

Parent Involvement

Ideas from the field

Every month, *Exchange* highlights a challenge of the month. On our web site (www.ChildCareExchange.com) we provide solutions from *Exchange* and solutions from the field to this challenge. In January, the challenge was “Involving Parents.” We received over 60 ideas submitted by *Exchange* Panel of 300 members and by visitors to our web site. Below is a small sample of the varied ideas shared:

Pam Tuszynski

**First Presbyterian Church Preschool
 Hollywood, California**

Since we have listening centers in three of our four classrooms, we ask parents to dictate stories or even the child’s favorite story on tape. Then we put it in their child’s classroom. It is a very special way for parents, who do not have a lot of time to do other volunteering, to do something unique for the school. The children love to listen to their parents’ tapes.

Kathy Sarginson

**ABCs of Children’s Care and Education
 Foxboro, Ontario, Canada**

I believe that from the first day of contact the personal daily conversations with parents create the most positive partnership. I have over 23 years as an owner of two centres, and every parent talks not about the activities we did, but the time I took for each family. Through these conversations our team of educa-

tors gains daily insight into the family parenting style and the trials and tribulations they are facing each day. It allows us to lend an ear or offer advice — in turn, parents learn how we treasure their children. To this day when I meet former clients we share these memories.

Marie Darstein

**The Sunshine House
 Rock Hill, South Carolina**

It is critical that parents understand the importance of learning through play. We conduct a mock class with parents where half learn about kiwis with a field trip (to the tree in the hall): smelling, feeling, tasting kiwis. They also discuss how they could use kiwis in other areas of learning (if they were really in a class). The other half of the parents learn about kiwis with a coloring sheet and a brown and green crayon — ugh. It doesn’t take long for them to understand the benefits of learning by doing and having fun at the same time.

Douglas Baird

**Associated Early Care and Education
 Boston, Massachusetts**

We have just begun an alumni association, Forever Friends, which is led by alumni parents.

Sarah Dixon

Pittsboro, North Carolina

I am a home child care provider. We had our first annual Art Exposition. For about three months we did not send any

artwork home. We did many different art projects, including art to wear, painting with tree branches, painting with our feet, and many others. We then sent out invitations to parents, also grandparents. The artwork was placed on the fence of our outdoor play area. The parents were amazed at our projects and spent about two hours asking their children how they did their special projects. There was a lot of conversation, and all the parents became better acquainted.

Kirsten Haugen

Kids Can!

Eugene, Oregon

Our parents and other daytime volunteers easily run center activities and projects because the teachers prepare trays of materials and instructions/guidelines for each volunteer. While the children are in circle, the volunteer looks over the materials and guidelines and is ready to help out.

Our kindergarteners help prepare special activities for parent-teacher conferences. Following each conference, the child takes her parent(s) back to the classroom and introduces them to a few activities which they do together — paint a picture, follow a picture recipe for a simple snack, listen to books on tape, or play a math game together, for instance. The kids enjoy showing their parents a bit of their world, and the parents who can’t drop in during the day get a taste of what goes on.

Lori Davidson

**Alpert Jewish Community Center
Long Beach, California**

We do many of the same activities — barbeques, fundraising, library, classroom volunteers, parent-child learning days, etc. Our most unique event is Parents' Day. Most of the staff go to a conference and the parents plan the morning program from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. They select a theme and create activities for the kids to rotate to. Our school has about 200 students and we have about 60-70 parents who work on the event. Everyone has a great time and the parents come away with increased appreciation of early educators. This is a yearly event.

Raina Jain

**Witty Kids
Mumbai, India**

We organize seminars by eminent pediatricians, various doctors' visits, a movie show for the entire family, various day celebrations, e.g., Grandparents' day, Mother's day, and teachers week.

Mark Bittner

**University of Wyoming Child Care Center
Laramie, Wyoming**

Each semester we have a sign up list for "Special Parent Fridays." We ask the parents to sign up for a Friday that they would like to come for 30 minutes during the day and share something unique with the class. It may be a hobby, talent, unique skill. For instance we have had parents do quilt making, dancing, chemistry, shearing sheep, and building pretend highways. The parents are always a bit nervous at first, but they end up loving it, as do the children!

Lori Harris

**Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center
Child Care Center
Lebanon, New Hampshire**

Since we are on-site at the medical center, classrooms walk over to the cafeteria to have lunch with their parents. We do a "Friday night date night" every month for parents where they can leave their child with our staff and go out with each other. Each classroom does a dinner each year

where the children make all the food and then we invite the parents for dinner.

Judy Chosy

**Smoky Row Childrens' Center
Powell, Ohio**

Invite parents to nominate staff for going "beyond the call of duty." The parent writes something positive about the teacher, and at the beginning of staff meeting it is read in front of the staff. This public and specific recognition is a great way to involve parents in boosting staff morale. If the budget allows, the center might reward the staff with something tangible, like a gift certificate for movie tickets.

Want More Ideas?

Go to our web site and on the home page find the Challenge of the Month section. There you can review the resources from the field for the current challenge of the month as well as past challenges.