Partner with parents

Time to allow for this section: 12 minutes

Supplies and set-up needed for Partner section:

- **Flip chart paper; on two sheets of flip chart paper write Parent "N" and Parent "S."**
- **Workshop DVD, laptop, and projector**

SAY: We didn't originally have "partner with parents" as a segment in the workshop until we did our surveys and interviews. But, when you asked us for help in reaching parents more successfully, we added it. We are certainly glad we did, because parents are critically important – As it says at the top of page 1:

"Parents can enhance your nutrition and education efforts if they are provided with information and support. Listen to their needs and provide them with tools and encouragement."

Warm-up activity

SAY: To get us warmed up, I have two pieces of flipchart paper up here. This one I have labeled "Parent N" which stands for "Needy." These are the parents you feel make your life more difficult. Maybe they're always late to pick up their child, or forget their forms, or just don't want to get involved. Possibly they complain, or they make demands that seem unrealistic. These are the parents who NEED extra compassion and patience. If you don't have any parents that fit in this category, consider yourself fortunate – it's probably not because your program is perfect, even fantastic programs have those kinds of parents. If you're a parent, you may have even exhibited some of these challenging characteristics yourself once or twice.

I have labeled this flipchart paper "Parent S," which stands for "supportive." These are the parents you love. They attend your meetings, they read your newsletters, they remember permission slips, they come in and help with special projects. Simply put, they make your job easier. You wish all your parents were like this.

Let's be honest. You wouldn't have requested help with parents if it weren't a challenge, correct? So we can't pretend working with parents is always easy.

In your workbook on page 1, write down the first name of someone who fits each of these categories from your program. If not currently, think of someone from the past. Think about what it is that makes them "needy" or "supportive." Having these real people in mind will help you focus on how to work with real parents.

(turn the page for more instructions for page 1, repeat page 1 twice)

Partner

with parents

Parents can enhance your nutrition and education efforts if you give them information and support. Listen to their needs and provide them with tools and encouragement.

Taking stock . . . check your cupboard

Connect the topic to your life. What are your experiences, opinions, and concerns? What do you need?

Warm-up activity

"Parent N" _____

Why are they a "needy" or challenging parent?

"Parent S" _____

What makes them a "supportive" parent?

Assemble your ingredients and tools

Acquire the knowledge and skills you need to create the outcome you desire.

Every parent wants …

- Happy, _____, smart, successful children.
- To be seen as _____ about their children.
- To be seen as doing things in their child's _____ interest.
- Parenting to be _____.
- To be _____ parents.

Assemble your ingredients and tools

Acquire the knowledge and skills you need to create the outcome you desire.

SAY: Regardless of whether a parent is "needy" or "supportive," all parents can be seen as having some common shared values. These are written in your workbooks at the bottom of page 1 with just a word missing from each statement. Let's fill in the blanks:

Would you agree that all parents want…

- Happy, ___healthy_____, smart, successful children. Who wants their children to grow up to go to jail?

- Parents want to be seen as ___experts_____ about their children. So, ask them for their ideas and insights.

- Parents want to be seen as doing things in their child's ___best____ interest. You may disagree with them how to go about it and even what their child's best interest is, but acknowledge that this is the parent's starting point and guide them.

- And, they want parenting to be ___easier___. We can help them.

- Parents want to be ___good___ parents; they want strong families; and they want to get better at parenting. Show them what they are doing well and help them overcome their challenges and meet their goals. Partner with them!

Partner

with parents

Parents can enhance your nutrition and education efforts if you give them information and support. Listen to their needs and provide them with tools and encouragement.

Taking stock . . . check your cupboard

Connect the topic to your life. What are your experiences, opinions, and concerns? What do you need?

Warm-up activity

"Parent N" _____

Why are they a "needy" or challenging parent?

"Parent S" _____

What makes them a "supportive" parent?

Assemble your ingredients and tools

Acquire the knowledge and skills you need to create the outcome you desire.

Every parent wants …

- Happy, _____, smart, successful children.
- To be seen as _____ about their children.
- To be seen as doing things in their child's _____ interest.
- Parenting to be _____.
- To be _____ parents.

Group discussion

SAY: Together let's consider some ways we can partner with both of these types of parents and hopefully shift some of the "N" Parents over to "S" Parents. Look over the list of ideas on pages 2 and 3 in your workbooks. Which of these approaches have you tried? Can anyone share an experience they've had with parents, especially a "needy" parent who is challenging to work with?

*(Allow for one response. Do **not** read the list, you don't have time.)*

Group discussion

Look over this list of ways we can partner with parents. Consider which of these approaches would work for you. Are there any that you think would help shift some of your "N" parents over to "S" parents? If you have had experience with one or more of these ideas, please share your experience with the group. If you have additional ideas that have worked with parents, please share those as well.

Suggestions for successfully communicating with parents

- Always act happy to see parents (all parents). Smile and greet them warmly, call them by name, and get to know them.
- Communicate often with parents about their children. Give them lots of encouragement. Parents may be stressed and may need help to do the best job they can.
- Thank parents when they help, are on time, participate, etc. Recognize them often.
- Share the parents' needs and concerns — ask for them — and listen to them. Provide ways for parents to share concerns on a regular basis — in writing or verbally.
- If a parent complains, respond rather than react. Here's how:

    1. First, ask them for more information. Allow them to fully voice their complaint, providing as much detail and as many examples as possible. In a calm, caring, concerned voice say something like: "Please tell me more… " "Can you be more specific?"
    2. As they describe their complaint, be an active listener and express your concern. Do not attempt to defend yourself. Extend an apology if needed.
    3. Ask the parent for their input in solving the problem by asking questions such as: "What would you like to see happen?" "How should we resolve this?" "In your opinion, what should be done?" (Consider how much you are being a positive role model by reacting this way!)

- If you cannot meet their demand, explain calmly that you appreciate their point of view and provide the reason for your policy/procedure/etc.
- Invite parents to participate in a parent advisory group or council. Meet regularly. Give them opportunities not only to learn what is going on and stay informed, but also to truly "advise" about the operation of your program.
- Send home invitations to visit your center often; once at the beginning of the year is not enough.
- Parents may be hesitant to volunteer — ask them to help in very specific and non-threatening ways. Come up with a list of really easy things parents could do to help. List the parents who help in your newsletter for public recognition.

Watch and Reflect

SAY: In this video you will hear teachers and parents talk about ways child care programs can partner with parents. You will also see parents in a parent meeting enjoying a food activity with their children and each other. Think about what you see that is similar to how you partner with parents and what is different.

(show video)

- Ask a warm, friendly staff person to call parents occasionally on the phone to get their ideas and opinions. Open the conversation with an update on how well their child is doing.
- Schedule parent meetings at convenient times. Provide child care. If possible, provide a meal.
- Communicate with parents in many different ways:
    - Use handouts, newsletters, the backs of menus.
    - Put up bulletin boards or displays.
    - Have a suggestion box.
    - Post announcements and/or have a blog on your Web site.
    - Call them on the phone.
    - Talk with them at drop-off and pick-up times.
    - Have parent meetings.
    - Have a regular day for them to come in and eat a meal or snack with their child and/or help in the classroom.
- Other suggestions and ideas:

Watch and reflect

Watch the video clip showing ways to partner with parents.

My thoughts:

Create your dish

Apply what you've learned to create the outcome you desire.

SAY: In your workbooks we listed on page 4 some of the main concerns and questions you told us parents have, as well as the information you would like to be able to share with parents. We collected this information from you on our first survey, in our interviews, and in a survey again in December, 2008.

Table discussion

SAY: Take a couple of minutes at your table to pick one of the topics your parents have concerns about. Think of one or two ways you could communicate with parents about this topic in a way that meets both types of parents – the "needy" ones and the "supportive" ones. When you are ready, fill in your goal and action plan on page 5.

Create your dish

Apply what you've learned to create the outcome you desire.

The following list includes the main concerns and questions you told us parents have, as well as the information you would like to be able to share with parents:

- What the children eat — your menus. Explain why children are served what they are — meal patterns and portion sizes, timing of meals and snacks.
- Information about nutrition and/or about specific foods.
- Quick, easy, and inexpensive recipes for meals and snacks to make at home.
- "Picky" eating — what if child doesn't like what you serve at child care, and how parents could handle that issue at home.
- Food allergies and special situations, how you handle them.
- Family-style service — how and why it is used, how to implement it at home, manners and skills learned.
- Conversation starters for family meals.
- Eating out healthfully.

Table discussion

Take a couple of minutes at your table to pick one of the topics your parents have concerns about. Think of one or two ways you could communicate about this topic with parents in a way that meets both types of parents — the "needy" ones and the "supportive" ones. After your discussion, fill in your goal and action plan on the next page.

Serve it, savor it, and succeed

Take your "dish" home. Share it with others, savor it yourself, and make it even better.

At the end of each segment of the workshop you will take time to set goals and begin an action plan to achieve your desired outcomes.

Accomplishing your goals requires moving what you learned in the workshop into the future . . .

- Take it back to your workplace and share it with co-workers and parents.
- Reflect on it personally and continue to learn more.
- Evaluate your progress on meeting your goals to set yourself up for ongoing success.

My goal and action plan

Define what you desire to achieve and make a plan to succeed.

1. Select one or more "needy" parents that you would like to reach. Determine a *new approach* to better communicate with these parents. Describe how and when you plan to give it a try:

2. Select a topic that needs to be communicated to your parents. Decide one or more ways to communicate it, using a method you find works well, or a new method you've not tried before. Describe your plan:

Serve it — A plan for staff training

Select one or more of the ideas listed below to share with your staff about ways to partner with parents.

1. Show the video clip about partnering with parents. You will need a computer and projector or a DVD player and TV. In what ways do you currently partner with parents? Discuss what works well and what your challenges are.

2. Share the list of common values parents share from page 2 ("Every parent wants …") and discuss what these mean for the parents you work with. Brainstorm ways to reach both "needy" and "supportive" parents. Refer to the list on page 3 for additional ideas as needed. Pick one or two ideas to try and make an action plan to implement them within the month.

3. Select a topic from the list of topics on page 4, or another topic you have determined you need to share with parents. All of the "ingredients" in RECIPE are potential topics, and the "Serve it: A plan for parent education" pages in each section provide ideas for partnering with parents. Brainstorm different approaches for sharing the topic you chose.

4. Plan some way to recognize parents and/or involve them in a celebration.

Serve it — A plan for parent education

Partnering with parents is what each of the "Serve it" pages for parents is about. Refer to any section of RECIPE for ideas. The references and resources page in this section lists many resources available for reaching and involving parents.

To focus on the concept of "partnering," consider organizing a gathering just for the purpose of asking parents how they would like to partner with you:

- Invite them at a time that is convenient.
- Provide free child care during this time.
- Serve something to eat and drink.
- Respect their time.
- Open the discussion by sharing what you hope to accomplish and your desire to find out how to better meet their needs.
- Allow them to provide feedback about current parent education opportunities as well as brainstorm new ideas.
- Allow their ideas to flow freely.
- End by summarizing and prioritizing the suggestions.
- Commit to implementing one or more as soon as possible.

Savor it — New approaches to partnering with parents

If you struggle with relating to and communicating with one or more of your parents, look over the list on pages 2 and 3 and select one or more approaches to try.

Refer to one or more of the Web sites on the resources page and read about how to work successfully with parents.

Succeed — Set ourselves up for success

Individually, or with others in your child care program, set up a schedule for reflecting on your progress in meeting your goals. Do one area every month, so each is evaluated twice a year, or, do three or more areas every two or three months. Write down in your calendar reminders to perform these progress checks. Make copies of this evaluation page and date and record the progress you make.

Date of evaluation: _____ Evaluator: _____

1. List one or more of the approaches we have tried for communicating better with "needy" parents. Describe how it went and our plans for the future.

2. Describe our success in communicating the topic I/we selected at the workshop using the method I/we chose. Determine what I/we will try next.

3. Did we have a staff meeting/in-service training about partnering with parents? How did it go?

4. Have we provided parents with an opportunity to suggest how they would like us to partner with them? How did it go? What else do we plan to do?

References and resources

- www.mypyramid.gov
  Has a variety of handouts for parents in the MyPyramid for preschoolers section under the heading "Developing Healthy Eating Habits." Refer to the 16 core nutrition messages that were developed based on the input of low-income mothers attending 30 focus groups. Most of the topics that parents are concerned about are addressed in positive, practical ways.

- www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Resources/nibbles.html
  Nibbles for Health: Nutrition Newsletters for Parents of Young Children from USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, revised 2008

- www.extension.purdue.edu/providerparent/
  is Purdue's Provider-Parent Web site dedicated to helping providers and parents give better support to children as they grow. It contains many useful materials that providers can print and share with parents.

- www.betterkidcare.psu.edu
  is the Penn State Better Kid Care Program Web site. The parent section has many useful resources. The E-Newsletter has archived articles from August and September 2008 about working with parents.

- www.nal.usda.gov/foodstamp/
  In the search box, look for *Loving Your Family — Feeding Their Future*, which is a nutrition education resource for families through the Food Stamp program, which now is known as SNAP, for the "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program."

- www.touchingheartstouchingminds.com
  Click on "Healthy Eating" in the drop-down menu under "Emotion-Based Materials." There are many topics you can select using the pull-down menu. There is a handout and a discussion guide with each topic.

- www.nal.usda.gov/wicworks/Sharing_Center/gallery/wic_fam3.htm#infants
  is the WIC program's Web site, which includes nutrition education resources for parent education.

- www.ca.uky.edu/agc/pubs/fcs7/fcs7188/fcs7188.pdf
  Home Is Where the Health Is, an 8-page PDF file from the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service that combines parenting skill-building with nutrition and physical activity tips for families.

- www.healthychildcare.org
  provides early education and child care information to both professionals and families.

- www.healthykids.us
  is the "Healthy Kids, Healthy Care" site hosted by the National Resource Center for Health and Child Care and Early Education. It views parents as "partners in promoting healthy and safe child care." Information is available in both English and Spanish.

- www.FeedingTheKids.com
  is a curriculum for parent nutrition education.

- *Raising Healthy Eaters* has lessons with lots of ideas for teaching parents about food and nutrition topics. In Indiana, contact the Purdue Extension office in your county for more information.
  www.extension.purdue.edu/extsite/counties.shtml