among all members of the family and its culture. Therefore, it is critical to view families in a holistic manner which takes into consideration both their culture and community. Cultural competency goes far beyond recognition of ethnicity and race but strives to recognize and understand the values and ideas that lie behind prescribed behaviors.

Quality Indicator V.A.1. The program is designed to enhance and support parent/child relationships.

Laying the Foundation.

Because research on brain development clearly support that infants and toddlers learn through their interactions with a primary caregiver, it is absolutely essential that program gear their services towards the goal of increasing the level and quality of interaction between parents and their children. Program staff, will never be able to achieve the same level of impact on a child's development as parents will. Therefore, the role of program staff is to support and enhance the parent child relationship.

The significance of the parent child relationship should be reflected throughout every aspect of the program. Program staff are encouraged to work as a team (with the families) to review the mission statement and curriculum materials to determine the degree to which they reflect this philosophy and enhance the parent child relationship. It is also important to select program staff who share this philosophy and who are both committed and skilled at putting it into practice.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Early childhood experiences are powerful in influencing young children's cultural understanding by association of habits, costumes, songs, stories, games, etc. that vividly impacted their early year's memories.

Children begin development of self-understanding including cultural traits and habits, at birth. Self-understanding slowly evolves from infants experiences with others, mainly parent, but certainly including caregivers, attending family members and significant kin and friends.

The close involvement of parents and caregivers with young children provides natural opportunities for modeling, guiding and nurturing positive racial, ethnic and cultural attitudes and perspectives. Promoting young children's cultural understanding can be achieved naturally through the involvement of the family in the children's care and education.

Getting Started

Designing a program that enhances and supports parent/child interaction is easier in theory than in practice. There is a delicate balance between a program that utilizes the program staff expertise and existing parent/child relationships. However this dyad should be central to all program activities. The following suggestions may be helpful in designing a program built on parent/child relationships:

- Ensure parent participation is in accordance with their comfort level and cultural practices.
- Incorporate and stress the importance of parent/child relationships at orientation meetings.
- Design home and center-base activities to promote and support parent/child relationships.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

- Research and learn about the composition and characteristics of diverse cultures and ethnic groups within the community that the program serves.
- Hold orientation meetings for parents and staff to discuss the importance of cultural aspects in the child/parent relationship.
- Support parent's efforts to find resources and activities to enhance their relationship with their children.
- Learn about and utilize models about caching, mentoring and consulting to support optimal parent/child relationships.
- Create a bulletin board of events, ideas and suggestions that encourage family relationships.
- Hold family events to celebrate the variety of relationships within the family.
- Mail newsletter and request parent's contribution for each issue. (They could give an idea to be developed by a staff person, a recipe, etc.).
- Use writing Family stories to enhance multicultural exchange respect and understanding for each other's customs and diversity of values.

Moving Forward

Read appropriate literature to gain and increase your knowledge of cultural diversity as it relates to parent/child interaction and relationships.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Attend workshops and conferences that deal with parent/child relationships.

Search the web for relevant information about this subject.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Quality Indicator V.A.2. Program leadership and staff understand and respect the culture of the families they serve.

Laying the Foundation

The development of mutual trust and openness between families and staff are critical elements that must exist to establish true partnership with families of different ethnic and cultural background. Staff must understand that the families cultural values and also believe that parental instincts, love and best interests for their children guide them as parents.

It is imperative to reflect on our own culture, understand our principles, values, and customs as well as our own bias and prejudices, to genuinely understand other cultures and to be able to establish viable relationships with people of other cultural and/or ethnic background. There must be true understanding and respect for the families' culture to gain their trust in order to work together to enhance the children's development and their families own growth and enrichment.

It is important to evaluate what motivates and leads the family's behavior. Understanding a culture means more than learning about food and folklore. It means to learn about the values that guide actions and life style. Respect for a family's culture is to accept it in non-judgmentally. When there is an issue regarding behavior per example, that could be harmful to their children it is necessary to address it with tact, caution, and firmness using professional responsibility. Understanding is to know the cultural principles that influence parent's childrearing and socialization practices, communication styles, and orientation toward life and education.

Getting Started

To bridge gaps in shared knowledge requires two complementary and ongoing processes: self-awareness of one's own cultural assumptions, values, and beliefs; and willingness to learn about the cultural knowledge of others

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

in the full context of their personal histories, assumptions, goals, beliefs, idiosyncrasies or characteristics and practices.

In order to do this the following may be considered:

- Assess the different cultural groups represented in the program enrollment.
- Conduct a training meeting before activities begin to review and discuss their principle characteristics and follow up with more in-depth learning.
- Reflect and analyze the effect of new knowledge on previous assumptions and be introspective to evaluate misunderstandings.
- When there is a language barrier, face to face communication eases the problem. Utilize families and community resources.
- Strive to provide bilingual support whenever possible.
- Encourage networking and friendship among the participants.
- Match staff strengths with parents' interests and needs.

Moving Forward

Read literature pertinent to cultures represented in the participating group.

Attend cultural events that may contribute to expand your knowledge.

Provide opportunity for all staff to learn a language.

Research ERIC website to read valuable articles with cultural information.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Quality Indicator V.A.3. The leadership and program staff understand that the child's home, community and cultural experiences impact his/her development and early learning.

Laying the Foundation

The cultural component of the program's environment and activities should strengthen the developing of a child's family and cultural identity by making connections between the program and the child's family and culture.

It is important to understand that the home, community and cultural experiences exert a strong influence in a child from the very beginning of his/her life. This principle must guide the activities offered to the child and the family in the program

In a multicultural setting, the traditions, values, and priorities of the participants, may differ from those of the staff in the program. Very young children have been exposed to their family's values, habits and costumes. The staff may or may not represent the culture of the participant. It is the responsibility of the program to create an environment of mutual understanding. This situation requires strategies and different approaches to enable both parties to understand each other regardless of their cultural background.

" Researchers have identified ways in which different cultural values and beliefs affect language socialization, among other patterns of parent/infant interaction (van Kleeck, 1944).

<http://www.zerotothree.org/vol20-3.html>

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Getting Started

Respecting uniqueness brings people together. Being together leads to an understanding of that uniqueness. Within a community, people have

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

different talents and skills, interests and likes, and sharing creates understanding.

- Value the diversity of the families as an enrichment factor in the program
- Research and learn about the composition and characteristics of diverse cultures and ethnic groups within the community.
- Visit the family and child to learn about their culture and costumes and observe their traits and principles regarding their child's rearing practices.
- Recognize valuable cultural experience of one family which if shared, may expand other family's experience and knowledge.
- Bring together families for intercultural sharing and exchange.
- Ensure that parent's participation respect their cultural practice and is within their comfort level.

Moving Forward

Reflect on past experiences to analyze responses to different behaviors or reaction to a situation or conditions. First impressions are strong, but sometimes are misleading and not an accurate assessment of a person, group or situation.

Read articles and /or books that address cultural diversity.

Attend workshops, seminars, or classes relevant to cultural diversity.

Visit other cultural or ethnically diverse programs to observe and exchange positive information and learn about innovative approaches.

(Family & Community Partnerships cont.)

Quality Indicator V.A.4. Materials that promote and support the program emphasize the importance of families in the lives of children.

Laying the Foundation

All materials used by the program whether in public relations efforts or direct activities with the family need to promote and strengthen families as they nurture their children. (Locate a reference, if possible.) Parents influence their children's emotional, intellectual, social, and physical development from the very beginning of their lives. In different cultures, parent's interaction with offspring may be varied. However, all parents care deeply for their children and strive to provide for their well being and healthy growth. It is important to build on the children's basic experiences particularly if this base is culturally or ethnically diverse. Thus materials that support these family experiences should be novel and stimulating yet familiar.

Getting Started

Program leadership has the final responsibility regarding the materials used in the program. It is important that the materials support the belief that families are important in the lives of the family members who are young children. The following activities may be helpful when implementing this indicator.

- Select and provide materials for parent/child interactions that promote the community and cultures of the family.
- Prepare program descriptions and literature to reflect the importance of the relationships of families with their children.
- Review program literature to ensure that the importance of families in the lives of their children is clearly stated.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

- Use pictures and language in program materials such as brochures and newsletters that emphasize the importance of families.
- Review all program documents to assure that all cultures are appropriately represented.
- Develop program materials that reflect its appreciation and respect for all families including those with disabilities.

Moving Forward

- Review literature pertinent to culture and diversity; access web sites to learn about cultures and families.
- Visit other programs and observe different approaches, materials, and practices.
- Participate in forums to share and gain knowledge with other program leaders.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Quality Indicator V.A.5. The program leadership and staff communicate with families in their primary language whenever possible.

Laying the Foundation

Communicating in an infant or toddler's home language naturally strengthens the child's feelings that his family and culture are respected and valued. Recognizing and using the family's primary language validates it and establishes increased comfort and enhances self-esteem. It is important to acknowledge that there are levels of understanding within a given language, therefore all communication whether written or spoken should be understood by the program's participants. A variety of resources should be available for the program to use.

Getting Started

The following strategies may be helpful to the program leadership as they consider the program's practice for communication with the program participants when the family's primary language is one that is different from the language commonly used in program activities and services.

- Identify the primary languages and levels of literacy of all program participants.
- Review reading levels of all program materials and match them with participant's literacy levels.
- Encourage families to use family literacy resources.
- Provide staff development activities to encourage the program staff to learn the basics of the participant's languages.
- Introduce dual language opportunities during program activities.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

- Prepare a list of resources that identifies competent and appropriate translators or interpreters within the community to assist the program.
- Empower parents to find and use their own language resources.
- Assess the availability of family literacy programs within the community and make necessary linkages.

Moving Forward

Attend workshops about the role of language in communications and human relationships.

Read journal articles about working with families of other cultures and languages, as well as the research on English as a second language.

Provide a variety of staff development opportunities to increase fluency in the second language.

Develop a dual language library of books and tapes for families and staff.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Quality Indicator V.A.6. The program assists families in expanding their knowledge of child growth and development and parenting techniques.

Laying the Foundation

Oftentimes parents look upon program staff that assist them with their children as "experts in the development of their child". The goal of a nurturing staff is to assist parents to learn they are the experts when it comes to making decisions about their own child. During these first few years as children grow and change so rapidly, parents feel more self-assured if they have friendly professionals to whom they can turn with their questions.

Some parents do not realize the extent of influence their personal habits and lifestyle has on the child. Program leadership and staff need to provide basic information from widely known experts as they assist families to learn more about young children in general and their own child in particular. This can be accomplished through regular opportunities to meet with families. Staff is cognizant about creating an inviting and comfortable environment and being available to the families on a regular basis. Knowing the families well allows staff to reinforce positive interactions parents have with their children.

All the areas of child development - social, emotional, physical and cognitive, including language development -are discussed with parents during these learning opportunities. It is easy for parents to see the physical and cognitive growth taking place with their child and within a few months parents also respond to the increased social awareness their child displays. Emotional development is as important as the other areas, therefore parents need to learn how crucial secure relationships are to the life-long emotional health of the child.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Getting Started

Staff should recognize and respect parents' unique teaching abilities, and challenge parents to be the best possible teachers they can be for their children. Borrowing from the concepts suggested in the "Ten Things Every Child Needs" as suggested in the Curriculum and Service Provision Section, the following are Ten Things Every Parent Needs to Know. This information can be used as the basis to expand the parent's knowledge of child growth and development and parenting techniques, therefore parents should:

- Interact verbally and through eye contact with your child to stimulate his cognitive development and teach him he is important to you.
- Provide lots of "loving touches" through kisses, hugs, and holding him. This provides a sense of security and keeps your child calm.
- Talk about the routines that you are engaging in with your child. Tell him what to expect next. Respond to his needs so he knows he can count on you.
- Provide a safe, healthy home so children can explore without concern for injury.
- Help your child develop a good feeling about himself. Share with your child his appropriate responses and why they make you both feel good.
- Take special care to find child care arrangements that will enhance your child's development, comfort him gently as you part, and model for him basic trust in those who care for him on a regular basis.
- Communicate with your child even before he learns to respond. Learn about different techniques to communicate with very young children.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

- Play spontaneously with your child on a regular basis. Arrange your home so active play is not frustrating for parent or child.
- Sing to your child even if you cannot carry a tune. This time of sharing introduces words, rhymes, rhythm, gestures and movements.
- Take every opportunity you can to read to your child. Start very young with board books and cloth books and progress to "lap-sits" at the local library.

Moving Forward

Visit another birth to three program in the community or area and discuss hosting parent education classes together.

Visit the library or a book store and become familiar with the parenting or baby magazines available.

Review parenting books on amazon.com.

Search the internet for interesting materials using the key words: parenting, parent education, child development. Some web sites of interest may be www.familysupportamerica.org ; www.npen.crc.uiuc.edu ; or www.zerotothree.org .

Become familiar with *Growing Child* (Birth to Six years) and *Growing Together* (Parenting) Newsletters and make them available to families. Growing Child, Inc. Lafayette, In 47902-1100. Phone: 765/423-2624, Customer Service: 1-800/927-7289

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Quality Indicator V.A.7. The program staff recognizes the influence of the community and its characteristics upon the family.

Laying the Foundation

Children sense, both visually and emotionally, early on that there are differences between families, where they live, and the supports in place to assist the family. The community forms the framework around the family that includes where they live, work, shop, and play. The adults as well as the children as family members are directly impacted by factors in their community. These factors include the geographic setting, the types of residences, and job opportunities. The community's socio-economic factors greatly impact family life and family members. Those factors include gangs/ethnic neighborhoods, availability of parks and recreation, access to health services, education opportunities for adults and children, library resources, and literacy opportunities.

Getting Started

The program has a responsibility to not only acknowledge the importance of the community's influence on families but also to provide opportunities to families that will support them in their efforts to know and understand this influence. Programs can provide the following activities:

- Plan workshops that lead families to understand their rights, roles, and power to make positive changes within their community.
- Analyze how your own community has shaped your attitudes and behaviors.
- Assess the culture of the communities where the program is located and families live including recreation, housing, medical services, transportation, primary and secondary languages, standard of living, child care, houses of worship, businesses, and shopping facilities.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

- Promote the community with staff and parents by advertising and supporting local events.
- Participate in community groups to learn more about the characteristics of the community and its resources.
- Invite community members to visit the program and share information.

Moving Forward

Identify successful role models within the community and use them as resources for families.

Add materials including articles about the community's resources and culture to the program library.

Initiate community events that support program participants.

Request materials from consulates or embassies of the country or countries represented in the community and program participants for families and staff's information and enrichment.

Offer your program site as a place for community groups to meet.

Quote: "When planting for a year, plant corn. When planning for a decade, plant trees. When planning for life, focus on family." - Chinese Proverb

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

PROGRAM STANDARD V.B. THE PROGRAM LEADERSHIP AND STAFF SEEK AND FACILITATE FAMILY PARTICIPATION AND PARTNERSHIP.

The program is designed to benefit families and should be responsive to them. Administration, staff, and parents should arrive at mutual understandings, which guide program planning, implementation, and evaluation through open and ongoing communication. When leadership and decision making opportunities are provided to parents, they become empowered and are better equipped to make decisions that are important in their own lives.

Quality Indicator V.B.1. The program leadership assures a system is in place for regular, effective communication, and responsive interaction between the program leadership, staff, and families.

Laying the Foundation

Programs need to recognize and value families as partners; therefore, a caring atmosphere should be established that is responsive to families. Program leadership fosters this partnership through careful planning and implementation of the program's activities. Programs meet the needs of families best when careful planning and implementation take place. Parents and program staff become partners as trust is fostered through two-way communication. Sensitive observation of the program participants as well as the gathering of systematic feedback from parents can enhance programming.

Getting Started

- Learn strategies for building partnerships with parents.
- Develop procedures for giving opportunities to staff to provide feedback to program leadership on a regular basis.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

- Provide parents opportunities to voice their ideas and opinions on the activities planned as well as provide feedback on their implementation.
- Establish and nurture a relationship where all parties are comfortable sharing comments and working together.
- Use staff meetings to review the degree to which the program's communication strategies enhance parent's participation and promote feedback.
- Review your program's communication system regularly to determine its effectiveness and make appropriate changes.

Moving Forward

Explore techniques and strategies for creating parent partnerships used by other programs.

Participate in workshops, seminars and/or classes designed for staff and administrators to learn about systems for communication and more effective communication strategies.

Locate and read articles on effective communication and building communication systems in journals and web sites.

Hold a staff event that focuses on communication: the program's system, its effect, and needed changes.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Quality Indicator V.B.2. The program provides opportunities for family involvement and educational activities that are responsive to the ongoing and expressed needs of family members.

Laying the Foundation

The manner in which resources and supports are provided to families is very important. There is now considerable agreement and understanding that *how* staff work with families is as important as *what* activities staff offer families. Understanding the dynamics of the family - their time restraints, their economic situation, social and cultural acceptance in the community, all affect how the family will participate in a birth to three program. Families do benefit from learning how to work more positively with their children utilizing programs as a primary source of information.

Family-based practices are responsive to the individual needs of a family. These practices assist the family to grow in their child rearing competencies and gain confidence about their important role. There is research available that indicates that when family-centered practices are used, there are positive outcomes in terms of families valuing the support and help they receive from staff. Leadership and staff must strengthen the family's ability to support the development of their children in a manner that increases the family's sense of parenting competence and not the family's sense of dependency on professionals or professional systems.

Getting Started

Being responsive to the ongoing and expressed needs of the family members is known as family-based practice. Family-based practice:

- strengthens family functioning by sharing responsibility and working together.
- provides families with participatory experiences and opportunities promoting choice and decision making.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

- supports family participation in obtaining goals to strengthen parenting competence and confidence.
- needs to be flexible and individualized.
- incorporates family beliefs and values into decisions, and family plans.
- provides resources and supports in ways that are flexible, individualized, and tailored to the child's and family's preferences and styles.
- promotes well-being.
- is accomplished in ways that are responsive to cultural, language and other family characteristics
- shares information so families can make appropriate choices and decisions
- develops appropriate family-identified outcomes

(Adapted from Sandall et al 2000, 45-46).

Moving Forward

Visit area family support programs and discuss family involvement from their philosophical viewpoint.

Contact the local affiliate of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (www.naeyc.org) and review their parent-involvement work.

Talk with local Head Start, prekindergarten and early childhood special education coordinators about their parent involvement activities.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Quality Indicator V.B.3. Families are included in the development and implementation of program activities.

Laying the Foundation

In quality birth to three programs the administration and staff develop partnerships with parents, who have both a right and a responsibility to participate in decisions about their children's care and education. Parents know their children best and can share valuable information about their children's development. Families benefit from the confidence they gain by becoming involved.

Research indicates that when parents are involved in the care and education of their children from the earliest years on through college, children are more successful in school and in their non-school activities. (Bowman, 1997, 157-170) When families have clear cut expectations of their children, for example, when expected to be honest; expected to be helpful to others; expected to remain in school, it is more likely children will meet those expectations. Family involvement in all aspects of the child's life can begin in the birth to three program and continue all through life.

Getting Started

In quality programs, administrators and staff

- Greet parents and children by name
- Take time to acknowledge the child's parents and their participation and progress
- Invite parents to participate in activities and special events
- Plan programs with the input and follow-up from parents
- Realize parents benefit from social support in addition to informational gatherings
- Provide food at program meetings to promote sociability and ease family schedules
- Share resources with parents

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

- Ask an interested group of parents to plan activities of their choice
- Have parents serve in an advisory capacity to the program.

Moving Forward

Identify new and innovative ways to involve parents in program activities.

Review books and journal articles describing successful activities to encourage parent participation in program activities.

Visit other programs and share ideas of successful parent involvement.

Look at parenting websites and gather ideas.

Quote: "Watch like a hawk for the gifts."-Dr. Alice Sterling Honig

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

PROGRAM STANDARD V.C. THE PROGRAM ASSURES THAT FAMILIES HAVE ACCESS TO COMPREHENSIVE SERVICES.

While one of the primary goals of birth to three programs is to enhance parent/child relationships, Maslow's hierarchy of needs tells us that food, clothing, shelter, and medical needs must be met first. In order to be successful in this, it is critical for programs to have systems in place for identifying the needs of families, making referrals to other community agencies, and following up to be sure services were delivered as anticipated.

Quality Indicator V.C.1. Program leadership and staff have a working knowledge of the resources in their community.

Laying the Foundation

Convenient, appropriate, effective, and affordable quality services that help build strong families and provide appropriate environments for young children prenatally and throughout their early years should be available in all communities and accessible to all families and children. Without the knowledge of the services available in the community as well as how, where, when and who can access them, programs cannot even take the first step to provide or make comprehensive services available to families. Few communities are able to provide all services that make up a comprehensive system. It is necessary that information sharing, coordination, and collaboration take place among all community entities so that a comprehensive system exists.

Getting Started

Every program that provides services to infants and toddlers and their families should have a goal that addresses knowing what services are available in the community and how families can access them. Activities in support of the goal should be identified for each program. This area is

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

clearly one in which the leadership of the program should take the first step toward the achievement of this quality indicator.

The following suggestions are for consideration:

- Construct or access a list of available services in the community that would comprise a comprehensive services system. This is a task best undertaken by a group rather than by a single program. The services should include:
 1. **Educational services for children** including developmentally appropriate full-day and half-day education and care programs in centers, family child care homes, home visit or family support programs; screening and assessment to identify children with potential special needs, and referrals to appropriate programs.
 2. **Family support services** including family-centered parent education and support; crisis intervention; adult literacy instruction; library programs; family counseling and assistance; social activities which promote family togetherness; play groups; park district recreational programs; and referrals to appropriate agencies for housing and employment needs.
 3. **Maternal and child health and nutrition services** including prenatal and postnatal services and counseling; immunization; early and periodic screening, referral and follow-up for all health needs; adequate meals for children; nutrition counseling for families, and access to a consistent "medical home" for regular health care.
- Identify the services available through your program.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

- Locate and update any existing directories of services for families available in the community. This activity could be performed by a program work group, an existing community task force, the local Child and Family Connections office, the local interagency council, the local Child Care Resource and Referral, the local library, a combination of individuals from previous suggestions, or a dedicated individual.
- Assemble a directory of available family services if none exists using a strategy described in the preceding activity. Design a process for updating the directory and who will take responsibility. Include the name, phone number, fax, e-mail, address, office hours, contact person, services provided, eligible population, and referral process for each entry. The following should be included:
 1. SSI (Supplemental Security Income - Social Security Office)
 2. Public Aid
 3. Early intervention including the Child and Family Connections and local interagency council
 4. Public health including local clinics and hospitals
 5. Child Care Resource and Referral
 6. DCFS (Department of Children and Family Services)
 7. Emergency assistance (911)
 8. Local early childhood, prekindergarten, and kindergarten as well as other community programs
 9. Local community organizations including houses of worship that provide family supports
- Identify the gaps in services and look into neighboring communities for the appropriate service provider. Form agreements with those providers to accept referrals from the local community along with the necessary process and procedures. The referring community could reciprocate by offering needed services to the neighboring community.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

- Identify program procedures when services outside of the scope of the program are needed.
- Sponsor and schedule a forum for community providers where they will introduce themselves and provide additional information to the directory.
- Hold an event similar to the provider forum but appropriate for families and caregivers.
- Invite other service providers to attend staff meetings as a guest presenter and vice-versa.

Moving Forward

Look to community resources to give financial support for an ongoing services directory.

Support the sponsorship of an event that could incorporate public awareness about community services.

Use existing events such as county fairs, home and garden shows, and health fairs to inform the community and gain support for the system of services.

Take advantage of existing coordination and collaboration groups, such as the local interagency council, to build support and cooperation for a seamless system of services for families and children.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Quality Indicator V.C.2. The program has both a referral and a follow-up system to assure that families are able to access services determined appropriate.

Laying the Foundation

Everyone in a community should move toward considering themselves as a potential referral source in support of a comprehensive, coordinated services system for families and young children. Conducting a public awareness effort to enhance the understanding of Child Find and the community's services system for families and children will assist each individual to consider this responsibility. Some individuals in the community by nature of their roles and responsibilities are required by law to make referrals when a child shows evidence of delay, a disability, and/or suspected abuse. All staff members in programs that provide services for families and their children as well as health care professionals are included in this group. The referral is only the first part of the process.

Follow-up, or perhaps more accurately the follow-along process, takes place so that no family or child falls through cracks in the system or to ensure that appropriate services are provided. It is important that all individuals making referrals are aware of this responsibility and allow time for appropriate follow-up. Data gathered from follow-up on children and families who have been referred for services is powerful for supporting reports to the legislature and other constituencies on the availability and provision of services. Extended follow-up can support accountability through the evaluation of the outcomes produced by services provided by early education and care programs

There is a difference that needs to be noted between "inquiry" and "referral." "Inquiry" is the very first contact that a family makes to seek information, support, or help. The "inquiry" can result in a range of

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

responses from an informal conversation or interview to a formal screening to determine whether a "referral" is appropriate.

"Referral" means the process of requesting that a child be screened, assessed, and/or evaluated. In some instances this may include looking at the child's home and/or other environments as well as the individuals who are involved in any way with the child, to determine if special services or interventions are needed.

The referral for any service is that first opportunity for the program to respond to the family and begin their relationship. It is critical that a referral process is in place as part of the coordinated and comprehensive system of services for families and children. This referral process must be coordinated across the entire system so that the family can access needed services. Emphasis again must be made on knowing the community, the stakeholders, the providers, and available services as well as those services that must be obtained outside of the community.

Getting Started

Each program must develop a process for referral and follow-up that works well for them. The process should include:

- Identify the concerns or needs in partnership with the parent.
- Provide referral options to the parent for follow-up.
- Empower parents to make contact with the appropriate program or agency.

The program process should include activities that promote the program goal for referral and follow-up. Activity choices need to be individualized and creative.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

- Train the program staff regarding the referral and follow-up process.
- Implement a process for documenting referrals and the follow-up process.
- Inform parents of their rights and responsibilities including informed consent. When appropriate, obtain informed consent for provision of services and release of information.
- Consider appropriate resources for referral for services not offered by the program.
- Track the referral, results, recommendations, parent satisfaction, and impact on the program.
- Identify further follow-up.

Moving Forward

Develop personal leadership skills using materials produced by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and other professional organizations including business.

Learn more about The Early Intervention System, The Department of Children and Family Services, and Supplemental Security Income or SSI.

Identify community stakeholders who are willing to work together to develop a community-wide system of referral and follow-up. If no appropriate entity exists, take the initiative to form one.

Identify stakeholders who may be new or do not participate in community activities.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Consider a community agreement that funds a centralized community office and staff person, perhaps the library or local clinic, to organize existing referrals and conduct follow-ups according to criteria established by a community work group. A system for reporting the data should be included in the agreement as well as the participation of the referring entities.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Quality Indicator V.C.3. The program works to address family needs.

Laying the Foundation

Historically, Ure Bronfenbrenner in 1979, noted families need both informal and formal resources and supports so that they have the knowledge, skills, time and energy to promote the development of their children. The family's socioeconomic status has a direct impact on the family's well-being and positive parenting abilities. Another impact on the family's well-being is the emotional health of family members. When families attend birth to three programs and share their needs, staff must respond with concern and empathy. Staff must also share their knowledge about community resources that might assist the family. A guide for families of all community resources, including job assistance, career planning, skill development or social services, needs to be available. It is the responsibility of each staff member who works directly with families to become familiar with the guide and keep it updated as new opportunities in the community become available.

Getting Started

Family constellations are very different. Programs need to be aware of how best to meet each family's needs. Staff planning before the first meeting will help the family feel more comfortable about taking advantage of all the program has to offer. Staff need to remember that families will choose various levels of participation regarding these supports just as they do regarding the program activities which involve both the child and his family.

Staff need to inquire

- regarding the best times for the family to meet with staff and not assume the family can meet during regular daytime hours.
- where the best place to meet might be, such as program facility, family home, local eating place, local library or other public building.
- about siblings and if child care is needed.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

- about members of the family and who might be available to meet with staff.
- how a continuum of services might best meet the family's needs.

Moving Forward

Talk with colleagues, friends, and family members to gain more insight about families and their needs.

Keep a notebook about community resources to which you have referred families.

Follow up with the families to determine if the experience and resources were helpful.

Attend community workshops and meetings regarding other programs of support and assistance to the members of your community or county.

Be aware of community philanthropic endeavors and how to access their services and resources.

Quote: "Early is not everything, but early is important."-Dr. Craig Ramey

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

PROGRAM STANDARD V.D. THE PROGRAM DEVELOPS A PARTNERSHIP WITH FAMILIES IN WHICH THE FAMILY MEMBERS AND STAFF DETERMINE GOALS AND SERVICES.

An important focus of the program is to help families identify how they want to improve their lives and the steps that will help them reach their goals. Through collaborative planning with staff, parents can be supported to use their individual gifts as a springboard for change. By evaluating where they are, where they want to go, and how to get there, parents will begin to experience success in taking charge of their own destinies and will naturally promote these skills in their own children. Being in charge of one's own destiny helps to build strong families. Children who grow up in strong families are more likely to reach their full potential.

Quality Indicator V.D.1. The program provides services that promote family growth and enrichment to identify and build on family strengths.

Laying the Foundation

For all the roles in life, parenting is the one for which we receive the least training and preparation. Fortunately, new parents today can avail themselves of information from health care professionals, relatives, friends, books and other print media, audio and video tapes, radio, TV, the internet, classes and programs, such as birth to three. Birth to three programs, available in many forms in many communities, are an opportunity for parents to learn about child development and how it is linked to their child-rearing practices. Professionally trained and experienced early childhood staff members support and assist parents in their new, exciting roles through the activities of the program. This support and assistance builds on identified family strengths. The birth to three programs also introduces parents to other new parents so a networking opportunity can be established. Parenting can be a frustrating, challenging role, but with support and assistance, it can be an enriching and satisfying life-enhancing experience.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Getting Started

In order to maximize the services provided to families, programs should:

- set a positive emotional tone when a parent enters the birth to three program
- communicate to families that each member is valued as an individual and that each is highly regarded as important in the life of the child.
- make all family members aware that they are welcome to come to program activities as frequently (or infrequently) as they wish.
- provide an appropriate place for family members to gather in a room with adult furniture and pleasant décor highlighted by a family bulletin board and calendar of coming events.
- adjust the format and content to the needs and interests of the families and consider their level of education and previous training.
- classes to help family members complete high school, take the provide vocational education programs or special remedial G.E.D. or improve their literacy abilities.
- present a wide variety of choices so families from diverse educational, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds can select the programs that are best suited to their needs.
- include time for questions and for informal socialization at each parent meeting.
- encourage parents to suggest topics and presenters on child health, growth and development.
- encourage parents to attend programs on consumerism, nutrition, home and money management.
- respond to calls to the program in a friendly, informative manner.
- establish a toy lending or book and/or book lending library near the parent classroom or lounge.
- make available pamphlets and journals on child rearing, toy selection, nutrition, and health.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Moving Forward

Visit area hospitals to learn how new parents are educated and assisted.

Contact the Cooperative Extension Service in your area to obtain free parent education materials. (www.extension.uiuc.edu)

Attend a large conference and review the parent training materials offered by the exhibitors.

Check the web-sites devoted to parenting that are listed in the Appendix.

Review the Special Editions put out by Newsweek (Spring/Summer 1997 and Winter 2000) on infant/toddler development at your local library.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Quality Indicator V.D.2. The program offers parents opportunities to develop and implement a family plan that describes family goals, responsibilities, timelines, and strategies for achieving these goals.

Laying the Foundation

All birth to three programs should utilize some type of family plan and help parents understand its importance. Just as a driver gets into the car with a destination in mind and a plan to reach the destination, no family should be part of a birth to three program without the opportunity to develop a family plan. This plan is the destination or goals for the family. The development of the plan is the method or strategies used by the family, with assistance from program staff, to accomplish those goals.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part C has served as the model for family-friendly legislation and originated the service plan for families. The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is really the core of the early intervention program, a system of services for children, birth to three who have disabilities or delays, and their families. Perhaps no other requirement of this particular federal law has the ability to guide program planners, service providers, and families as they move from agency-centered or child-centered services to a family-centered "community of caring" (DiVenere 1988, 1). The IFSP has been called a promise to children and families—"a promise that their strengths will be recognized and built on, that their needs will be met in a way that is respectful of their beliefs and values, and that their hopes and aspirations will be encouraged and enabled" (McGonigel 1991. 46).

This promise is just as true for the family plan found in other birth to three programs serving infants and toddlers outside the early intervention system. At the heart of the family-centered philosophy is the concept of enabling families. *Enabling* families means creating opportunities and means for families to apply their present abilities and competencies and to acquire

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

new ones as necessary to meet their needs and the needs of their children. (Johnson et al. 1989, 5).

The family service plan is based on the family needs assessment. The quality and extent of information gathered in this assessment determines many of the activities that follow. Some programs develop their own family assessments and others may use those that are standardized and commercial. The assessments are updated periodically. The way the process is presented sets the tone for the partnership between the family and the program.

Getting Started

The following recommendations are adapted from principles underlying the IFSP process, but are appropriate for birth to three programs developing family plans with parents.

- Infants and toddlers are uniquely dependent upon their families for their survival and nurturance. This dependence necessitates a family-centered approach for service to these families.
- Programs should define "family" in a way that reflects the diversity of family patterns and structures.
- Each family has its own structure, values, beliefs, and coping styles. Respect for and acceptance of this diversity is a cornerstone of family-centered practice.
- Birth to three program systems and strategies must reflect a respect for the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of families.
- Respect for family autonomy, independence, and decision making means that families must be able to choose the level and nature of program involvement in their life.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

- Family/professional collaboration and partnerships are the keys to family-centered programming and to successful implementation of the family plan.
- Professionals and para-professionals should use an enabling approach to working with families that requires them to re-examine traditional roles and practices and develop new practices when necessary—practices that promote mutual respect and partnerships.
- Birth to three services should be flexible, accessible, and responsive to the needs identified by the family (Adapted from McGonigel 1991, 49).

The process to develop a family plan includes:

- Meeting with the family to determine how the birth to three program will become involved in their lives. This involvement shapes the entire family plan process.
- Determining the degree to which a family is able to identify and articulate its agenda which will vary from family to family.
- Presenting the total birth to three program opportunities and assisting the family as they inquire for specifics and options related to their needs and schedule.
- Helping both parties to realize the plan is a fluid document, encompassing goals which the family would like to achieve and the progress the child should be making by meeting appropriate developmental milestones.

The plan could include, but is not limited to

- A brief family history or description
- A brief description of the child's current behaviors

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

- Areas in which the family would like support
- Program practices in which the child and family will participate

Moving Forward

At meetings with other birth to three programs, ask about their family plans, how they are used, and how families are involved.

Gain permission, then review the IFSPs of young children with disabilities in your programs.

Attend workshops at conferences or other trainings to learn about the family plan process.

Review early childhood journals for helpful suggestions regarding family assessment and development of family plans.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Quality Indicator V.D.3. Program staff and families regularly review the family plan, document progress toward goals, and make needed revisions.

Laying the Foundation

Scheduling a time every few months to review the family plan provides an opportunity for the staff member and parent to reflect on the development of the child. It is a time to inform the parent how current behavior impacts later development. For example, explaining how enjoying books and asking repeatedly for a favorite book promotes literacy and helps the parent understand the necessity for reading **that same book** one more time!

It is the role of the program staff to encourage parents and assist them to recognize their successes. Writing down the parents' comments is a good way to begin reviewing the family plan. Staff at this time can also provide anticipatory guidance, which is information to parents about the expected needs, behaviors and milestones their child will experience over the next few months. It assists parents with their understanding of future development; what to expect and how to manage their expectations. The meeting to review the family plan also assists the family to recognize and interpret their children's cues and behaviors and also increases the parents' confidence as they grow in the parenting role.

Getting Started

Families and their children are continually undergoing change. The goals and activities in the family plan need to be revised to reflect new developments in the family.

- Review and update each family's progress and goals at least every three months.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

- Incorporate major family happenings, such as birth of a new baby, death of a grandparent, serious family financial or emotional difficulties, if appropriate.
- Review of the document within this suggested time frame should be agreed to by both parties.
- Both the staff member and family should have a copy of the family plan.

Moving Forward

Survey the families about the family plan process.

Use the results of the survey to make needed changes to the plan format and process.

Learn more about the Portage Project, their trainings, and the way they use family plans (www.portageproject.org).

Quote: "It is not perfected till it is shared."-Jane Porter

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

PROGRAM STANDARD V.E. THE PROGRAM TAKES AN ACTIVE ROLE IN COMMUNITY AND SYSTEM PLANNING AND ESTABLISHES ONGOING COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS THAT SERVE FAMILIES.

Programs must take affirmative steps to establish ongoing collaborative relationships that go beyond the development of referral networks.

Therefore, programs are encouraged to secure a broad range of services by working together with community agencies.

Quality Indicator V.E.1. Efforts are made to work in collaboration with other providers of services to families with young children in order to maximize services and resources available in the community.

Laying the Foundation

A birth to three program for infants and toddlers and their families needs to meet the comprehensive and sometimes complex needs of all families. Head Start Program Performance Standards 1304.41(a)(1) emphasizes that early childhood programs collaborate with partner programs in communities "in order to provide the highest level of services to children and families, to foster the development of a continuum of family centered services, and to advocate for a community that shares responsibility for the healthy development of children and families of all cultures" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1999, 147). As each program completes family plans and anticipates family needs, other resources may need to be identified from other community programs and agencies.

The Crossway Community located in Washington, D.C. identifies the following three principles, among others, to guide all of their efforts.

- Children develop in the context of family.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

- Families develop in the context of community and are the building blocks of a healthy society.
- Community collaboration is critical to community development and to family outcomes (Guinan 1998, 36).

Individual partnerships or agreements with other programs can be the first step in the development of a comprehensive service delivery system. The service delivery level involves cross-agency efforts that focus on meeting the needs of individual children and families. Today many families across all income levels are experiencing greater stress and child poverty is at record levels. An individual program or service provider cannot view itself as an isolated institution within the community separate from family and other community services.

Getting Started

Birth to three programs for infants and toddlers and their families can enhance the program's services by taking an active role in facilitating and building community partnerships. The following questions may be helpful:

- Which community agencies and programs should participate?
- Does the collaborative have leadership? Who is it?
- Is the leadership willing to take risks and make changes?
- What are the strategies to reach out to community partners that have been identified?
- Is the development and maintenance of community partnerships recognized by the program as a task that requires time and effort?

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

- What confidentiality guidelines are in place to guide the sharing of information about children and families?
- Are health services including mental health partners in the collaborative process?
- What provision is made to ensure that families in the community have access to desired services?
- Have any barriers been identified that may affect the families' access to high quality services, and if so, how will they be addressed?
- Are transition and its process considered? For more information on transition see Quality Indicator V.E.4. in this section.
- Has a process been considered to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of collaborative agreements that are in place?

When establishing and maintaining collaborative relationships, the following approaches are helpful:

- Conduct a resource and needs assessment of the community, identifying programs, existing partnerships, and community leaders as well as available services and service gaps;
- Hold and document discussions with staff and parents regarding family partnerships;
- Draw upon the program's data sources to identify next steps regarding collaborative partnerships;
- Engage in discussions with parents and staff, then with potential partners about the purposes and goals of all proposed collaborative relationships;

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

- Identify specific areas for working together to achieve shared goals of children and families;
- Nurture a mutually respectful environment in which everyone's contribution to the partnership is acknowledged;
- Develop forums or use other strategies, such as team meetings and working agreements, for working together on an ongoing basis;
- Consider the staff resources needed to maintain collaborative relationships; and
- Recognize that collaborative relationships are strengthened through formal, written agreements, which help ensure that relationships among agencies endure after initiators of the agreements are no longer involved.

The process of raising and educating healthy and successful children requires a new vision for community wide commitment of programs, schools, and service agencies to address the needs of the whole child. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, remember that change begins with individuals, not programs or agencies.

Moving Forward

Explore funding opportunities that may be available at the local, state and federal level.

Enlist the aid of the program consultant or technical assistance system to search for existing models and formats for written agreements for partnerships and collaborations.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Quality Indicator V.E.2. Comprehensive physical and mental health, educational, social, and recreational resources for children and their families are developed and promoted in collaboration with the community.

Laying the Foundation

What happens to the very young even before birth will influence their future development and performance. A safe and healthy birth, emotional bonding, and good nutrition are vital and indicate that health and learning are inseparably related. The focus must immediately and decisively be on the needs of children if the hope is to improve their outcomes.

Whose responsibility is it to assure the best possible outcomes for young children? Who should take the lead in seeing to it that every child receives not just love, food, and protection but also the rich experiences and guidance needed to succeed? Parents are the first and most essential nurturers and should take the lead but should not have to do the job alone.

In the past extended family, neighbors, and the community formed a network of support to which families turned when they were anxious, confused, or needed reassurance. Today this network has been weakened. However families still lean on one another, especially in times of crisis. In today's fragmented, less supportive world they increasingly must turn to outside agencies for help. It is time to build new networks of support, those in which communities and neighborhoods have an important role as well as a stake in their success. Failure to act will mean higher costs later on in remedial education, unemployment, the impact of crime and wasted lives, and promises unfulfilled.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Getting Started

Program leadership and staff should consider the following strategies;

Take advantage of opportunities to serve on community initiatives that are working to identify and make comprehensive services and resources available.

Look at the community to identify what exists and what does not.

Design a comprehensive system of services and resources, including physical and mental health, education and care, as well as social and recreational resources.

Recruit families of the community as members of the initiative.

Encourage business and agencies to support family life in the work place, giving increased security to children.

Influence new construction projects in the community to consider children and their needs.

Promote neighborhoods as places for young children to learn with spaces and places that invite play and spark the imagination.

- Offer the infant and toddler program space and resources for community use.
- Highlight community events such as parades, park district programs, and library activities.
- Assist and participate in community events with other community agencies and programs such as health fairs, market days, and other celebrations.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

- Help families identify opportunities for literacy experiences in the community.
- Support literacy development by providing story bags that highlight community life. Consider sharing some with libraries, restaurants and doctors' offices.

Moving Forward

Belong to and attend the meetings of groups such as the birth to three forums and local interagency councils.

Become familiar with similar activities in communities nearby.

Ask for technical assistance inside and outside your system to identify community models of comprehensive services in the state.

Review existing data collection from community efforts.

Find out more about successful community systems.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Quality Indicator V.E.3. The program leadership recognizes the urgent need for high quality child care for infants and toddlers and participates in community collaboration to identify, locate, and provide access to this service.

Laying the Foundation

Child care and early education are critical to the success of two national priorities: helping families work, and insuring that every child enters school ready to succeed. The article, *Effects of a Community Initiative on the Quality of Child Care* states, "With the growing evidence on the importance of young children's early life experiences in determining later successful life outcomes, several states are implementing initiatives designed to improve the lives of young children and their families" (Bryant, Maxwell, and Burchinal 1999, 449). It is a fact that many parents need child care every day. The Children's Defense Fund report indicates that fifty-nine percent of mothers with infants (under age one) are in the workforce, and thirteen million preschoolers, including 6 million infants and toddlers, are in child care every day (Children's Defense Fund 2001, 1).

Studies have found that much of the child care in the United States is poor to mediocre. One four state study found fully 40 percent of the rooms serving infants in child care centers to be of such poor quality as to jeopardize children's health, safety, or development. (Children's Defense Fund 2001) Children in poor quality child care have been found to be delayed in language and reading skills and display more aggression toward other children and adults. The research is clear that the quality of child care has a lasting impact on children's well-being and ability to learn.

In the Report on Early Childhood Development and Learning, *How Are the Children?* an adaptation of a report by Deborah Phillips states, "The placement of children in high quality child care can supplement what they gain at home.....The good news is that, according to research, young

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

children, including babies, can thrive in child care when it is of high enough quality" (U.S. Government 1999, 6-7).

Quality child care for all children cannot be an asset in a community unless all of its members, who are involved with the provision of early education and care, families, and other leaders collaborate to make this a reality. The family and ultimately the community will suffer when coherent, well-coordinated services are not provided through a comprehensive approach. This approach challenges all of us to look at policies and practices and make changes. It is not easy and cannot be done quickly, but when services are fragmented, too many children and too much promise fall through the cracks.

Getting Started

Program leadership should assist communities by participating in local efforts to assess needs, identify available child care resources, and educating stakeholders regarding components of high quality child care. This may include coordination with the local Child Care Resource and Referral, working in community activities, and/or serving on forums. Programs involved in local work groups need to consider the quality of their own system of child care as well as working to improve the quality of the child care offered in the community.

Better Baby Care states that the following 12 steps will promote care that is safe and healthy, family-centered, and developmental; therefore, making an investment in better care for babies and toddlers:

"Safe and Healthy Care

- Ensure that all child care meets state and local licensing requirements and that standards follow the recommendations in the National Health and Safety Standards for Out-of-Home Care.
- Provide every infant/toddler program with access to health and mental health consultation and support.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

- Promote the inclusion of children with special needs and provide ongoing support to parents and providers.

Family-Centered Care

- Help parents understand how to select and monitor the quality of care for their infants and toddlers.
- Promote parent involvement, parent education, and family support through child-care and services that reflect the cultures and languages of the families served.
- Create networks of support for family child care and kith and kin providers.

Developmentally Appropriate Care

- Ensure that infant/toddler providers have specialized training in child development and family support and receive adequate compensation.
- Develop the capacity of all higher education institutions in the community to offer courses in infant/toddler care and supervision." (Programs can encourage staff to enroll in coursework.)
- "Provide an infant/toddler specialist to work with providers and parents in every Child Care Resource and Referral Agency.

*Critical Investments

- Expand the supply of quality infant/toddler care through direct investments and higher reimbursement rates for accredited care.
- Ensure that all eligible children have access to Early Head Start.
- Provide families with paid parental leave for the first year of a baby's life" (Better Baby Care INTERNET, 10/02/02).

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

*Programs can impact the area of "Critical Investments" through work with a community group rather than by itself.

Moving Forward

Keep abreast of concerns and research regarding child care through journals, conferences and the Internet.

Identify opportunities to serve on a state or regional level work group concerned with some issue in quality child care.

Be willing to present or serve on a panel at community events to inform and update the public on high quality child care and related subjects impacting young children and their families.

Recruit and enlist the help and support of legislators in the community's effort to provide a system of coordinated, comprehensive child care for all young children and their families.

Prepare and circulate press releases for local, regional, and state newspapers, newsletters and other printed materials to update and inform the public on concerns, progress, needs, and vision for a system of quality early child care in the community.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Quality Indicator V.E.4. The program leadership works with the family and community in supporting transitions, respecting each child's unique needs and situation.

Laying the Foundation

All transitions are too important to be left to chance. Adjustments to important transitions are accomplished more effectively when individuals have adequate and reliable information about what to expect and are provided with the appropriate emotional and social support. This is true for adults as well as for children. Life has many transitions or changes such as attending school for the first time, going away to college, beginning a new job, getting married, giving birth, moving, or changing jobs. A great deal of stress can be associated with these changes. Appropriate planning and preparation during any transition can minimize the impact of stress.

In the field of early childhood education, *transition* is used in many different ways. Traditionally, *transition* has been used to describe the period of time that falls between two different types of activities. *Transition* may also be used to describe the time period in which children move from home to program or school, within program or school activities, from one activity to another, or from program to program, program to school, or school to school. Early childhood professionals are concerned with easing all transitions. Sharon Kagan in a summary of a national policy forum further describes transitions as, "Horizontal movement across environments within the same time frame and vertical movement across environments across time" (Kagan 1992, 17).

A key factor in transition is to ensure the continuity in certain key elements that characterize all good early childhood education and care programs. Because of the variety of experiences children and their families go through in the developmental period of life, it would be reasonable to assume that easing the transition process along with ensuring continuity is more

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

efficiently and effectively accomplished through community cooperation and collaboration. Transition practices that are developmentally appropriate and specific to a given situation can be helpful in all transitional situations.

In the journal, *Young Children*, Jerlean E. Daniel writes, "When adults are comfortable with the transitions related to the growth and development of their children, understand children's developmental needs, and structure the children's transitional experiences to include appropriate adult support, early childhood transitions can occur in ways that do not prove to be dysfunctional to children's growth and development" (Daniel 1998, 4).

Getting Started

Procedures for transition are ongoing and not limited to one-time efforts at the end of the program year. The following steps should be considered when looking at and formulating a transition process:

- Assess the existing transition process and procedures in your program. If one does not exist, then develop it.
- Provide staff development training on transitions and their importance.
- Develop strategies for informing and involving parents in the transition process.
- Inform families on their rights and procedures including confidentiality.
- Create confidentiality guidelines that are shared with other programs.
- Encourage families to visit settings where the child is likely to attend.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

- Develop and/or utilize materials that outline what parents should look for in quality programs.
- Gather information concerning other training opportunities on transition and encourage staff and parents to attend.
- Offer training workshops to staff to discuss strategies to effectively communicate with parents of diverse backgrounds.
- Develop written transition agreements with schools and other child care settings that clarify roles, transition responsibilities, and timelines.
- Develop a mentor system in which experienced parents work with newly participating parents.
- Develop a packet of information about the child's progress that the family can take with them to the next program.
- Form special groups or provide other forms of support to parents as they seek to continue to be their children's advocate in new settings.
- Become aware of and inform parents of local education and training on local program options and how to access them.
- Give special assistance to migrant and other culturally and linguistically diverse families in locating services to assure a smooth transition.

Moving Forward

Find information and form relationships with other programs and communities that have made an effort to design and implement a coordinated system of transition.

(Family and Community Partnerships cont.)

Become a member of existing early care and education community efforts.

Showcase successful transition efforts in collaboration with the community.

Take advantage of opportunities to learn more about transition and system planning and implementation through local higher education, conferences, and business seminars.

Review requirements on transition planning and process that are regulated by state and federal law.

Be willing to serve as a transition demonstration site and resource to others.

Quote: "Never doubt that a small group of concerned citizens can change the world, indeed it's the only thing that has."-Margaret Meade