Building strong parent partnerships is at the core of high-quality programming. Below are specific teambuilding strategies for you and your staff to consider. Consistently applied, they lay the foundation from which a long-term partnership can flourish.

**Meaningful Communication Counts**

The groundwork for a partnership with parents is laid before the child’s first day of attendance. Warm-up visits are great for parents and children. Help parents know what to expect from your program. Provide a simple, clear parent handbook and enrollment contract. If your orientation packet takes forever for parents to wade through, it may be perceived and overwhelming or intimidating. Consider offering a condensed version of the most frequently asked questions to accompany your handbook.

During the first weeks of a child’s enrollment, provide opportunities for staff and parents to talk about the child’s likes, dislikes, overall temperament, and developmental milestones. If parents can’t meet in person, provide them with a cassette tape to record their thoughts. Let them know you are interested in hearing their personal goals for their children. The point is to open and sustain lines of communication.

Arrival and dismissal times are prime opportunities to connect with parents. Try to have plenty of staff on hand during morning arrival so teachers can greet parents in a relaxed manner and hear how the child’s night and early morning went. The same thing applies to afternoon dismissal. As children wrap up end-of-day free play, teachers should be able to share highlights of the child’s day with parents without feeling rushed.
Help Parents Comply With Program Policies

Most programs identify illnesses that exclude children from attendance. For working parents, finding alternative care arrangements for sick children is often a real problem. If parents don't have family leave to use, provide resources for finding alternate care for an ill or recuperating child. For instance, some communities have backup child programs or a drop-in center for mildly ill children.

Nursing schools, hospitals, or nanny agencies in your community may offer “sitters on call” for parents in need of temporary care. After locating resources in your community, post them on a web site, publish them in your center’s newsletter, or distribute a resource flyer. Most parents want to cooperate in heading center policies regarding ill children; some need more help than others knowing how to do so.

Respond to the unique needs of your parents so they are aware of policies. If it’s easier for parents to read the information in another language, listen to a tape, or log on to a web site, accommodate these special communication needs. It takes time, but being responsive to your clientele strengthens your relationship with parents. There are creative ways for getting such resources developed. Tap into the time and talent of senior volunteers, high school and college students pursuing independent study, and other service groups with specialized expertise.

Invite Parent Assistance

When questions arise or problems occur in dealing with a specific child, capitalize on these opportunities to seek parent input. Be gracious rather than accusatory. Avoid blaming parents. Instead seek their assistance as a valued, informed partner. For instance, ask parents how they think each of you can nurture or reinforce a child’s specific disability.

Include Parents in the Joy of Child Care

Assume parents are shy. Don’t wait for them to offer to participate in the classroom. Go beyond inviting them to just observe or lend an extra pair of hands on a field trip. Distribute surveys to determine parents’ hobbies, skills, or special talents. Then creatively find ways to integrate them into your program. Children, families, and staff build stronger bonds from such shared experiences.

Organize monthly parent-teacher nights with child care provided so parents (and staff who have children of their own) can attend. Offer special events such as family-night out potlucks or parenting workshops. Be sure to include parents in the planning! Working together toward a common goal allows staff and parents to forge friendships in a casual, non-threatening way.

Share Information Regularly

Programs that strive to keep lines of communication open, schedule parent conferences at least twice a year. Make the experience reciprocal by asking parents to think of topics they’d like to discuss. Don’t rush the process. Conferences should allow for at least 30 minutes of uninterrupted conversation. If a developmental checklist is provided, use triplicate forms: one to file and one for each parent. This is particularly important when a child’s parents don’t reside together.

Respect Confidentiality

Child care staff can respond more sensitively to children when they are aware of potentially stressful circumstances occurring in the home. Such events may include separation or divorce, the birth of a sibling, family illness, or even the death of a beloved pet. So that parents will be more likely to inform teachers about such situations, create and distribute a written confidentiality statement. Follow it to build parent trust.

Acknowledge Parent Contributions Whenever Possible

Expressed gratitude, respect, and appreciation go a long way in teambuilding. Help staff develop the habit of acknowledging parents’ positive contributions whenever possible. When teachers do that, parents almost always give the same respect in return. It’s the staff teams are made of.

Karen Stephens is Director of the Illinois State University Child Care Center and early childhood specialist for the ISU Family and Consumer Sciences Department. This article was adapted from her Parenting Exchange column entitled “Parent-child care partnerships: Teambuilding steps to take.” That column-distributed electronically-gives parents suggestions for building respectful partnerships with program staff. Log on to www.childcareexchange.com.
Dear Parents,

This questionnaire is designed to find out how we are meeting needs of families enrolled in our program. Your candid and honest responses will enable us to improve communication and services for you and your child. Please circle the numeral from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) that best represents your feelings regarding each of the statements below.

1. I have received adequate information about program policies and procedures.
2. My child received a warm introduction into the program.
3. Teachers encourage me to be actively involved in my child’s learning.
4. I am regularly informed about my child’s development.
5. Classroom newsletters and teachers’ written notes keep me well informed.
6. I have had sufficient opportunity for informal conversations with the teaching and administrative staff.
7. My parent-teacher conferences have provided me with useful insights about my child.
8. I have been invited to participate in classroom activities and field trips.

How has your child benefited from his/her experience at this center?

In what ways could we improve the program to better meet your child’s needs?

Planning Ahead

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NLU Courses for Directors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spring Term begins</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 7, 2003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Online Courses</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ECE512 (2 s.h.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood Curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECE593 (2 s.h.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar: Early Childhood Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FND505 (2 s.h.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary Issues in Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>On-Campus Courses</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ECE510 (3 s.h.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child, Family, and Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECE593 (2 s.h.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminar: Early Childhood Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPS500A (3 s.h.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Development with a Focus on Early Childhood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For more information about the Early Childhood Administration degree program, contact Doug Clark at dclark@nl.edu or (800) 443-5522, ext. 7711

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Development Opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Directors’ Technology Training</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>March – April 2003</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Made possible by funding from IDHS, the goal of Directors’ Technology Training is to improve the computer skills of directors and increase their access to management resources through the Internet. Each seven-day training event is limited to 12 participants and priority is given to directors whose programs serve IDHS-funded children. Registration of $65 includes all course materials.

- **Introductory Training**
  - Location: Northern Illinois University – Rockford
    8500 East State Street, Rockford, IL
  - Dates: March 25, 26, and April 1, 2, 8, 9, 15

Participants may earn 2 s.h. of graduate credit (ECE534) by paying an additional $470.

- **Intermediate Training**
  - Location: National-Louis University-Wheaton Campus
    200 S. Naperville Road, Wheaton, IL
  - Dates: May 21, 28, 30, and June 4, 6, 11, 13

Prerequisite: ECE534. Participants may earn 2 s.h. of graduate credit (ECE535) by paying an additional $470.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Winter Management Institute: Family-Friendly Directors</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>February 28 – March 1, 2003</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you are interested in examining and improving your center’s policies and practices from a family-responsive lens, this institute is for you! Center directors, assistant directors, curriculum coordinators, and owners of child care programs are encouraged to attend. Guest instructors Lila Goldston, Eileen Eisenberg, and Karen Stephens will present two exciting days of practical information to help you strengthen your center’s policies and practices to become more family centered.

If your center serves AT&T families, you are eligible to receive a scholarship covering all costs for this family-friendly institute, plus lodging, follow-up on-site technical assistance, technology support, and registration and housing for the Leadership Connections statewide directors’ conference in May 2003. You will also be eligible to receive a quality enhancement grant for your center.

- **Location**: Center for Early Childhood Leadership
  National-Louis University
  Wheeling Campus Annex
- **Dates**: February 28, 8:30 a.m. - 8:30 p.m
  March 1, 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Registration is $199. This fee includes full participation in the training, handouts, and meals.

Participants may earn 2 s.h. of graduate credit by paying an additional fee and completing follow-assignments.

For more information about these training opportunities, contact Eileen Eisenberg at eisenberg@nl.edu or (800) 443-5522, ext. 7703

---

Attending the Chicago Metro AEYC Conference?

Be sure to join our **Suite Talk**
hosted by CECL
Thursday, January 30, 2003
3:00 - 4:30 pm
Chicago Hilton & Towers
Imperial Suite North
www.chicagometroaeyc.org

---

The Director’s Link Winter 2003
Since 1985, NAEYC’s accreditation system has grown significantly bringing notable improvements to programs serving young children and their families. During the past two years, the leadership of NAEYC has engaged in a thorough evaluation of the accreditation system, looking at the scope and goals of the system as well as the process by which programs move through self-study to achieve accreditation status. Changes recently approved by the Governing Board of NAEYC will help achieve three broad goals:

- Establish NAEYC accreditation as the standard bearer for program excellence;
- Improve accountability for families and other stakeholders; and
- Build recognition for the value of NAEYC accreditation and NAEYC-accredited programs.

The next era of NAEYC accreditation will affirm accreditation as a force for improving children’s well-being and early learning. The recommended changes will also ensure that NAEYC accreditation remains the most reliable and accountable way to recognize quality early education programs.

Some of the first changes focus on improving service to programs that are seeking NAEYC accreditation. Among the anticipated enhancements are expansion of the Academy staff and leadership, new communications networks and strategies to get information to programs, and new software to schedule program visits.

The NAEYC Governing Board appointed 10 members to the newly formed Commission on NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria. Members of the Commission will recommend new early childhood program standards and update NAEYC’s accreditation criteria for programs.

The Commission will help strengthen the system by establishing program standards that identify the essential characteristics of high-quality programs that programs must meet in order to be accredited by NAEYC. Over an 18-month period, they will meet regularly to develop new standards and criteria for consideration by the Board.

The changes that are being made will increase the accountability of the NAEYC accreditation system. They will also help more early childhood educators make improvements in their programs. They will encourage policymakers, employers, and others to support program improvements, and will inspire more parents and families to insist on high-quality NAEYC-accredited programs for their children.

These changes reflect a reinvented vision and mission for NAEYC accreditation. They call on families, community officials, and early childhood professionals everywhere to work together to ensure that many more children benefit from high-quality early learning experiences—now and in the future.

For more information about NAEYC accreditation, visit www.naeyc.org/accreditation.

The Accreditation Corner

**NAEYC Accreditation: The Next Era**

The Accreditation Corner

**Take Time Out with the Experts Online!**

The Center for Early Childhood Leadership will host four nationally renowned early childhood experts on its Web site discussion forum *Time Out!* This is your opportunity to chat with the people who have written the books and helped shape early childhood policy and practice.

**Monday, February 3 – Saturday, February 8**

Guest expert: Cara Levinson, Attorney

*ADA Law: New Developments for Center Directors*

**Monday, March 3 – Saturday, March 8**

Guest expert: Karen Stephens, Illinois State University Lab School Director and Columnist

*Promoting Your Family-Friendly Program*

**Monday, April 21 – Saturday, April 26**

Guest expert: Judy Harris Helm, Best Practices, Inc. Author and Training Consultant

*Meaningful Activities and Experiences for Children*

**Monday, May 19 – Saturday, May 24**

Guest expert: Chip Donohue, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, *The Role of Technology in Early Childhood Professional Development: Obstacles and Opportunities*

Each expert will be the featured guest for a week-long open discussion on issues of interest to center directors. Check out the Center’s Web site (www.nl.edu/cecl) for information about how to log on.
Throughout her life as an early childhood professional, Sallee Beneke's personal journey has taken her far. On the road to her current post as the Director of the Early Childhood Education Center at Illinois Valley Community College in Oglesby, Illinois, she has worked as a master teacher, prekindergarten at-risk teacher, and an early childhood special education teacher. Besides leading the lab school at IVCC, Sallee also teaches a course in Documentation Practices and the Project Approach and supports student teachers as they implement those practices at the Early Childhood Education Center.

Under the Sallee’s leadership, the lab school at IVCC has become a model program in every way: earning NAEYC accreditation, being selected as a pilot site for implementation of the Work Sampling System-Illinois (WSS-IL) assessment tool, and for its literacy development practices which garnered the attention of Newsweek magazine in April 2002. “The Newsweek story was really exciting for us,” said Sallee. “It was great to receive the recognition for our program and our teachers.” The IVCC program will also be highlighted in the January 2003 issue of Young Children in a feature on meeting math standards for young children.

Sallee is also the author of Rearview Mirror: Reflections on a Preschool Car Project, and co-author of Windows on Learning: Documenting Young Children’s Work. She is a member of the editorial review board for Early Childhood Research and Practice, the online journal published by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education.

Sallee’s path has wandered through the heartland, with stops in Iowa for college and in Oklahoma while her husband Bill attended law school. It was during Bill’s schooling that Sallee got her first taste of early childhood education as a preschool classroom assistant. She soon went on to earn a CDA, then early childhood teaching certification, a special education endorsement, and most recently a master’s degree in Early Childhood Curriculum and Instruction from the University of Illinois.

Sallee’s journey, has been amazing, but even more remarkable is how she has managed to stay connected with her hometown roots. Today, Sallee resides with her family in the 140-year-old house that she grew up in. Her four children represent the sixth generation in her family’s lineage to live in the house. “This was always a dream of mine,” says Sallee, “I love living in the small town that I grew up in. I feel so connected here, and I think this sense of “where I fit in” gives me a lot of strength.”

Even though the road has made a full circle, Sallee’s journey continues. If you ask her, she’ll tell you she is enjoying the best of both worlds. At the moment, she is planning the science area for the model classroom to be presented by ISBE at the next Midwest AEYC conference, and is dreaming about the next house makeover project on her list. In her words, “I feel very fortunate that I’ve been able to raise my children here, while at the same time I’ve been able to participate in cutting edge projects in the field of early childhood.”

Don’t miss out on this highly acclaimed professional development opportunity for early childhood leaders.

- Three stimulating days of training, exhibits, networking, and fun.
- Meet and learn from national experts in leadership and program management.

Your local CCR&R may have professional development funds to sponsor your attendance at Leadership Connections. For registration information, contact Jill Bella at (800) 443-5522, ext. 7706 or by e-mailing jbella@nl.edu. A conference brochure and registration form can also be downloaded from our Web site www.nl.edu/cecl.