

WEST VIRGINIA EARLY CHILDHOOD PROVIDER

QUARTERLY

**Partnering and Communicating
with Families**

*Understanding the
Parent's Perspective*

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THE HEAD START PARENT, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK FOR EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Parent and family engagement is essential to quality early care and education. Whether providing child care, conducting home visits, offering family support services, or intervening early when a child has special needs, the partnership with parents is fundamental to providing quality early childhood services. Evidence demonstrates that when the partnership is strong, children form better relationships, feel good about themselves, and do better in school. It is only natural that all of those who enter the lives of young children work together with other adults and parents to give a child safe, healthy, and meaningful early experiences.



The National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (NCPFCE) is funded by the Office of Head Start (OHS) to support and improve the engagement practices of Head Start and Early Head Start staff, as well as staff in early care and education and home visiting programs more broadly. In identifying and developing the best and most innovative practices and processes, OHS and NCPFCE have jointly developed a framework for programs that maps the program elements, common to many early childhood programs and services, that support integrated, comprehensive and systemic engagement with parents and the larger community of service providers.

The Office of Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework is founded on the belief that high quality, goal-directed relationships are essential at all levels – parent/child, parent/family, staff/parent, staff/staff, administration/staff, agency/agency, and policy-maker/agency. It also recognizes that the various programs and services that contribute to the care and education of young children need to be seen as an integrated whole. This begins with program foundations, proceeds to program impact areas, and continues to family and child outcomes.

The three elements of program foundations are leadership, continuous improvement, and professional development. In this model, leadership is fully committed to program-wide efforts at family engagement, programs have plans to review and improve their practices over time, and staff have sufficient opportunities to develop their skills.

These foundations lead to four elements of programs that are key to parent and family engagement:

- *Program environment* - families feel welcomed, valued and respected by program staff;
- *Family partnerships* - staff and families work together to identify and achieve goals and aspirations;
- *Teaching and learning partnerships* - families are engaged as equal partners in children's learning and development; and
- *Community partnerships* - communities support families' interests and needs and encourage parent and family engagement in children's learning.

AS A RESULT OF THIS SYSTEMIC, COMPREHENSIVE, AND INTEGRATED APPROACH TO FAMILY ENGAGEMENT THE FOLLOWING ARE ACHIEVED:



Head Start Parent and Family Engagement Outcomes

1. FAMILY WELL-BEING	Parents and families are safe, healthy, and have increased financial security.
2. POSITIVE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS	Beginning with transitions to parenthood, parents and families develop warm relationships that nurture their child's learning and development.
3. FAMILIES AS LIFELONG EDUCATORS	Parents and families observe, guide, promote, and participate in the everyday learning of their children at home, school, and in their communities.
4. FAMILIES AS LEARNERS	Parents and families advance their own learning interests through education, training and other experiences that support their parenting, careers, and life goals.
5. FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IN TRANSITIONS	Parents and families support and advocate for their child's learning and development as they transition to new learning environments, including EHS to HS, EHS/HS to other early learning environments, and HS to kindergarten through elementary school.
6. FAMILY CONNECTIONS TO PEERS AND COMMUNITY	Parents and families form connections with peers and mentors in formal or informal social networks that are supportive and/or educational and that enhance social well-being and community life.
7. FAMILIES AS ADVOCATES AND LEADERS	Parents and families participate in leadership development, decision-making, program policy development, or in community and state organizing activities to improve children's development and learning experiences.

As a result of a genuine focus on partnerships with parents and communities, programs serving families of young children assure that children are healthy, emotionally secure, and ready for school. In the ongoing development of this approach OHS and NCPFCE continue to review and update evidence-based materials and practices, disseminate the best of these, and provide activities such as training and technical assistance, support of policy development, and further development of materials. All of these efforts are intended to further the development of the highest quality services for young children and their families.



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
**Parent, Family, and
Community Engagement**

The Office of Head Start National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement is a partnership between the Brazelton Touchpoints Center at Children's Hospital Boston and the Harvard Family Research Project, with the Council of Chief State School Officers, National PTA, and Save the Children as active members.

For further information, contact the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement at ncpfce@childrens.harvard.edu.

Communicating with Parents

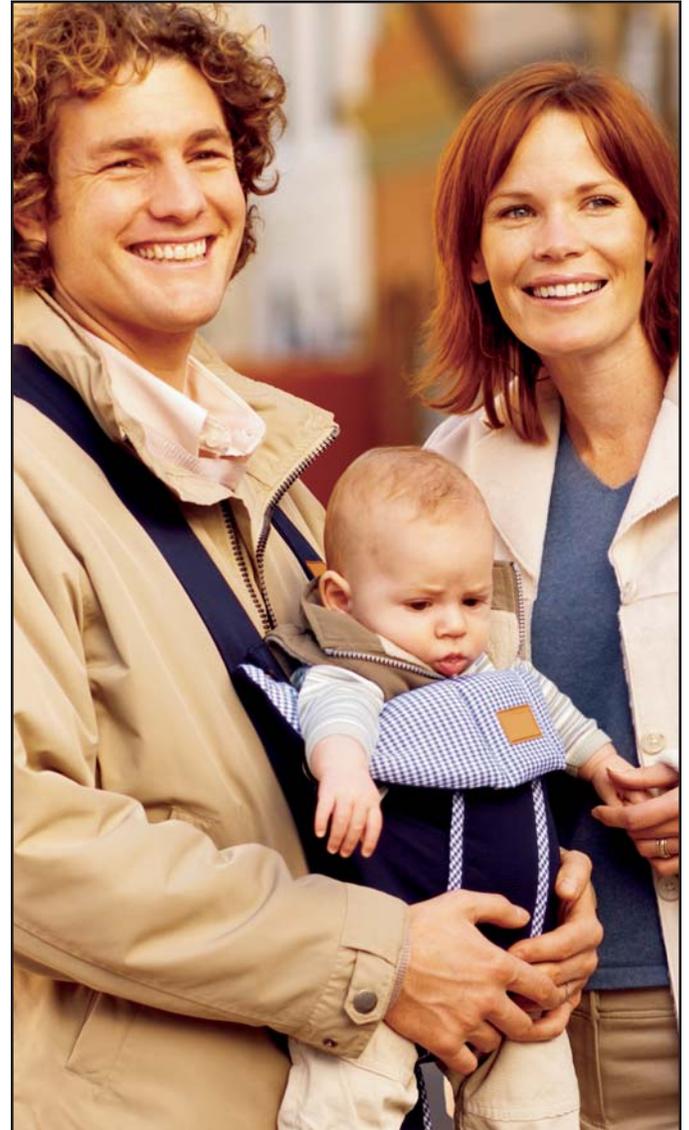
Submitted by National Network for Child Care

As the director of a campus child care center serving almost 100 children, I hear compliments--and complaints--from parents about how we as a staff communicate information. I have identified three primary sources for effective staff-parent communication:

1. The relationship between parents and staff members.
2. The self-confidence of the parent and staff member in their roles as parent and child care provider.
3. The staff member's level of confidence in giving or asking for information.

The relationship between parents and child care providers, like every other relationship, depends on people getting to know and trust each other. Initially, people get to know each other by being friendly and showing interest. Often a simple and sincere, "How are you?" is enough to get a conversation started. Subsequently, asking about a job interview, midterm exam, or other life event lets parents know we see them as individuals. Like each of us, parents want to be viewed as persons, not as roles.

Most early childhood educators understand the unique relationship between parents and their young children. However, despite this intellectual understanding, staff members' day-to-day experiences can often lead to frustrations and disappointments. At times we may worry that parents are unhappy with messy art projects or muddy playgrounds. We need to recognize that, while some parents expect to see their child with paint in his hair or stains on his clothing, other parents may be upset. Sometimes, it is



the surprise of the mess that parents react to. Informing and reminding parents that a messy day is coming up will help them prepare. For example, they may bring a towel to put in the car, or they may make sure not to schedule anything after picking their child up from the program.

We need to make classrooms welcoming places to parents. We can do this by the greetings we offer and our willingness to reach out and include parents in the classroom and other activities. Above all, we must not compete with parents. What we know about children is different from what par-

ents know, primarily because we observe, interact with, and experience children in group settings. While our observations and experiences are different, they are not necessarily more valid than those of parents. Offer a compliment about the child to the parents often. This will help later when you need to address a concern or problem.

In talking with parents, staff members need to feel self-confident in their role as educators. Self-confidence does not mean having all the answers. Rather, it is the knowledge that we can help young children grow, develop, and learn because of our special training and skills. It is the value we place on ourselves as early childhood educators. We display our self-confidence when we listen to parents' concerns and when parents ask for our advice.

It is important to ask parents what information they want about their children's participation in the child care program. We also need to let parents know what we will tell them. Talking to parents about what goes on in the program reassures them that they will know what is planned and what has happened. It also helps to avoid disappointment. For instance, parents may expect elaborate birthday parties, while staff may think a simpler observance is more appropriate for young children in group care.

When staff members need to ask for personal information, they should begin by explaining to the parent why they need the information and how they are going to use it. For example, providers may need information so they can respond to a child's comments in the program. Or, providers may need information so that they can ease a child's worry about something that has happened in the program or at home. Staff can respond in a more meaningful way when they can say, "Your mom (or dad) told me..." Many parents will

appreciate staff wanting to be responsive to their children. Others may not, especially if it involves family, home, or other personal matters.

How people hear information affects how they respond. When talking with parents about emotionally-charged information, providers need to think about what they are likely to say before they say it. What words will be used and how might the parent perceive what is said? Providers can ask a trusted colleague (a supervisor or co-teacher) to listen to what they plan to say. They must not only listen to the words, but also hear the message the words convey. Does the statement of concern sound like a complaint? Will parents perceive comments as criticism of them or their child? Does it seem like we are blaming the parents?

In my work with teachers, parents and children, I have found that ambivalence about what staff members need to say causes more problems than any other single factor. The parent is more likely to hear what we say when we are clear about what we need to say and how we want to say it. Otherwise, we give conflicting messages and only make matters more confusing. When there is clear, open, empathic communication, everyone benefits.

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Sunbeam Early Learning Center: Partnering With Families

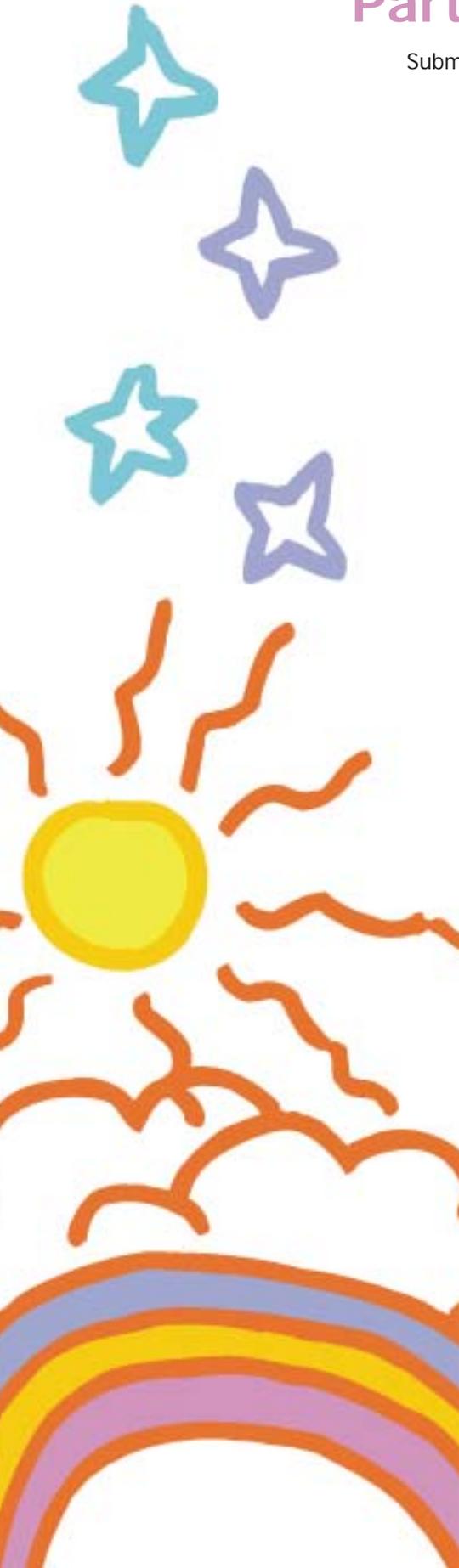
Submitted by Janae Ice, Sunbeam Early Learning Center

According to John C. Maxwell, “Nothing of significance was ever achieved by an individual acting alone.” Educating young children is an example of many individuals, groups, and even communities working together in order to provide quality education.

After 32 years, the owner and director of Sunbeam Early Learning Center, Helen Post-Brown, and her staff know and understand that families are a vital link to that education. As a child care center, we know that we need to provide a safe, nurturing, and educational environment that is developmentally appropriate for all children, but we also must partner with our families in many different ways in order to provide the ultimate care and experience for our children. We provide quality communication, guidance in Positive Behavior Support (PBS), information on supportive services in the community, and quality child care.

One of the most important resources we provide to our families is varied types of quality communication. Merriam Webster’s definition of communication is “the exchange of information between individuals through a common system of signs, symbols, or behavior.” The word “exchange” is the key to this definition. Communication is an “exchange” of information, the give and take so to speak. At Sunbeam, we believe that we need to exchange information in order to communicate effectively with our families. Therefore, upon enrolling children into our center, we provide a detailed tour of our facility, along with a one-on-one discussion while gathering information about the family and the child that is being enrolled. We provide time for them to ask questions and voice any concerns or fears that they or their child may have upon entering our center.

To us, this is an important piece of building a lasting relationship with our families. As the family then becomes a member of our Sunbeam family, we are sure to greet them each morning and afternoon as they arrive and depart from our center. Our teachers then provide email communication to our families as a way to ensure detailed communication about educational experiences taking place in the child’s classroom. The educational experiences are sent to parents in the form of lesson



plans and pictures of their child actually involved in the experience. Parents can then take the time during breaks at work or in the evening to “check out” what their child is experiencing during their Sunbeam day.

For parents, knowing what their child is doing during the day provides comfort and is also a great conversation starter for them with their child on the way home after a long work day. In our infant and toddler rooms, teachers take communication one step further by providing daily written reports for the parent.



Our center uses Positive Behavior Supports (PBS), which is rooted in our core belief system. We are a PBS pilot site through TACSEI (Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention for Young Children.) We are implementing PBS throughout our center as a way of teaching expectations and guiding children to social emotional competence. We have developed a center-wide matrix of behavior expectations: At Sunbeam, we BEAM with Respect and Safety. Included on our matrix are the expectations and guidelines in order to teach our children how to be respectful and safe. We provide this same information to our parents to provide continuity between our center and home.

We also provide access to our leadership team for parents that communicate a need to us about how to handle difficult situations at home. We use our resources through PBS and TACSEI in order to provide appropriate resources for our families that express a need or are identified as having a need.

A Parent Resource Area is a place to inform our parents of local community resources and events that are available to support many different needs. We have many different pamphlets and informational brochures in our Parent Resource Area.

We partner with CELL (Center for Early Literacy Learning) in order to provide





CELL Pops at varied times throughout the year in order to facilitate early literacy learning in our homes. CELL Pops are one page flyers that are sent home that incorporate literacy activities into daily activities at home, such as going for a walk, driving in the car, cooking dinner, or going to the store.

Sunbeam is NAEYC accredited and licensed by the State of West Virginia. We hire and retain highly qualified staff and provide a quality education for all of our children. We believe that providing for our families directly affects the educa-

tion of our young children. We provide quality communication, guidance in Positive Behavior Support (PBS), information on supportive services in the community, and quality child care. At Sunbeam Early Learning Center, we offer time and room:

- to grow
- to explore
- to experiment
- to discover
- to play.

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I Wonder What Is Going On At Home: Understanding the Parent's Perspective

Submitted by Suzi Brodof, River Valley Child Development Services and Marsha Dawson, Teacher



Early care educators are often inclined to blame the home situation when problems arise with the children in our care. We often think or say “if only the parents would do this or that”. It is not always that simple.

It is important that those of us who care for young children have a very specific mindset for working with parents. Working for the betterment of the children means we have to keep the following statements in mind.

1. Parents trust us with the most precious thing in their life--their child.
2. To educate the whole child we need to work in partnership with the parents.
3. If asked, 100 percent of parents want the very best for their children.
4. Research is very clear that the best situation for the child is when parents and teachers work well together.

With all these points in mind, it is important that teachers build their credibility. Most of the teachers working with young children care deeply about their students

and value the involvement of their parents. But what is important is whether we make others feel as if we do. Stop and think of something you said today to make a parent know that you care about their child. Did you take the time to come up with something special that let each parent know that you noticed their child?

Oftentimes, parents are concerned about a situation that the teacher knows nothing or very little about. They might be struggling to pay their rent, juggling two jobs and school, or dealing with a very sick parent. We, as the educators, must always keep the focus on what we do know about their child. Try making a statement like this, “Mr. Johnson, unfortunately neither one of us saw what happened on the bus. Let’s work together to be sure that a situation like this one does not happen in the future.”

Communication is the key. Regardless of our relationship with the parent, we, as early childhood professionals, must communicate regularly and professionally. Parents value frequent communication from the teacher very, very highly. Even though some parents might throw their child’s “My Day” notes away, it is so important to keep the communication going. Often parents just need someone to listen, someone they know cares about their child.

Use “tender loving care” with difficult parents. Never argue, yell, use sarcasm or behave unprofessionally with parents. There needs to be one adult and the only person you can control is you. What should you say? Say, “I am sorry that happened. How can we work together to make sure this does not happen again?”

Remember, teachers and parents have one huge thing in common--they both want what is best for the child.

“Regardless of our relationship with the parent, we, as early childhood professionals, must communicate regularly and professionally.”



The Search Is On!

It’s that time of the year again. We are in need of photos for the 2013 West Virginia Early Childhood Calendar. For the theme and information on how to submit photos, please visit page 30.

Parent Leadership Opportunities Important For Families and Communities

Submitted by Barbara Tucker, West Virginia Early Childhood Transition

Parent leadership opportunities afford parents strategies to gain the knowledge and skills to function in meaningful leadership roles. A “parent voice” can help shape the direction of parent and professional partnerships by sharing responsibility, expertise, and leadership in decisions that affect families and communities.

One benefit of nurturing parents in leadership roles is improved self-confidence. Parents feel better prepared to be an advocate for their child’s needs. Programs also benefit by being more responsive and accountable to the families they serve. Parents are central to family support models, and in a family-centered, strength-based leadership model, it is essential to encourage interested parties to develop to their potential.

Parent support, education, and leadership work together to help develop the skills to move parents toward more meaningful roles in programs by giving them opportunities to become a part of the team, developing the programs rather than simply the persons benefiting from the services provided.



In West Virginia, there are several opportunities for parents to “have their voices heard.” One is the WV Early Intervention Interagency Coordinating Council (www.wvdhhr.org/wvicc). Parents are encouraged to become members of the council. Several past year parents who have been consumers of early intervention services have told their stories to ICC members. Powerful!

Partners in Policymaking is a leadership program to teach parents the skills necessary to become advocates. Parents can then influence the system of services for people with developmental disabilities. The mission of West Virginia Parent Training and Information, Inc. is to empower parents in their roles as decision makers and advocates for their children and to promote partnerships

among parents and professionals.

Parents who have been through transitions are a wealth of knowledge as to what worked, where there were bumps in the road, and what they would have changed along the process. The Massachusetts Early Intervention Parent Leadership Project www.eiplp.org/transition has guidance articles written by parents. Of particular interest in the guidebook are the sections on Best Practices in Transition, which discuss moving on from the child’s and the parent’s points of view.

To help prepare a child for transition, experienced parents suggest talking with the child about what to expect from the new experience. Parents can also read books about preschool, visit the school (if possible), and expose the

child to peer events to de-sensitize to group sounds and experience limited time away from parents. Another suggestion is to celebrate the success of transitioning with the early intervention team during a good-bye visit.

Parent-centered tips for transition include: attending an Understanding Special Education (USE) course sponsored by the local school system's Parent Educator Resource Center; writing a letter of introduction to the school system (some counties have families complete an All About Me form for the receiving agency); organizing paperwork in one place which will

help prepare for the eligibility/IEP/placement meetings; asking for assistance from medical personnel to integrate health care needs into the school system; and being open to the process.

Developing a positive working relationship with the school will foster open communication and help work toward a resolution in case of disagreements.

As a mom of a precious son who had multiple medical and developmental needs, Erin Ward has words of wisdom for parents whose children are entering a preschool special needs program.

“Remember that as a parent you can be the number one advocate for your child. The more you learn about the transition process the better equipped you will be to anticipate the upcoming changes and to be an active participant in the planning. Turning three is the beginning of your family's experience with the special education system. Resolve to yourself that it will be an ever-changing and evolving process throughout your child's educational career. Through it all, by keeping your child at the center of all decisions, the outcome will be a success.”

The Early Childhood Transition Steering Committee has many resources and products available to assist families and caregivers with transitions. Here is a partial listing of those products.

Effective Collaborative Teams:

- WV Early Childhood Community Collaboration Strategies
- Tasks, Tips and Tools for Promoting Community Teams
- Early Childhood Collaborative Team Profiles
- Training and Technical Resources Handout

Family Involvement and Support:

- WV Early Childhood Family Leadership Brochure
- Family Packet
- WV Side-by-Side Description of Agency Responsibilities
- WV Early Childhood Community Collaboration Strategies

To view all the products and services that are available through the West Virginia Early Childhood Transition Steering Committee, please visit

www.wvearlychildhood.org

Engaging Diverse Families

Submitted by National Association for the Education of Young Children

The research clearly indicates that meaningful engagement of families in their children's early learning supports school readiness and later academic success. For an increasing number of families, engagement in early learning is linked to their children's participation in early childhood programs.

Because of their unique position in the lives of families and children, it is imperative that early childhood programs examine and improve strategies for developing partnerships with families. Yet, early childhood programs have been struggling to engage families, especially diverse families. Janet Gonzalez-Mena (2008) describes cultural frameworks as influenced by:

- Race
- Ethnicity and national origin
- Language
- Religion and/or spiritual practice
- Abilities and disabilities
- Social class, status and economic level
- Sexual orientation

Engaging Diverse Families (EDF) is helping early childhood education programs effectively engage diverse families. The goal is to learn how excellent early childhood education programs are effectively engaging diverse families and to share what is learned with other programs struggling to start and sustain

family engagement practices. As part of this project, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) identified 10 programs that engage families by:

1. Encouraging and validating family participation in decision making related to their children's education. Families should act as advocates for their children and early childhood education program by actively taking part in decision making opportunities.
2. Facilitating consistent, two-way communication through multiple forms that is responsive to the linguistic preference of the family. Communication should be both school and family initiated and should be timely and continuous, inviting conversations about both the child's educational experience as well as the larger program.
3. Exchanging knowledge with families. Family members share their unique knowledge and skills through actively volunteering and participating in events and activities at school. Teachers seek out information about their students' lives, families, and communities, and integrate this information into their curriculum and instructional practices.
4. Placing an emphasis on creating and sustaining learning activities at home

and in the community that extend the teachings of the program so as to enhance each child's early learning.

5. Supporting families' efforts to create a home environment that values learning and supports programs.
6. Creating an ongoing and comprehensive system for promoting family engagement by ensuring that program leadership and teachers are dedicated, trained, and receive the supports they need to fully engage families.

In a year-long process, NAEYC investigated the family engagement practices of early childhood education programs. To take part, programs submitted a written application and program materials and participated in a phone interview; 15 finalists received an on-site visit by NAEYC staff. Through the evidence provided, NAEYC uncovered examples of exemplary program practices and learned how programs are successfully engaging the diverse populations they serve.

In April 2010, NAEYC recognized the following ten programs as being exemplary in their family engagement practices:

- Children's Village Child Care Center in Philadelphia, PA

- CRT Locust Early Care & Education Program in Hartford, CT
- Iowa State University Child Development Laboratory School in Ames, IA
- Montgomery County Community College Children's Center in Blue Bell, PA
- Rainbow School in Stanford, CA
- Schools for Friends in Washington, D.C.
- Sheltering Arms Early Education & Family Center - International Village in Atlanta, GA
- Sunnyside Child Care Center in Northampton, MA
- The Family Schools, Inc. in Brewster, MA
- YWCA of Minneapolis Downtown Children's Center in Minneapolis, MN

NAEYC also recognized these five programs for their noteworthy family engagement accomplishments:

- Blueskies for Children in Oakland, CA
- Kidango Little Washington Township in Fremont, CA



- Temple Beth Shalom Foundation School in Miami Beach, FL
- Egenolf Early Childhood Center in Elizabeth, NJ
- Pocono Services for Children and Families in East Stroudsburg, PA

Resources available now include a resource list and a literature review. The literature review provides a definition of family engagement, presents a conceptual framework, and identifies examples of evidence-based program practices. NAEYC will develop and publish program profiles and additional materials to help other programs implement sustainable family engagement strategies.

An advisory committee, jointly convened with Pre-K Now, provided initial guidance for this work.

For more information, visit www.rightchoiceforkids.org.

More West Virginia Children Raised by Relatives and Family Friends, Report Finds

Submitted by West Virginia KIDS COUNT

According to a new KIDS COUNT report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, 19,000 West Virginia children, and more than 2.7 million children nationwide, were cared for by extended family members and close family friends. In West Virginia, this long-time practice has increased by an alarming 27 percent in the last decade. In 2001, there were approximately 15,000 West Virginia children living with relatives or close family friends because their parents could no longer care for them. By 2010, that number had increased to just over 19,000. Nationwide, there was an 18 percent increase in children living with relatives during the same period. In fact, the Casey Foundation estimates that nine percent of American youths will live with extended family for at least three consecutive months at some point before age 18.

The rise of this practice, known as kinship care, demands immediate attention, according to the report, *Stepping Up for Kids: What Government and Communities Should Do to Support Kinship Families*. Many family members and friends who take on parental responsibilities with their often-limited incomes struggle to meet the basic needs of children--a problem that could be alleviated with increased access to and

awareness of government and community programs.

Even though state and federal regulations prefer placement with kin over families unknown to the children, only 13 percent of children in West Virginia in state supervised foster care are in a formal kinship arrangement, while in the U.S. that figure is 26 percent. A state's reliance on kinship families in its foster care program varies widely throughout the country from six percent to 46 percent. The failure to identify and engage family resources for children in foster care often means the loss of family connections and the loss of financial support so important to children throughout life.

"In the midst of very difficult budget choices, there are opportunities to help these families. For some it includes the earned income tax credit and assistance with child care, and, for others it could be Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) or relative-foster care," said Margie Hale, executive director of West Virginia KIDS COUNT. "These options increase the financial stability of kinship families and create a more stable environment for the children."

"The Casey Foundation is dedicated to

improving the lives of children and families, and that includes supporting extended family and others who take on the responsibility of raising kids," President and CEO Patrick McCarthy said. "Research shows that kids fare better when they remain in the safe, stable and familiar environment that relatives can provide. We urge state policymakers to make crucial benefits and resources available to kinship families so that their children can thrive and have the best shot at becoming successful adults."

The new KIDS COUNT report details the types of challenges kinship caregivers encounter:

Financial. They are more likely to be poor, single, older, less-educated and unemployed, which makes taking on such additional costs as child care and health insurance an extra burden. They often are unfamiliar with available government support programs or struggle to access them, particularly in the case of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)--the primary federal financial aid program for low-income families.

Emotional. They must contend with child trauma from parental separation, as well as possible emotional and

behavioral issues tied to abuse or neglect.

Legal. They sometimes lack the necessary legal authority to enroll a child for school, access basic medical care or give medical consent. Requirements for becoming licensed foster parents, which aren't always applicable to kinship families, present additional hurdles to receiving the same benefits as non-relatives taking in children.

Stepping Up for Kids shows that kinship care is particularly prevalent in African-American families, where children are twice as likely as the general population to be raised by extended family and close friends at some point in their lives. The report also identifies the various circumstances--including death, child abuse or neglect, military deployment, incarceration, or deportation--that lead extended family members to become primary caregivers.

It also highlights recommendations for states and communities to take advantage of existing federal funding for these families and to strengthen them and help their children flourish, avoiding greater costs down the road:

- Establish laws and resources to bolster kinship families by promoting stable housing, access to child health care and community-based services for older adults.
- Increase their financial stability through TANF-funded programs specifically designed to meet their unique needs.
- Remove barriers within the child welfare system through policies that formally seek to involve relatives in a child's care and through reforms to foster-home licensing requirements.

For more information, visit www.wvkidscount.org.



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Picture two classrooms, in Room 1 children sit in circle time for 15 minutes. They have access to art materials to create individual projects, teachers act as facilitators in the classroom setting up the room before the children arrive, children “write” on paper that they can access, the class goes outside whenever weather allows, and centers are open for 45 minutes for the children to play and interact with each other.

In Room 2 the children sit in circle time for 45 minutes, they have crafts to complete, their teacher stands off to the side, worksheets are completed so the children know their alphabet before kindergarten, the class goes outside only if everything the teacher wanted completed is finished, and cen-

ters are open for 15 minutes. Which classroom is helping the children get ready for kindergarten? Which of these classrooms is a child-centered classroom?

What do kindergarten teachers think is important for children to know when they enter kindergarten? A survey done in California found that teachers don’t wish for children who know their alphabet, instead they want children who can follow through with a difficult task, can regulate their impulses and “have the self-control to listen to the teacher’s directions for a few minutes” (Guernsey, 2009). This same survey said teachers “gave top billing to self-care and motor skills followed by self-regulation” (Guernsey, 2009). These teachers said it was easiest to

teach the children academic skills when they did not have to teach self-regulation skills too. Kindergarten teachers also like to see: the ability to communicate with peers, the ability to sit still and pay attention for 10 minutes, the ability to get along with others, and the ability to use crayons, scissors, and a pencil.

In a child-centered classroom, children initiate their own learning. Teachers are facilitators. They help students learn without direct instruction. The teacher’s role is to help the children learn. A child-centered classroom is not chaos, but it is carefully laid out so the children have the freedom to think, explore, question, experience and search for answers. The children have access to outside play to help

develop gross motor skills and cooperation. In a child-centered classroom children play, and through that play they develop knowledge, cooperation, fine and gross motor skills, and problem-solving skills.

Looking back at the two classrooms scenarios--from which room would a kindergarten teacher hope their students came? Which is the child-centered classroom? Room 1 is the answer to both of these questions. The teacher prepares the classroom as a medium for learning. She has a wide range of developmental goals using play as a focus. Through play, the classroom enables the children to develop their own knowledge and interact with peers to develop the skills necessary to succeed in life.

Some important considerations in setting up a child-centered classroom include:

A predictable schedule

A schedule should be posted. It should be a written schedule as well as a picture schedule.

Transitions

Music or other auditory cues should be used to tell the children they have a certain amount of time remaining to play before clean up. After that, a clean-up song tells the children it's time to clean-up.

Open availability of materials

Materials should be available for the children during free play. These materials should include but not be limited to: art items, sorting toys, books, music, and science materials.

Few restrictions

When the classroom is set up properly, the teacher is not constantly telling the children "No". The class rules are simple, perhaps three or four rules. The children are free to explore their environment.

Teacher preparedness

Teachers should arrive early to make sure the room is ready for the children. "In order to be a successful teacher, I need to be prepared" (Murphy, 2001).

Long periods of uninterrupted free time

During free time children learn to interact with their peers. They learn cooperation and problem solving skills. They develop and improve their fine and gross motor skills and they learn about science through exploration.

Diverse activities

Don't just read a book. Use flannel board stories, story gloves, story aprons, and acting to illustrate the many different ways to tell a story. Have these activities available for the children after story time so the chil-

dren can retell the stories to each other.

Music every day in the classroom

Use music during transitions, during lunch and snack time, and at nap time.

"As you grow older, the only thing you will remember with word for word accuracy are the songs you learned when you were little..." (Murphy, *The Importance of Early Experiences! Playing is school readiness!*).

With proper preparation and a few changes, all classrooms can produce children who are ready to start their journey into kindergarten.

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West Virginia ACDS Invited to Present at National Conference

Submitted by Sherrie Barrett, ACDS State Coordinator



The Apprenticeship for Child Development Specialist (ACDS) program was invited to present at the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development in Indianapolis, Indiana. Sherrie Barrett, ACDS State Coordinator and Jennifer Conkle, ACDS Regional Coordinator, presented at the conference on June 13, 2012.

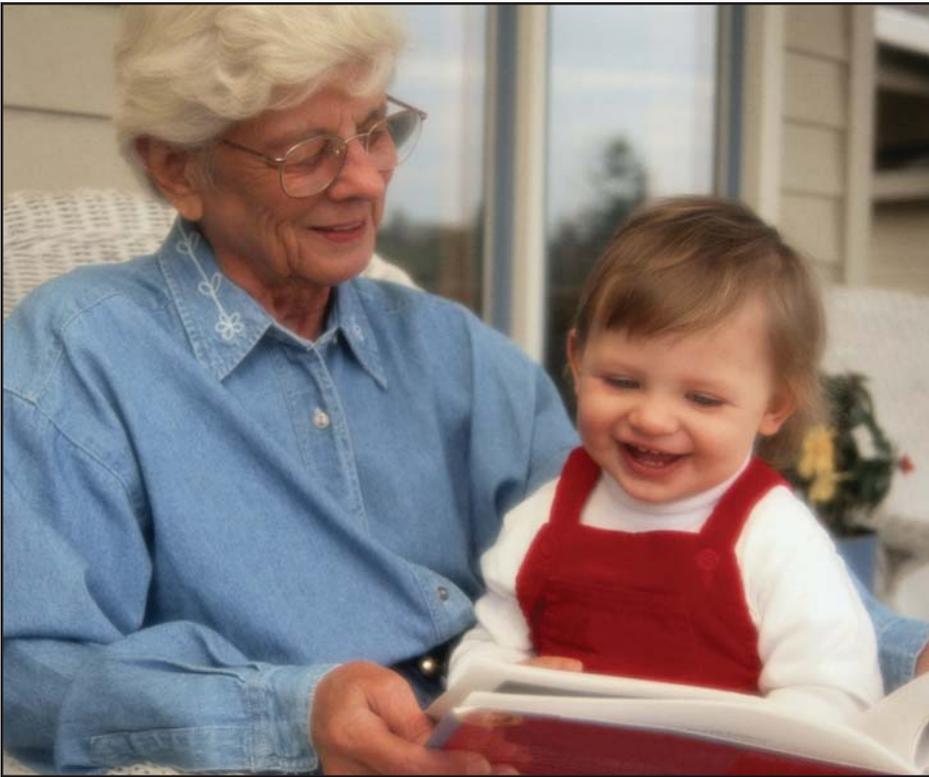
West Virginia is considered a leader in applying the apprenticeship model to the field of early education. During the conference, Sherrie and Jennifer provided information on the success of the West Virginia ACDS program. “It is an honor to represent our state at the National Conference,” Sherrie Barrett, ACDS State Coordinator, said. “Hopefully this will open doors to assist other states with the implementation of an ACDS program.”

The ACDS program is based on a professional partnership between child care providers and their employers. It is a program where: apprentices “learn by doing,” there is a blend of classroom work and on-the-job training, and professional growth is provided for those in the early care and education field.

If you are interested in the program or have any questions, please contact Sherrie Barrett at 304-523-0433 or sbarrett@rvcds.org.

Emerging Language and Literacy in the Preschool Years

Submitted by Bridgett Blevins, Marshall University Student



Emerging language and literacy are the beginning of how we communicate our needs to one another and learning how to read and write. Most people think that literacy does not begin until a child starts kindergarten. The truth is that emergent literacy skills begin as early as a child begins to notice print or pictures around her.

As time passes, language and literacy is becoming more of a front runner in education in the preschool classroom. Teachers have always known that these are important skills that emerge; but teachers also recognize these skills play an important role in the success of a child throughout their school years.

Language and literacy success develops at different levels. The first stage is oral language. The more a child is spoken to, the more words he will know and the more he will comprehend.

Most babies are born to speak. Within the first year of a baby's life, the way she communicates will change from crying to saying a few words. As infants, children begin to use crying, cooing, and babbling to convey what they need. For instance, a child may cry when his diaper needs to be changed, when he is hungry, or even when he wants to be cuddled. An attentive parent knows the difference of every cry. "By listening carefully to your baby and responding

to his cries you are letting him know that he is important. This is how your baby first learns to communicate with you" (SolveYourProblem.com).

From the time a baby is born, she can hear and recognize the sound of her mother's voice as well as the voices around her. When feeding or nursing, a baby will watch her parent's face. This is an important time for a parent or caregiver to interact with the baby by singing or talking.

The next step for a baby is cooing and becoming more attentive to the voices around him or her. This begins to happen when the baby is around two months of age. It is very important that a parent or caregiver gets close to the baby's face and makes the same cooing sounds. The baby may show interest for a short period of time, but it is still a significant milestone in the infant's life.

It is important to talk, sing, and even read to an infant from early on. By the fourth month of a baby's life, he or she will begin to smile as well as show other significant signs of anger, frustration, and excitement.

By 12 months of age, on average, a baby should have a vocabulary of about three words. The words are usually

“mom-mom, da-da, and ba-ba (mommy, daddy, and bottle).” To make up for words not spoken, the baby will communicate needs by nodding, grunting, and pointing.

Some parents and caregivers use sign language as another method of communicating early. These are considered pre-verbal means of communication. The signed words are similar to those that are spoken. They include mommy, daddy, more, all done, and milk. At this age, not only can the baby verbally say three words but can also sign three to five words. When using sign language, also encourage speaking by saying the word while signing.

It is important to remember that not all children develop language skills at the same time. One child may say a first word at the age of 10 months, while another child may not say a first word until he is 15 months old.

Research has shown children who come from affluent neighborhoods or educated parents have a more enriched vocabulary. This is due to the fact that they are not as limited in health care, school, nutrition, and print enriched materials such as books, toys, and games. It is because of this that these children are said to excel in school in contrast to those that do not have these same opportunities.

“The most important preparation of the environment for successful devel-

opment of spoken and written language in the child is the language environment of the home. It is never too early to speak clearly and precisely to the child. In fact, the language of the caregivers in the first six years of life will literally form the spoken language of the child. Reading aloud to the child gives the message that reading is fun for everyone, and concepts and vocabulary words will be experienced which would never come up in spoken language” (<http://www.michaelolaf.net/1CW36language.html>).

There are several things to ensure that children’s language acquisition is a success. One is to make sure they feel important in whatever they say.

Another is to provide daily experiences for them. This includes reading, singing, rhyming, and retelling stories. Resist the temptation to baby talk. Children learn dialect and intonation from those they are around daily. In order for children to move away from baby talk, parents and caregivers should speak appropriate language because children often imitate those around them.

The alphabetic code is the next key factor that predicts a child’s success in language and literacy in school. The alphabetic code consists of alphabetic knowledge, phonological and phonemic awareness, and invented spelling. A child learns the alphabet first by rote memory usually through singing the

“Alphabet Song”. Alphabetic knowledge or awareness is naming and recognizing the letters of the alphabet, but not the sounds of the letters.

The first letter that a child usually recognizes is the first letter of his or her first name. Parents and caregivers need to read to children daily. When reading or looking at a book, it is important to point to and name pictures and letters, encouraging the child to repeat what is being said.

Once a child enters a preschool environment, language and literacy change from that in which they have acquired at home. A preschool teacher knows how important it is for a child to have a print enriched environment. Therefore, a developmentally appropriate preschool classroom will have labels on everything. Labels include pictures with the names of items on every object in the classroom including toys, games, puzzles, centers, cubbies, tables, chairs, doors, etc. Caregivers can encourage parents to do the same at home. Parents may not want to label everything, but they can label various items throughout the house. During this stage, the child also begins to write and draw pictures that have appropriate meaning. Their drawings begin as scribbles, but evolve into recognizable pictures throughout time.

The third key factor that predicts a child’s success in language and literacy in school is print knowledge.

Environmental print and print concepts are included in this. Environmental print is the print that is all around us. Children recognize various logos such as those of their favorite fast food restaurant, cereal, or cartoon. Parents and teachers both can use the child's prior knowledge of print to improve their learning of letters and print.

One idea that can be used is when a child draws a picture, ask them to tell you about the picture. While the child dictates, allow him or her to watch you write. This will encourage writing skills. The writing starts out as scribbles. With practice, he or she will begin to imitate writing and sounding out words by themselves.

Language and literacy begins to emerge from the day an infant is born. A baby begins with crying, then cooing, and eventually forming simple words. With a language enriched environment, a child has a better chance of succeeding in school in both language and literacy. When a child experiences language and literacy skills, he or she will also develop and grow in other domains such as fine motor and gross motor development, social and emotional development, and cognitive development.

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Parent Blocks

NEWSLETTER



"Providing resources to parents throughout West Virginia"
Volume 9, Issue 3, Summer 2012

Becoming Involved In Your Child's Care

One of the best ways you can help your child in child care is to become involved. Research has shown a child benefits when parents are involved and know what activities the child is participating in during the day.

The best way to find out what is happening each day is by communicating with the teacher. Not

only will you know what is happening, but you will be able to ask direct questions of your child about the day's events.

Here are some tips for becoming fully involved in your child's day:

1. Take a few

moments each day to look at any work sent home with your child and discuss what it is.

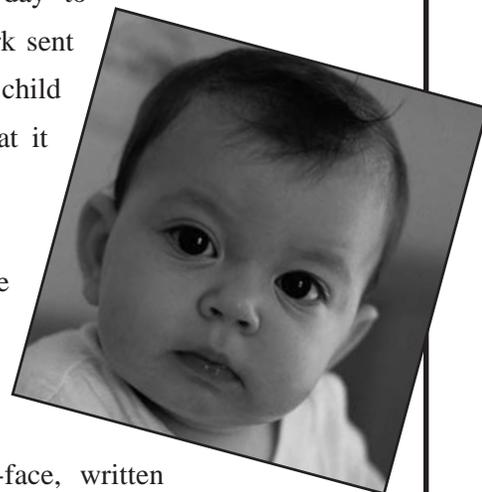
2. Communicate regularly with the teacher.

This could include face-to-face, written communication, email and even texts. Find out what the teacher prefers.

3. Ask for ways that you could be more involved in the classroom.

Volunteering is a good way to spend a little time in the center and see what a day is actually like. Many parents find they feel more connected to other parents and families when they volunteer.

Continued on next page



WV Parent Blocks Newsletter is a project of West Virginia Early Childhood Training Connections and Resources, a collaborative project of West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources/Bureau for Children and Families/Division of Early Care and Education; WV Head Start State Collaboration Office; Office of Maternal, Child and Family Health/West Virginia Birth to Three; and West Virginia Department of Education/Office of Special Education and is supported and administered by River Valley Child Development Services.

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Visit our website at www.wvearlychildhood.org

Some ways that you can volunteer include:

- Read a book to the class once a week
- Help with a special art project
- Clean the fish tank or take care of a classroom pet
- Welcome new families entering the program
- Host a book fair or toy swap
- Help with field trips

If you don't have a lot of time to give, consider helping with special events at the center. Many centers have fundraisers or special events that occur during the year. Offer to help coordinate one of these events or help with publicity for the event.

Many centers seek feedback from parents for planning purposes. Some even ask for parent representatives to participate in the management of services.

Whatever your talents, there is a way you can become involved with your child's care. Sometimes you just have to be creative. Above all, don't be afraid to ask the center for ways that you can become involved. You--and your child--will be glad you did.

New AAP Sleep Recommendations

Submitted by Glenna Bailey, RN, Nurse Health Consultant

Since the American Academy of Pediatrics began the Back to Sleep campaign in 1992, deaths from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) have decreased dramatically. In the years since, researchers have learned much more about keeping babies safe while sleeping. One aspect of this is a new emphasis on providing a safe sleeping environment.

In October 2011, the AAP issued an updated policy statement and safe sleep recommendations. This updated statement includes the following recommendations:

- Always place your baby on his or her back for every sleep time.
- Always use a firm sleep surface. Car seats and other sitting devices are not recommended for routine sleep.
- The baby should sleep in the same room as the parents, but not in the same bed (room-sharing without bed-sharing).
- Keep soft objects or loose bedding out of the crib. This includes pillows, blankets and bumper pads.
- Wedges and positioners should not be used.
- Pregnant women should receive regular prenatal care.
- No smoking during pregnancy or after birth.
- Breastfeeding is recommended.
- Offer a pacifier at naptime and bedtime.
- Avoid covering the infant's head and over heating.
- Do not use home monitors or commercial devices marketed to reduce the risk of SIDS.
- Infants should receive all recommended vaccinations.
- Supervised, awake tummy time is recommended daily to facilitate development and minimize the occurrence of positional plagiocephaly (flat head).

Because the use of blankets is no longer recommended, alternate sleepwear should be used. These would include sleep sacks and one piece sleepers. In using sleep sacks or one piece sleepers, it is important to make sure they fit well. Anything that is too loose could cover the baby's head during sleep.



Growing Together Through WV Birth to Three A Family Guide

These are the steps your family will go through in the early intervention process.



1. Referral

- You, your physician, or others with a concern about your infant/toddler's development (age birth to 35 months) can make a referral to WV Birth to Three (WVBTT).
- The first step to getting help is to make a referral by calling 1-866-321-4728.

2. First Visit

- When a referral is received, an Interim Service Coordinator (ISC) will call you to schedule a home visit, at a time that's good for you, to explain the WVBTT process and begin planning for the next steps.

3. The Evaluation

- If your child has a substantial delay in an area of development* or has certain risk factors, he/she may be eligible for WVBTT services.
- You will select 2 WVBTT professionals who will work with you and gather information to determine if your child is eligible to receive services.
 - Eligibility is not based on income.

*Areas of Development

- thinking and learning
- motor (including vision and hearing)
- speech
- social/emotional
- self-help skills

*** You, as a family, may choose to proceed at your own pace, stop eligibility determination, or withdraw from the program at any time. ***



4. The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) Meeting

- If your child is eligible, with your consent, you will help develop an IFSP within 45 days of the referral.
- Your IFSP team will help you decide which services you need to help you help your child learn and grow.

5. Delivery of Services

- Your IFSP services will be provided in your home or community.
- IFSP services should begin no later than 30 days after you signed the consent.
- The IFSP will be reviewed at least every 6 months, or sooner, if you request.
- WVBTT supports and services are provided at no charge to the families.

6. Service Coordination

- At the initial IFSP meeting, you met your ongoing service coordinator who will work with you to make sure your IFSP services are meeting your needs.
- The ongoing service coordinator will also link your family to other available community services, as needed.

7. Transition

- Your child will leave the WVBTT system when he/she turns three years of age.
- Your service coordinator and IFSP team will help you with the transition process, including exploring other possible services.



For more information about WV Birth to Three, please visit www.wvdhhr.org/birth23.

WV Birth to Three services and supports are provided under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and administered through the WV Department of Health and Human Resources, Office of Maternal, Child and Family Health.



The theme for the 2013 West Virginia
Early Childhood Calendar is...
DRAMATIC PLAY!

We need your photos of
children **AND** families/adults:

- ❖ Leading puppet shows
 - ❖ Designing art projects
 - ❖ Re-enacting special stories
-
- ❖ Enjoying dress-up/role playing activities
 - ❖ Inventing characters
 - ❖ Experimenting with different art supplies
 - ❖ Creating outdoor work projects

Children should be infant, toddler, or preschool age.

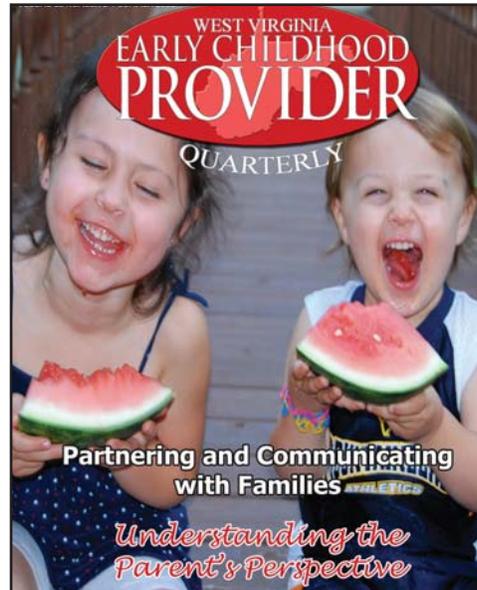
Please include the child's name and age, name of person submitting photo, address, and phone number. All photos must be accompanied with a WVECTCR photo release. Download a copy of the release at www.wvearly-childhood.org/resources/photorelease.PDF. If sending photos via email, please do not resize the pictures.

Send to:
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611 Seventh Avenue, Ste. 322
Huntington, WV 25701
Attn: 2013 Calendar
or email the photos to tcr@rvcds.org

Deadline: October 1, 2012

For questions, please contact us at 304-529-7603 or
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MARK YOUR CALENDAR! Reggio is coming to West Virginia!!

October 19 & 20, 2012
Bridgeport Conference Center, Bridgeport, WV

West Virginia Association for Young Children is sponsoring a two-day training, "The Journey Begins".

Presented by Terry Green from the Audubon Area Head Start, Owensboro, Kentucky

NAREA affiliated • STARS Registered • Open to center directors, Head Start, ECE College Instructors and ECE students • May sign up for one or two days

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