

Supporting Families: Children Are The Winners

Early childhood professionals can play a critical role in the attitudes parents develop about their child's schooling. Teachers of the very young often establish the first connections parents have to school situations and thus influence parents' attitudes toward involvement. Just as the early years are crucial for children's learning, they are also critical in establishing parents' patterns of involvement. If parents are not involved in their children's early school experiences, it is unlikely that they will become involved as their children grow older (Berger, 1995).

Benefits of Family Involvement

Family involvement in children's learning benefits children, parents, teachers, and program quality in many interrelated ways. These include child competence, parent effectiveness, and program enrichment.

Child Competence

The single most important determinant of a child's success in school is not socio-economic status or parents' level of education, but rather parental interest and support (Watson, et. al, 1983). "Parents who have a support system to rely on are likely to translate their positive human relationships into a productive home learning setting for children" (Watson, et. al., 1983). Supporting parents in their efforts to nurture children, in turn, can lead to increased child competence.

Parent Effectiveness

Parent participation can be "a means of fostering the growth and development of parents as people" (Powell, 1989, p. 6). Parents who participate tend to feel both vested in what happens at school and more effective in their roles as parents. Many parents believe that young children learn best through teacher-directed "instruction," worksheets, and grades. However, by watching and listening to teachers in high-quality programs, parents observe that young children learn best through active engagement in self-initiated activities (Bredenkamp, 1987). In addition, parents have opportunities to learn appropriate methods to nurture development through participation. Through involvement with teachers, parents also can learn positive guidance techniques and appropriate strategies to promote learning at home.

How to Support Families and Encourage Involvement

When early childhood professionals encourage parents to nurture their children, the likelihood that the children will experience success and grow up to be healthy individuals

increases. Supporting families in child rearing begins by forming partnerships based upon mutual respect, shared understanding, and cooperative decision making.

Get to Know the Parents

Early personal contact helps to alleviate parents' and children's apprehension as they begin a new experience. It also conveys the message that children and their families are valued (Gestwicki, 1992). Parent questionnaires can supplement personal contact and highlight parents' questions, concerns, needs, and interests. Regardless of family configuration, background, or challenges, every family has strengths. Knowing families will enable teachers to capitalize on family strengths. Parents who feel a teacher genuinely cares for their child, and wants their child to succeed as much as they do, are likely to view working together favorably and to share information willingly.

Communicate With Parents

Two-way communication allows sharing of information, concerns, and feelings. Frequent two-way communication is essential to establishing rapport, and building understanding, trust, and a sense of collaboration, all of which contribute to a teacher's ability to support parents. Two-way communication can take place during home visits, phone calls, classroom visits, conferences, or brief conversations during drop-off or pick-up times. Be as positive as possible when talking with parents. Share children's accomplishments with them regularly. Even when there are concerns or problems to discuss, begin and end discussions on a positive note.

Consider Parents' Practical Needs

Flexibility in scheduling conferences, school events, and various opportunities for participation increases the likelihood that parents will become involved. This may require special efforts to keep in touch with parents, such as an evening phone call, home visits, parent-teacher dialogue journals, arrangement of transportation and child care, or events scheduled on Saturdays.

Conclusion

Support given to parents goes a long way in mediating the stresses many families experience and in facilitating their abilities to nurture their children. Partnerships between teachers and parents produce mutual benefits, but greatest of all are benefits to the children for whom they care.

For the complete article visit:

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<http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article/view.aspx?ArticleId=644>



Spoon Flowers for a Mother's Day Gift



Materials Needed:

- Styrofoam cup
- Paint
- Tissue paper
- Plastic spoon
- Glue
- Pom poms

Start by cutting out flower petals from tissue paper. The darker color the tissue paper, the better since it won't show the imperfections.



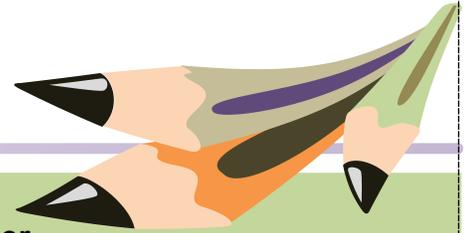
Glue and stick each petal on the spoon (5 in total). Put a glob of glue in the middle and stick on a white or colored pom pom.



Paint the spoon "stem" with green paint as well as the styrofoam cups. On the top, use brown paint to make the "dirt." Once the flowers are dry, stick them in the upside-down cup and you're done!



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Recipe Corner



Ingredients:

- 1/3 cup honey
- 1/4 cup natural peanut butter
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 cup crisp rice cereal
- 1 cup old-fashioned rolled oats
- 1/4 cup dried cranberries
- 1/4 cup chocolate chips

Directions:

1. In a small saucepan over medium heat, combine honey, peanut butter, and butter. Stir until melted and smooth, 1 to 2 minutes. Remove from heat; stir in cereal, oats, and dried cranberries. Let the mixture cool for about two minutes and stir in the chocolate chips.
2. Drop mixture by the tablespoon into mini paper cupcake or candy liners. Place on a rimmed baking sheet, and refrigerate until set, about 15 minutes.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the 2nd Annual Concho Valley Child and Youth Conference! We appreciate all the feedback, as they will assist us in the planning process for next year's Conference, we hope to see you there!!

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