



Family involvement

Families are a key element in all child care programs and it is important for you to build a positive relationship with the family of each child in your care. Family involvement can include volunteering, serving on the management committee, getting involved in fundraising, working bees and social events. It is important that families feel confident and welcome to work in partnership with the service to promote positive outcomes for their children. OOSH services should adopt a viewpoint of committing to working collaboratively with families so that they can provide a high quality service that meets the needs of children and their parents.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT

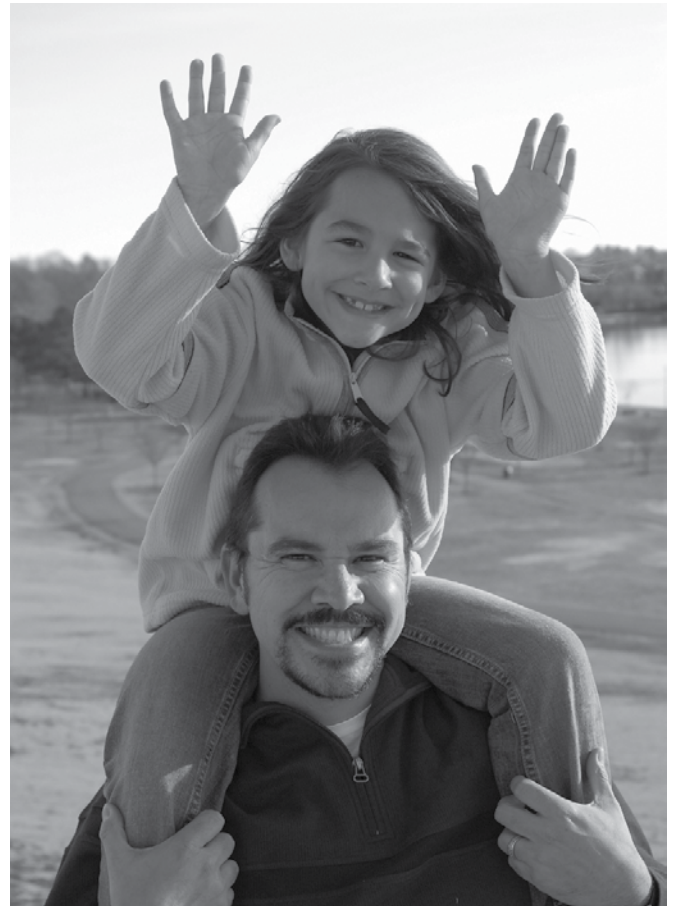
The first time a family member comes into contact with an OOSH centre will define their view of the service it provides. A warm and friendly environment where families are greeted and made welcome will make the best impression. If you want to get family members involved, make your service is one they will want to be involved with and let them know how they can be involved.

ORIENTATING FAMILIES

Showing families around and introducing them to staff members will make them feel welcome; let them see where the children play and the facilities the service has. A family handbook is an invaluable tool for communicating the aims, philosophies and policies of the service, and gives the opportunity to share other information; such as how family members can join the committee or how they could become involved in fundraising and social events.

FAMILIES FROM CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE (CALD) BACKGROUNDS

Getting families involved when there are language barriers or cultural differences can be very challenging for services, but it offers worthwhile results and can strengthen the service's place in the community. Some ways to reach out to CALD families are to:



- ★ Try to employ staff from a range of different cultural backgrounds
- ★ Learn what you can about the cultures in the local community
- ★ Celebrate cultural holidays and festivals
- ★ Attempt to get translators along to induction days etc.
- ★ Network with local community and cultural organisations
- ★ Ask local councils about any interpreter services that may be available

For more ideas in this area refer to Network's publication 'Hi-OOSH - Harmony in OOSH', which includes strategies for creating a harmonious cultural environment in OOSH.

■ INCREASING STAFF COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Not all staff may be naturally confident in speaking with adults even if they communicate brilliantly with children. Communicating with families is vital and an issue that should be addressed in the centre's policies, at staff meetings and may need to be addressed through staff training. Communication with families is also one of the principles for Quality Assurance and therefore any efforts being made to address this area should be documented and used in the accreditation process.

■ FAMILY MEMBERS AS VOLUNTEERS

There will be a wealth of talent and skill among the centre's families that could be used to provide unique and wonderful experiences for the children. Consider conducting a survey or 'skills audit' to determine their interests, hobbies or abilities and use the results to develop a database of volunteers who would be available to come into the centre and offer their skills. Grandparents are family too - don't forget to suggest that grandparents and other extended family members would also be welcome to volunteer their time. Remember it is a legal responsibility to ensure a paid staff member is always present with a volunteer.

Volunteers need clear expectations about their duties, time commitment and resources. If volunteers work directly with children, they need a complete background check. You also need to give them information about appropriate and inappropriate discipline and techniques for interacting with children.

■ INVITING FAMILIES TO HELP ON EXCURSIONS

On excursions, volunteers can be used to make up the ratio of 1:8 carers to children (there must still be 1:15 paid staff in attendance and it is a legal responsibility to ensure a staff member is always present with a volunteer) so inviting family/ grandparents, etc. along is a good way of having enough support on excursions and lowering staff bills – however, as with using volunteers for anything, it is important to be clear of the expectations the centre has of them.

■ TAPPING INTO RESOURCES THAT FAMILY MEMBERS MAY HAVE

Make families aware of the kind of resources that the centre uses on a regular basis and see if they are able to contribute, for example, clean empty containers for junk craft. This gives families who are unable to donate their time, the opportunity to contribute to the Centre. Their workplaces may also offer interesting vacation care excursions; such as visits to military bases, local sports arenas, newspaper offices etc. Unless there are open channels of communication the centre may never find out about these great opportunities.

■ OTHER RELEVANT OOSH DEVELOPMENT FACTSHEETS:

- ★ Family Handbooks



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