

Strengthening Collaboration Between Schools and Families



The child is the center of all collaborative efforts. Successful collaboration with families can provide for meaningful learning opportunities and supportive learning environments.



Fruitful, effective collaboration requires sensitivity and planning. Suggestions for achieving this goal include:

- In preparation for an initial meeting, the teacher can take a strength-based approach when thinking about the child's abilities and skills. For example, perhaps a child is not yet reading independently, but can follow print and pay attention to a story when others read aloud.
- Similarly, behavioural observations need to be descriptive and as matter-of-fact and non-judgemental as possible in order to invite collaboration. A statement such as, "He's violent and dangerous" is not only judgmental, but also shuts down positive communication. It is more accurate, and more useful, to carefully describe what was observed, as in "On Tuesday morning he threw a chair at another student."
- Prior to the meeting itself, the teacher can email, phone or send a note home inviting parents to think about the strengths and preferences of their child. Parents need to feel they are prepared for the meeting as well.
- If there are reports that will be discussed, provide a copy to parents prior to the meeting so they are not trying to read and absorb new information while discussing the report at the meeting.
- If there are areas of concern, ensure that parents have been told about these immediately after they occur, so there are no surprises at the meeting. Communicating frequently, honestly and openly develops trust.
- Enquire whether the parents have any concerns they would like to discuss at the meeting. It helps the teacher to have time to check into concerns before the meeting, rather than being surprised by them. Ensuring there are no surprises for parents or teachers helps to build collaboration, and trust.
- Agree on a time for the meeting, and include both a start and a finish time. Both parents and teachers are busy people with other commitments, including their families. If the meeting is not completed within the set time, it is better to meet again on another day rather than disrupting people's schedules.
- If notes are to be taken, let the parents know that a copy of the notes will be provided to them at the end of the meeting to check for accuracy and to ensure everyone has a record of what was decided.
- An inviting way to start any meeting is to do a "round robin" with each person sharing one strength of the child.
- Move from what the child can do to what parents and teachers would like the child to be able to do.
- Finally, talk about how progress will be monitored and what will be indicators of success.
- Parents have an important role to play in supporting this, and providing additional practice and feedback at home. Collaboration ensures that parents know what is expected, and how to support and reinforce their child's learning at home.