

Building a Partnership with Your Child Care Practitioner

Children learn and grow in the context of relationships. While they are very young, the most important relationships are with you and with the other adults who care for them. They also watch to see what kind of relationship you have with those other adults. When children see their adult caregivers, from both home and day care, cooperating as partners, the transition from one setting to the other happens more smoothly. Children feel more secure and they are able to let their potential unfold freely.

Here are some suggestions for building a successful partnership with your child care practitioner.

- Look for a child care setting that **shares your approach** to bringing up children, one that respects your **values and goals** for your child and that can fulfill his or her **needs**. It will be hard to work with someone if you disagree about fundamentals.
- Choose a program which gives you a feeling of **mutual respect**. You should feel you can respect the **practitioner's experience and knowledge**. In turn, you should feel that you are **respected for your specific knowledge** about your child's unique personality and needs.
- Make sure that you **discuss and agree on operational details right at the beginning**: hours of care, payment, notice about holidays, what to do if the child is sick, etc. It is better if all of these things are **in writing**. Partnerships can break down easily over little misunderstandings that could easily have been avoided.
- Make **your expectations** clear from the beginning too. Let the practitioner know about your approach to routine and discipline, your expectations for learning activities, any special cultural or religious concerns, any medical needs of your child, etc. The program cannot make adjustments for your child if they don't know what you would like.
- Look for a program that has an **open-door policy** and take advantage of it as much as you can. The program should make you feel welcome and comfortable when you visit.
- Maintain **frequent communication** with the program. Let them know how you prefer to communicate (conversations, in writing, e-mails, a communication book, etc.) and also what time is best for you (drop off, pick up, on your lunch hour by phone, in the evening, etc.).
- Tell the practitioner **what is happening at home** both day to day (how your child slept, how much breakfast he ate, where you went on the weekend, etc.) and in general (the child's likes and dislikes, what the child shows interest in, what you enjoy doing together, etc.).
- Be sure to let practitioners know about **changes** which may **cause children to be stressed** (Grandma's coming to visit, big sister started kindergarten, the dog is sick, Dad started shift work, etc.). Under stress, whether it's positive or negative, children's behaviour often gets worse. It's important for practitioners to understand what is going on so they can respond appropriately. For instance, they could read a story about a sick pet and get the child talking about her feelings.
- **Get involved** in whatever way you can, depending on your schedule, interests and talents. Here are a few possibilities: bring in scrap paper for crafts activities; bring cupcakes for your child's birthday; send a special dish for your culture's holiday celebrations; make a tape of yourself singing songs in your home language. Some parents are able to accompany the group on an outing or come to the program to talk to about a special topic. These are opportunities for you and the practitioner to see each other in action.

Successful partnerships depend on an attitude of respect and on clear and frank communication. On this solid base, you can work out common goals and share decision making for your child. Together, you will be able to make the connections between home and day care that will enhance your child's development.

This resource sheet was written by Betsy Mann and first published as a resource sheet for the Canadian Child Care Federation. Find more information about partnerships between families and child care programs at www.cccf-fcsg.ca.

