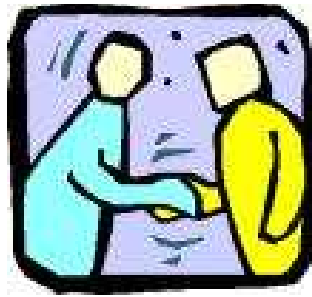


# *Making Connections with Parents*



**A Handbook of  
Tips and Suggestions for  
Involving and Following-Up  
with Parents**



## *Making Connections with Parents*

is a handbook developed for everyone who provides a program or service to assist Parents in their role as Parents.

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[www.prevention.gc.ca](http://www.prevention.gc.ca)

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### A Special Acknowledgment

We are especially grateful to Rick Morris whose commitment to building and believing in community organizations and supporting the community in general, will forever be remembered .

During phase one of this project, Rick and his team identified the need for supporting and following up with parents. As a result of his contributions and inspiration, we affectionately dedicate this handbook to the memory of Rick.

It is our hope that **Making Connections with Parents** will assist in your engagement and follow-up with parents in your community.

This resource was developed by Lynn Voisey Smyth for the St. John's Parenting Skills Services Project Steering Committee.

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## Introduction

*The bond between a parent and child is everlasting, while a parent's influence on a child's life long success is most powerful.*

Welcome to *"Making Connections With Parents"* . This handbook contains tips and suggestions for involving and following-up with parents using your programs and services.

Over the past decade, a great deal of attention has been paid to positive parenting and its value on the well being of children and adolescents. The research on this topic shows that poor parenting, family conflict and marriage breakdown increases the risk for developing behavioural and emotional insecurity in children. These factors often result in substance abuse, antisocial behaviour and juvenile crime, not to mention interfering with the development of self confidence.

In phase one of the St. John's Parenting Skills Services Project, a recommendation was made to develop a handbook addressing techniques to involve and follow-up with parents. It is our hope that the tips and suggestions contained in this handbook will add to your strategies to involve and follow-up with parents accessing your programs and services .

This handbook concludes with a list of community programs, services and resources from which we drew our information. We believe this handbook and these resources available to you can make a positive difference in parenting practices.

The world of parenting is vast and the need to be everything to every parent is impossible to meet. As with most initiatives of this nature, there is always more that can be written. We believe the components of this handbook can be used to stand alone, or can fit together as a coherent whole. Our intended audience are groups, organizations and individuals working in support of parents of young children and adolescents.

## SECTION 1

### *How “Making Connections with Parents” can be helpful to you.*

Parenting quite often comes with little preparation beyond the parenting influences they themselves received from their parents. Most of the learning is “on the job training” and can become quite difficult in the absence of extended family support or community programs. The role of positive parenting is vital to the well - being of children, adolescents and families in general. Supporting parents in their role as parents is truly a valuable and worthy goal.

### *Making Connections with Parents* , can be helpful to you:

- ▶ When encouraging individuals to take that first step to participate in your program;
- ▶ As a reinforcement to use respectful approaches when supporting parents;
- ▶ While "following -up" with parents and encouraging continued participation;
- ▶ In recognizing the importance of inclusiveness with all parents;
- ▶ By offering respectful and effective methods for gathering information and following-up.

### *Making Connections with Parents* takes a number of approaches:

- ▶ It recognizes the barriers that exist to successful parent involvement;
- ▶ It provides Guiding Principles and The Values of Parent Support that you can use as handouts or with other resources;
- ▶ The tips and suggestions can serve as additional methods that you use to help create successful parent involvement and the follow-up suggestions can encourage parents to remain involved;
- ▶ It provides resource and activity sheets to use to support involvement activities.

## **Guiding Principles when Engaging Parents**

### **Inclusiveness**

An inclusive approach to service delivery ensures that all parents from all socio-economic levels and sectors of society are encouraged to access such services.

Inclusiveness fosters a sense of safety and inclusion for parents with clear, consistent messages that your support is positive and beneficial for them, their children and their communities.

### **Accessibility**

Ideally, all proposed services/programs must be accessible to all parents, child care providers, and families. The term accessibility relates to persons who may require specific physical access, accommodations, other information or services. It also applies to any parent who has to consider the distance to travel to access services, time constraints, childcare, and other supports to participate.

### **Affordability**

Affordability speaks to the need to ensure that people are not prevented from accessing services/programs because they are unable to do so financially due to associated costs. Transportation and childcare are two such examples.

### **Respect**

There is an inherent need for parents to feel worthy as individuals and to be recognized for the value of their roles in their children's lives. Parents can be honored in their parenting activities without judgement. Celebrate parents and the important role they have in the lives of their children without judging their parenting abilities.

The collective abilities to collaborate and cooperate, as well as to offer support to each other, are crucial to the success and on-going benefits accrued to parents and their children.

Respect among the services and programs will enhance the ability to enrich the experience by collaborating with other individuals and organizations.

## *The Values of a Peer Parent Support Model*

<b><i>Equal</i></b>	We all have something to learn from each other's experiences and knowledge.
<b><i>Realistic</i></b>	A "grounded" focus on parents as people and the provision of support, encouragement and information.
<b><i>Empowering</i></b>	It is important to help foster positive self-esteem and self-confidence in parents.
<b><i>Inclusive</i></b>	Programs and services should be available to any parent wishing to participate, rather than targeted exclusively to any one population labeled as "needing improvement."
<b><i>Strengths-based</i></b>	Recognize and build on the strengths and expertise of parents, rather than looking only at the negatives or areas of "lack."
<b><i>Non-judgmental</i></b>	Accept parents for who they are and where they are. Strive to be open and accepting of different ways of doing things.
<b><i>Sensitive</i></b>	Parents exist in many different kinds of families in many unique situations. Be sensitive to the many different and unique needs. It is important to promote sensitivity to and awareness of, the range of parents' needs, circumstances, cultural background and more.
<b><i>Responsive</i></b>	Value feedback and be flexible enough to respond where possible.
<b><i>Informative</i></b>	Recognizing that knowledge is power, aim to inform parents about programs, services, information and opportunities that may be helpful to them.
<b><i>Respectful</i></b>	Respect is about building a trusting relationship at a pace that is set by the parents themselves. Their need and level of safety, comfort and readiness sets the tone and pace for peer relationships.
<b><i>Reaching Out</i></b>	Reach out rather than wait for parents to "come in" to programs.

## *The Benefits of Parent Involvement*

### *Parent Involvement :*

- *builds on their knowledge and skills*
- *enhances the lives of family members*
- *creates a sense of belonging*
- *offers a sense of accomplishment*
- *increases self confidence to affect change*
- *provides parents with opportunities to effect meaningful change*
- *provides opportunities to network with other families and providers*
- *promotes the model of community collaboration*
- *makes programs and services accountable to families*
- *increases a sense of personal power*
- *offers leadership role models for other families*

*Adapted from "Making Room at the Table", Family Resource Coalition of America, 1998.*

## SECTION 2

### *Barriers that Prevent Parent Involvement.*

Those of us who are parents or who are close to parents, recognize the many joys associated with parenthood. Yet parenting today can be quite an uphill struggle, especially when economic stress, raising a family as a single parent, cultural and language barriers, to name only a few, can create challenges.

The following barriers do not fully represent everything that parents face , however, recognizing these may help bring light to the subject of low parental involvement. This list is a compilation of parent input, individual interviews with service providers and through other published resources.

1. Minority families often find that language and cultural differences interfere with their motivation and comfort level to get involved.
2. Newcomers to our country may have a different perception of professional roles and may feel intimidated by someone approaching them in a professional manner.
3. There is sometimes shame connected to a feeling of lacking parenting skills. Not wanting to be exposed as a “bad parent” can often be a barrier to involvement.
4. Lacking an understanding of how to support your child’s development can be embarrassing, especially when faced with such things as parent/teacher interviews or formal evaluations.
5. Parents are primarily concerned with day to day survival. Food, clothing, housing, and the lack of time to pay attention to individual needs can be a major barrier.
6. Scheduling of programs can sometimes interfere with such things as: unavailability due to work, missed wages or homework support.
7. Safety issues for evening functions can be a concern due to such things as dangerous neighborhoods.
8. Child care may not be available, affordable or may be difficult to arrange.

9. Transportation is often unavailable and not affordable.
10. Parents may feel intimidated if expected to speak out in group sessions. Some parents may have low literacy or educational experiences and fear attention may be drawn to that.
11. Parents may feel they have a lack of knowledge or education when speaking with a professional on a topic. There may be a feeling that the professional has all the answers and the parent has none.
12. Parents may feel judged by occupation, economic status, marital status, immigrant status, culture shock, and behavioural history. Not looking at the strengths and interests as a person can create a barrier.
13. Family values and beliefs may differ from those of others.
14. Professional language, jargon or acronyms may create an immediate distance between the contact person and the parent.
15. Parents may have limited opportunities to relate with other parents on their own and without the professionals being there.
16. Parents may have a lack of or knowledge of available resources, such as, child care, transportation or a homework program in a community centre.
17. Not knowing there are other ways in which to become familiar with your program before getting involved in more specific areas. For example, drop in playgroups, resource libraries, computer access, information packages, volunteer opportunities and other family fun activities.
18. A parent's partner may be resistance to get involved.
19. Parents may experience fear of potential abuse or criticism from a partner or family member if you get involved.
20. Parents may fear losing benefits and resources if they accept support from other sources.



## ***Removing Barriers and Sharing Their Stories***

Your action in recognizing and helping to remove barriers is necessary for the success of parent involvement. Looking through the eye's of a parent , getting to know their strengths, interests and attitudes are effective first steps. Parents will more readily participate if the activities suit their needs or recognize their strengths as valuable contributors.

### ***The Stories***

There is no single best way to interest parents to become involved or to create collaboration within your program, however you can decide on a variety of ways that may work for you.

To help in the design of this booklet and to get a better sense of effective ways in which to involve parents , individual and small group discussions were held with parents and service providers. A questionnaire was distributed at the beginning of each session to help generate this discussion. During these discussions, many new discoveries were made. Providing this opportunity for parents to share their stories and give their opinions brought recognition to the value of working collaboratively. They agreed that communicating with each other and being part of a decision making process created an all around respect and an awareness of equality.

\*A sample of the questionnaire is included in the appendix. It is easy to read and presented in clear language.

### ***Here are some of the things Parents told us:***

*"It is important for professionals to view parents as equal partners. We can learn from them and they can learn from us."*

*"The more involvement we have, the more we discover what we can do and how we can contribute."*

*"Professionals need to reach out and invite parents to help make decisions ."*

*"Involving our own brothers and sisters, other family members, and friends is important to us."*

*Sometimes they know more about us then we know about ourselves. That way they can encourage us to stick with it."*

*"Professionals can encourage parents to look at the "big picture" and then we fill in the pieces."*

*"To make parents as strong as can be, they need to be empowered to speak out and to be included as respected, legitimate partners in creating change."*

The following came from a number of parents who willingly told their stories and recognized that sharing these stories with their peers was an effective way to deal with some of their parenting issues rather than feeling analyzed.

*We moved from Ontario three years ago. My husband found work on the "rigs" and was gone for three weeks at a time. It was so lonely. I had no family only some of his friends that I didn't know very well. Some nights I would cry and cry when I got the kids to bed. I didn't have anyone to call. Once my kids got in school, I started to meet other parents and started some new friendships. I found out from them where there were other programs that connected me with other parents. That really helped. My children have lots of friends now too and I don't feel as lonely.*

*Where do you go when the kids are stuck in the house all day and they are driving you crazy? frustrated I found out about a family resource centre about 3 miles away. I got the nerve to call and they told me I could come to a playgroup . One day I put the kids in the stroller, got a bus and went to the place. The kids had a great time playing and I got to meet other moms. I found out two things. One was the playgroups were free and the centre was able to help me with transportation. There were lots of things for me to do to help out at the centre. Now I volunteer at the Saturday playgroups and this year I helped organize a parent conference. I feel like I am doing something worthwhile and I'm giving back to the community.*

*It is hard to find a place to meet other dads or to take my children out when they visit me? I am a single dad and I only see my children on weekends for now. I need a place to go when they are with me and I also want a place to go to meet up with other parents. During my divorce, I realized that I had a fight on my hands to get shared custody. I don't think dad's rights to be involved with their kids are respected.*

*I am a single Mother. It is really hard to do everything that gives your kid's a good life. I try my best but nobody gave me the instruction manual to do it on my own. I came from a family where my mother and father were always fighting, and I said "no way", my child is not going to go through the same thing. That's why his dad is not on the scene. We couldn't agree on anything and he started shouting at my kid all the time . I just want to know if I am doing the right thing. but I am afraid to call someone for advice. I know I am a good mother but I don't want anyone to judge me because I am single.*

*As a counselor, I hear about all kinds of family relationships. I believe in listening and offering whatever healthy alternatives are available. Having a way to find out what exists in our community in relation to community programs and services is very helpful for me to know so that I can inform parents as to what is available to them.*

*We have started a dad's group. We did a lot of research into involving dad's as dad's and began this group a year ago. The discoveries we have made about the images that dad's and society have about dad's is a real eye opener. The group methods that we have used are valuable in generating discussions and taking a closer look at the father's role, interaction and effects on his children. Making an extra effort to create a personal connection really helps in keeping them coming back.*

*Our children don't need to be "fixed". Parents and teachers need to get better at communicating and respecting each other and then they will do better at what they do.*

*Of all the jobs in the world, being a good parent is a big job. When I am facing some of the ever day challenges and the kids are demanding something, then remembering to be positive with them is not easy. My public health nurse connected me to a whole lot of programs where I can find other parents to talk to and can get lots of information on how to do it right.*

## SECTION 3

### **Taking a Collaborative Approach**

The *Capacity Building* and *Collaboration* literature for involving parents is about acceptance, relationships, respect and action. Therefore, parents' contributions to the design and implementation of any program in which they are involved is fundamental to its success.

Our attitudes that support community collaboration reinforce our values in supporting the roles of parents which serve as wonderful models for our children and our community. The concept of capacity building and collaboration is growing and as we strive to be more open, inclusive and accepting of each other, successful parent involvement is surfacing. Recognizing and respecting each other's strengths, expertise, needs and sharing of resources is a true indicator of collaboration.

The following "Values Supporting Collaboration" can be useful to you and your parents when defining "collaboration."

## **Values Supporting Collaboration**

### **Partnerships**

The relationship between families and professionals is one of equality and respect, resulting in the creation of a mutually beneficial partnership.

Success comes from promoting the excellence of all partners.

### **Empowerment**

Parents are their own best advocates. They are part of the decision making process on a collaborative team.

Parents who are confident and competent, empower their children to achieve success and well being.

### **Family Strengths**

Families are assets – not barriers to overcome or work around. They are a vital resource to themselves and to one another. Programs build on these family strengths.

Seeking services and resources is considered a sign of strength.

### **Cultural Competence**

Community-based programs that respect cultural diversity are culturally and socially relevant to the families they serve.

Respect is possible when each family's culture is valued and recognized.

## Getting to know your Parent Community

Knowing who the parents in your community are is a key to involving them.

Talk with groups of parents to learn about their:

- ▶ cultural backgrounds,
- ▶ primary languages,
- ▶ strengths, interests, skills and expertise
- ▶ their daily life activities,
- ▶ their daily life stresses, needs, what they want for themselves and their families,
- ▶ their employment status,
- ▶ time availability

Getting to know your parents influences your planning for future involvement .

### How can you do this?

- knock on doors and invite them to a family event or a luncheon (with on site child care provided);
- put flyers or questionnaires in their mailboxes (with a location where they can be returned or a self stamped addressed envelope);
- do a community door to door survey of their interests;
- give a presentation at their next community centre meeting;
- walk around with a wagon of attractive information or resources to strike up their interest;
- network with other community resources about who you are such as the local convenience store, the community centre, or the church. Often, these community places know the individuals in the community best and can support you in spreading the word.
- call them and invite them to a family friendly place to meet with you.



Using word-of-mouth is often said to be the best way to strike up the interest of parents. Consider additional strategies that can be used to draw attention to your program.

- newspaper articles, and coffee news;
- radio and television announcements;
- posters, brochures , flyers distributed and hung in places where parents go;
- schools, child care programs, doctor's offices, churches;
- community health programs and family resource centres;
- recreation facilities and even laundromats;
- door -to- door information sharing, phone calls, mail outs, home visits;
- web-sites, directories and asking community agencies to refer parents.

The strategies you use for involving parents should match the needs and characteristics of the community. No matter which methods are used to interest parents, personal contact should be made at some point . Such contact is invaluable in promoting full parent participation in the program.

**\*A special note.** When considering doing questionnaires or surveys of any type, confidentiality is an important issue to consider. There is a sample confidentiality statement included in the appendix of this handbook that may be a useful tool for you to use when developing a confidentiality policy with your organization.

Confidentiality is:

The right to privacy and is a fundamental value in all democratic societies. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom recognizes the importance of preserving privacy in a free society.

## SECTION 4



### **The Top Twenty Tips to Successful Parent Involvement**

The “Beginning Process” may be one of your most difficult tasks . Striking up the interest with parents and encouraging them to engage in the activities you are offering will take planning. Here are a few more helpful tips for your approach:

1. Selecting an individual whom you know has a friendly, open and positive approach is a great first step. A welcoming attitude influences an individual’s willingness to be receptive .
2. Making an extra effort to create a personal connection will leave a true impression that you really want them to join you. The telephone is an effective way to begin.
3. When you are making the initial contact, honesty can be your best policy. Along with your friendly approach, letting the parent know where you got their name and why you are calling brings clarity to your intention right away.
4. Identify your goals. Let the parent know what you hope to accomplish by the end of your conversation. Set the stage for a positive response by letting the parent know what your first meeting will involve and what benefit it will be to them.
5. Personalize any written information such as a notice or an invitation.
6. If a parent is making the initial contact with you, reinforce their contact by responding positively. An example could be: “I’m glad you called. This is a great way to describe who we are and to find out what interests you have in our program.”
7. Using easy- to- understand language can generate a more positive response. Often the use of professional language or acronyms may create an immediate distance between you that you are trying to avoid. Using polite, everyday language will also create a friendly and less formal approach.
8. Parents are more likely to take an interest in becoming involved in your program

if they already know someone who is or has been involved . Create opportunities for this parent to meet with other parents. There may be a social that is coming up, a playgroup they can attend or you may have a peer support in mind. Parents relate better to other parents who had similar experiences. A neighbourhood coffee house is a great place to meet.

9. Explore their strengths and interests by asking what they would like to gain from your program. Helping a parent recognize their strengths often encourages a sense of empowerment and self confidence.(A strengths and interests sheet is attached in the appendix which you may find helpful in gathering this information.)
10. Offer to send a newsletter or brochure that explains the activities of the program further, or invite them to drop by (if it is possible)and pick up this information. Dropping by your centre or site can be an effective way to become familiar with a new setting.
11. Better still, you swinging by their home with the information may create a more familiar way to get to know each other. That should of course, be with the parent's permission.
12. Highlighting success stories in your newsletter and the benefits that other parents have gained during your program meetings helps your reader to visualize themselves in that same situation.  
*\*A note about newsletters or other information.* Because you are reaching out to a broad audience, remember to keep your newsletters informative, easy to read and clear. A one or two page newsletter is plenty. Keep in mind that many in your audience may only have two or three minutes of time available to read your information.
13. Let the parent know what other family supports you have available that may influence their participation. You may have the resources to offer dinner, child care or transportation. You may have the ability to reimburse any expenses they may incur to get to you or you may know of someone coming your way from whom they can hitch a ride.

14. If the parent is coming to meet you, have a warm, friendly area set-up where you can meet. If the children need to come along, a number of books, toys and other child related activities can be added to the setting. ( An early childhood educator or family resource centre practitioner can give you great advice with this type of set-up.) A warm, friendly environment helps to create a relaxing atmosphere.
15. An individual who is most comfortable using e-mail as a way to communicate may be a consideration. Ask the parent once you have made contact, which way is the most comfortable communication tool to use.
16. If you have a web-site and the parent has accessibility to the internet, you can suggest they look up the web-site for additional information. Make sure you direct them to the menu item that will give them what they need to know.
17. Have another parent as a peer support. There may be a parent involved in your program who can act as a peer support to the new parent. Often someone who has used your program or who you know has had similar experiences may be the best person to make that contact.
18. Your location and how they can get to you is always helpful . You can help find the closet bus route to you, describe to them what your building looks like, and inquire as to whether or not they require anything special to participate. Letting them know they are welcome to drop by is often a positive strategy.
19. Make special efforts to ensure the confidentiality of individual situations is respected by all those interacting with individual parents as well as parent groups.
20. Don't forget the "Three F's": Food, Friends, and Fun. A wonderful magic formula that always create a relaxing and welcoming atmosphere.

*Leave a lasting impression. Your friendly approach and positive attitude will show your sincerity in having parents use your resources.*



## Including all Parents



The world of parenting is vast and the need to be inclusive of all parents is a difficult challenge to meet.

Inclusion can mean many things. It can mean eliminating barriers, creating group memberships, facilitating positive relationships, acceptance and respect. It can also mean having rights respected, influencing high self-esteem, a sense of belonging and celebrating differences. Providing a safe forum for all parents can be a challenge. Here are a few additional tips to help ensure that you have included everyone .

- ☺ Welcome newcomer families by calling, visiting or inviting them to a social event that you may be having. Introducing them to parents of the same culture or with a parent who speaks their language is a valuable involvement tool. Inviting them to bring a cultural dish is a good way to contribute and strike up the interests of others. Newcomers to Canada often appreciate a helping hand from home visitors or outreach workers.
- ☺ Act as a liaison between parents and other agencies that provide services from which the individual may benefit. This may be helpful when individuals have cultural or language barriers or are intimidated by first meetings.
- ☺ Stay current with issues that address racism, sexism, homophobia, and other types of prejudice and discrimination in our society. This can be a positive strategy when support is needed.
- ☺ Provide a supportive environment for parents who may have difficulty accessing programs regularly. Some suggestions are:
  - ▶ Involving Dads - a special effort to involve dads might be required due to such circumstances as custody sharing or reinforcing the role of dads. Often there are limited places for dads in particular to find support from each other or to spend time on their own with the children.
  - ▶ Schedule home visits at times that are convenient for families. Appreciate the scrutiny that some parents go through. If home visits are necessary, reduce unnecessary intrusions by calling ahead or collaborating with other agencies who may be involved and combine your visits.

- ▶ Accessibility may be difficult for some parents who experience physical challenges. Bringing you to them can be a great support .
- ▶ Encourage parents who have children with special needs participate in your programs. Encourage these parents to sit on advocacy committees, policy making groups, or special committees where their voices will have additional strength.
- ▶ Include foster families in parent events or programs . Their involvement as foster parents can help recognize the important role they play in making the family a success and in providing a safe—if only temporary—home.
- ▶ Parenting programs and information sharing can be designed and offered to support incarcerated parents . There are many parenting programs that can be offered through self study, the internet or through distance education. Volunteers, parent program facilitators and other support personnel who have regular contact with incarcerated parents will more likely help to open their minds to learning concepts and ideas that will build on their parenting practices. Including their families' participation in some of these activities will keep a closer connection between them during their incarceration.

**Something important to remember before you say your goodbyes during the initial contact:**

- ▶ Let the parent know that you will be following-up with a telephone call, e-mail or other communication form. Within a week is a sensible time period, allowing them time to have read your materials and absorbed the information.
- ▶ Leave your contact information, just in case they want to contact you. They may have further questions or have identified other resources they may need to participate.
- ▶ Let them know how much you enjoyed meeting with them.

## SECTION 5

### A Strengths-Based Activity

Recognizing personal interests and strengths is often a helpful beginning to involve parents. Everyone has strengths and helping parents understand their own strengths builds their confidence and supports positive parent interactions.

The following is a SAMPLE checklist that may be helpful to use during your initial contact or when you first meet face to face. This checklist can help to gather simple yet important information on an individual's strengths and interests to helping to build the foundation in your relationship. This information can become helpful reminders for your first follow-up. The checklist and a sample of a clear language survey can be found in the appendix for your usage when gathering information from parents.

*"The greatest good we can do for others  
is not just to share our riches with  
them, but to reveal theirs to themselves"*

Sister Judith

# Sample

A Checklist of Interests, Strengths and Resources to encourage  
the involvement of Parents

Name of Parent:	Mary Jones	Date of contact: Oct. 1,2005
Contact Information:	111 St.John's Place	Telephone: 777-8888
Who contacted whom:	She called our centre looking for information on kindergarten readiness	
How will follow-up be made?	By telephone next week	

First time contact

Areas of Interests	Strengths	Resources needed	What kind of a follow-up can take place
would like to participate in the evening sessions	is comfortable meeting new people	child care is a barrier	call the Family Child Care Agency
would like to meet another parent as Peer support			
	enjoys using the internet to find information		send a brochure for additional information
	has own transportation	an accessible entrance is essential	

## Follow-Up Suggestions

Now that you have made the connection with parents and have started to build a relationship, following - up is very important. It reinforces that you are interested in having them involved in your program.

Following-up comes in many forms and occurs at a number of stages during the engagement process.

1. Call again. Remember to use clear language during your follow-up.
2. Inform parents of upcoming programs or other events that may be of interest to them. Bulletins, newsletters or e-mails can be less formal but effective follow-up methods. It is important to let the parent know that you will continue to share information.
3. Encourage parents to contact you if they have any questions or would like additional information. Try to have a friendly, real voice answer your phone. It brings a personal flavour, especially to those who had difficulty initiating the call.
4. Make sure you leave your contact information during that initial contact. Sending that parent a card that includes your telephone number, mailing address and e-mail address is a great follow-up method. A fridge magnet as a promotional tool will help to keep this information at hand.
5. It is important that you have gone through your checklist prior to your follow-up to see what resources or arrangements you can provide to influence their participation. This kind of follow-up demonstrates your sincerity to help meet that parent's interests or needs.
6. During your follow-up contact, offer to share more information about the program. Who is involved, what the setting is like, sharing other resources and ideas that will encourage participation.
7. Let this parent know there are other parents in your program they can contact if they would like to find out more about what you are offering.
8. Call with a date, a time and a place where your first meeting will be taking place. Another call the day before the event is always a good reminder.
9. Invite other family members or friends to come along (if appropriate to the

event) or encourage them to call with any questions or information they may have to help is a successful involvement strategy for the parent.

10. Don't forget to mention the three F's: the food, the fun and the friendship.

## **Preparing for your first meeting**

During your initial contact, ask the parent to prepare ahead of time some questions or ideas that may help in the development of your partnership.

- ▶ Encourage the parent to ask their child or partner if there is anything that he/she would like you to have discussed. Any input or ideas they have can make this meeting successful.
- ▶ Ask the parent to jot down some of their priorities to discuss at the meeting. As an example, a homework tutor may be needed to eliminate some of the stress associated with a math course in which the child is having difficulty. OR child care may be needed in order to get that parent out to the event. This can help keep a focus and avoid lengthy discussions of topics.
- ▶ Let the parent know: who will be there, what the first meeting is about, what the atmosphere will be like, what information will be given and what refreshments will be available.
- ▶ Give clear directions on where the meeting will be taking place.
- ▶ Ask this parent to think about their strengths and interests ahead of time. You can suggest such things as: What are my favourite things to do? Who do I like being with the most? What do I do for myself?
- ▶ Find ways to create a pleasant atmosphere in the environment and in your presentation.

## **Your First Face to Face Meeting**



- Start with a positive frame of mind. It is important to make s first meeting as cordial as possible while keeping in mind y you are there.
- If your first meeting is with a group, it may be helpful to have a written agenda and name tags. The name tags help everyone become familiar with each other and the agenda reinforces what to expect.
- If it is an individual meeting, make sure you provide a warm and welcoming environment. Introduce yourself while greeting this individual. Your approach is of utmost importance at this time. Be friendly, shake hands and give eye contact. Sit with the parent, not behind a desk. Make sure that you won't be interrupted by others or by the telephone. (Turn off your cell phone).
- Stay on schedule. Having a parent wait may leave the impression that you have more important things to do.
- Keep communication clear by avoiding any professional jargon and make sure everyone has equal time to communicate.
- Try to re-call anything special about this person that you discovered during your first contact. ( The Checklist of Strengths and Interests, in the appendix may be helpful here.) Re-calling this information can help the parent feel at ease and let them know that you are interested in why they are there.
- Do some "ice breaking" activities to get started and to help everyone relax. Look in the appendix for the "What's In a Name" activity.

## Other follow-up suggestions

Perhaps the least time-consuming follow-up strategy involves sending written materials and resources to parents after the activities are finished. These materials might include:

- ▶ a summary of the session;
- ▶ questions to encourage self-reflection;
- ▶ a letter that discusses the participant's involvement in the parent activities;
- ▶ an interesting article.

A plan or recognition of special skills that were identified can look something like this:

- ▶ Who agreed to do what before your next meeting;
- ▶ Take the parent up on an offer to contribute to your first meeting. For example, you found out they love to bake. Bringing some of their homemade cookies to the meeting can be a positive way to give recognition to their contribution;
- ▶ Include parent ideas as a regular practice. Let their creative abilities shine;
- ▶ Consider labeling signs or other items in everyone's language;
- ▶ Make special arrangements to have interpreters for those needing to understand the information being given.

Offer parents other opportunities to focus on themselves as individuals. Provide them with information or offer a workshop on:

- Enhancing their daily living activities such as budgeting, caring for themselves, child development, what to look for in quality child care.
- Bring in a motivational speaker or better still, invite a parent to be that speaker.
- Help parents learn to make the best use of existing resources. Instructions on using the internet or learning how to use a directory of resources can be helpful to parents who have limited experience with these communication tools.
- Embrace diversity. Tolerate differences and create plans that incorporate multiple views within shared values. Encourage their planning in such things as multi-cultural themes.
- Invite them to bring along a friend or member of the family. Often these people know each other so well, they can lend a hand to be a great support.
- Celebrate short-term and concrete successes routinely. Recognition of small successes builds momentum and general enthusiasm.
- Give parents a role in your program. Treat a parent's skills and willingness to help as an asset to the program. They can take notes, put on the coffee, hand out information to others. Encourage them to join a committee.

- Set up a regular evaluation opportunity. Assess how and if the values and expectations of your program correspond with parents' values and expectations.
- Create the opportunity for parents and children to be together. Offer occasional dinners, movie night, family fun days or drop-in playgroups . Reflect the values of parents in the environments you create. Pictures of the various cultures or families of your participants can be a welcoming gesture.
- Create opportunities for all participants to feel they are equal. Leaving with the feeling that they are equal to you, will encourage their continued involvement.



## Relationship Builders

Individualizing your connection with each parent can assist in building a positive relationship. Here are some tips to encourage this.

- ▶ use the person's name when talking to them;
- ▶ reinforce an attitude of equality by using your first name when introducing yourself;
- ▶ provide lots and lots of positive reinforcement by responding with positive language such as : that was a great idea you had, OR tell me about how you handled that situation;
- ▶ project confidence through positive body language such as: smiles, eye contact, shaking hands, and for those who like hugs (give a hug);
- ▶ provide a calm atmosphere which helps everyone get along;

- ▶ accept suggestions for parent-driven ideas and activities;
- ▶ show a willingness to listen and keep an open mind;
- ▶ emphasize all positive gains and celebrate every step towards success;
- ▶ find resources to provide extra sets of hands, for example: additional staff or volunteers to provide peer support; always inform the parent as to whom will be contacting them;
- ▶ develop clear and consistent communication strategies among parents, staff, and other connected agencies, to promote successful parent participation;
- ▶ make a habit of calling at least two parents each week ; following -up is a cost-effective investment;
- ▶ respect the needs and special circumstances of each family;
- ▶ confidentiality ; there will be many personal stories shared throughout various meeting times and personal information gathered, therefore it is important to remind everyone that personal information shared should remain confidential.
- ▶ provide the kind of personal prompts and practical attention that you would want yourself;
- ▶ end your meeting on a positive note and thank everyone for coming.

## **On The Resource Shelf**

### **The St. John's Parenting Skills Services Project**

website: [www.parentingskillsproject.com](http://www.parentingskillsproject.com)

**Connecting Parents** -The Peer Parent Support Training Program

**Making Connections with Parents** - A Handbook of Tips and Suggestions for Involving and Following-Up with Parents

**The St. John's Parenting Skills Services Project** - Phase One Inventory Binder of Parenting Services , Parenting Programs, Research Study Findings, Literature Review, Parenting Services Model .

## Other helpful resources and information available on the internet

- ▶ **When Parents Ask For Help: Everyday Issues through an Asset-Building Lens**  
By Renie Howard .Published by Search Institute, 2003.[www.researchpress.com](http://www.researchpress.com)
  
- ▶ **Your Family: Using Simple Wisdom in Raising Your Children**  
By Jennifer Griffin-Wiesner [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)
  
- ▶ **"The special needs of foster families,"** Adapted from Mercurio, L. (1999)  
America's Family Support Magazine 18 (2) 41-42. [www.familysupportamerica.org](http://www.familysupportamerica.org)
  
- ▶ **Family Support America Foster Care Fact Sheet, #11,** September 1999. This publication was produced in part by the National Resource for Family Centered Practice, funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children, Youth and Families Children's Bureau.  
[www.familysupportamerica.org](http://www.familysupportamerica.org)
  
- ▶ ***Dealing with Challenging Parents,*** Published by Glencoe/McGraw-Hill, a division of the Educational and Professional Publishing Group of The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 1221 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York 10020. 2000-2005 Glencoe/McGraw-Hill.  
[www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/educationupclose.phtml](http://www.glencoe.com/sec/teachingtoday/educationupclose.phtml)
  
- ▶ **PARENTS IN HEAD START** - Coalition with Parents and Community  
Administration for Children and Families • 370 L'Enfant Promenade, S.W. • Washington, D.C. 20447 [www.frccn.org/Hscfdp](http://www.frccn.org/Hscfdp)
  
- ▶ ***Overcoming Barriers to Effective Parental Partnerships: Implications for Professionals in an Educational Setting.*** The Journal of Educational Issues of Language Minority Students.#16, Retrieved on June 18, 2000 from the World Wide Web: <http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu>.

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<http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/pblct/forum/e072/e072k.shtml>
  
- ▶ *Preventive Parenting with Love, Encouragement, and Limits: The Preschool Years*, by Thomas Dishion, Ph.D., and Scot Patterson. Preventive Parenting is a blueprint for helping young children realize their potential for loving, learning, playing, and working. This book is the perfect resource for new parents wanting to get off to a good start or for parents who are having difficulty managing their young children (ages 1 to 6). Highly recommended for parenting groups and workshops. [www.cfc.uoregon.edu/scientists](http://www.cfc.uoregon.edu/scientists)
  
- ▶ **Parents and Adolescents Living Together, Parts 1 & 2**, by Gerald Patterson, Ph.D., and Marion Forgatch, Ph.D. [www.castpub.com](http://www.castpub.com)
  
- ▶ Gabel, Stewart (1995). **Forum of Corrections Research.** Behavioural problems in the children of incarcerated parents. Volume 7 (2).  
[www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/pblct/forum](http://www.csc-scc.gc.ca/text/pblct/forum)

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- ▶ Smith, C. A., Lizotte, A. J., Thornberry, T., & Krohen, M. (1996). Resilient youth: Identifying factors that prevent high-risk youth from engaging in delinquency and drug use. In J. Hagen (Ed.), **Delinquency and disrepute in the life course** (pp. 217-247). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- ▶ Webster-Stratton, C., & Hancock, L. (1998). Training for parents of young children with conduct problems: Content, methods, and therapeutic processes. In J. Briesmeister & C. E. Schaefer (Eds.), **Handbook of parent training: Parents as co-therapists for children's behavior problems** (pp. 98-152). New York: John Wiley.

# Appendix

## An Ice Breaker Activity

### **What's In a Name?**

Give everyone a blank name tag. Ask them to print their name on the name tag and to think about a symbol that would best describe them. Give an example such as a drawing of "a guitar and camp fire." ( a least 5 minutes... some need al little longer).

When everyone is finished drawing their symbol, ask each person to introduce themselves and describe why they chose this symbol. The description that the person owning this example could be "I love to play the guitar and my favourite time to do this is sitting around a camp fire with my families and friends."

Material needed:

- ▶ Name labels or folded paper that can sit in front of them if they are at tables.
- ▶ Have a variety of colored pencils or markers available. People like to get creative. Often you will hear, "but I can't draw." Stick people, simple drawings work great.
- ▶ Masking tape

This is a quick and easy way to get to know each other and to give each participant a chance to shine at the beginning. Once they have presented their name tag to the group ask them to wear them or put them in front of them so that everyone can see. It will provide other participants and yourself the chance to remember each others name and to be recognized by name. It provides an opportunity for individual interests to be known, and common interests to be shared.

Have Fun!

**Checklist of Interests, Strengths and Resources  
needed to encourage the involvement of Parents**

Name of Parent:

Date of contact:

Contact Information:

Telephone #:

Who contacted whom:

How will follow-up be made?

First time contact

<b>Areas of Interests</b>	<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Resources needed</b>	<b>What kind of a follow-up can take place</b>

## Parent Questionnaire

How many children do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

How old are they? \_\_\_\_\_

How did you find out about this program? \_\_\_\_\_

### Please circle a yes or no in the following section

Did you feel welcome here? Yes No

Did you feel your ideas were used in planning our activities? Yes No

Will you come back again? Yes No

Did you feel comfortable haring your needs or interests  
with others? Yes No

Were the discussions helpful to you as a parent? Yes No

What would you like to gain form this  
program? \_\_\_\_\_

---

Thank you for helping us make this program a success. Let other friends and family know they can come too.

**Confidentiality:** The treatment of information that an individual has disclosed in a relationship of trust with the expectation that it will not be divulged to others in ways that are inconsistent with the understanding of the original disclosure.

The Confidentiality Policy below can be used as your own policy or can be used to enhance one that you already have. It is not a written contract. It creates and understanding between two people that the privacy of others is to be respected .

### Confidentiality Policy

- ▶ Personal information that you share with your facilitator will not be shared with anyone outside of this agency.
  
- ▶ Personal information that is shared with you during the parent group session will not be shared outside of the session.
  
- ▶ Be careful not to identify others by giving their name if they are not attending the session.
  
- ▶ You must report any information if you know there has been a crime committed or if someone has been threatened or in danger. In this case, confidentiality should be broken. Consult with the facilitator or a social worker. If it is an emergency, you may need to consider reporting it to the police immediately.

## Plain Language

Plain language is communication designed to meet the needs of your audience, so people can understand information, that is important to their lives.

In speech we use plenty of personal words - "you", "we", "I" and ACTIVE verbs. We do this quite unconsciously and by habit. The personal touch increases human interest. Active verbs make the sentences more direct and easier to understand.

Some helpful hints when writing to or speaking with your parents.

# Use simple, "everyday" words.

# Use words consistently.

# Use familiar, concrete words.

Use clearer words!

### Instead of . . .

additional

advise

assistance

at this moment in time

as to

at an early date

commence

consequently

forward

in respect of

obtain

residence

comply with

during the period

### Try . . .

extra, more

tell

help

now

like

about, soon

start

so

send

for

get

house

follow

during

due to the fact that	due to, since
expedite	speed
for the purpose of	for, to
forward	send
herein	here
heretofore	until now
herewith	below, here
in accordance with	by, following, per, under
in a timely manner	on time, promptly
in order to	to
not later than	by, before
notwithstanding	in spite of, still
pertaining to	about, of, on
pursuant to	by, following, per, under
regarding	about, of, on
set forth in	in
therein	there
thereof	its, their
under the provisions of	under
whereas	because, since
be in a position to	can
during such time that	while
first of all	first
in relation to	about, for, with
in spite of the fact that	despite
until such time as	until

Use the simplest words to get your meaning across. And don't be put off by people who accuse you of being childish or simplistic.