Helping Families Find Support

4Cs of Alameda County | www.4calameda.org

You know that no matter how much you do to support the positive development of children, the most important influence in their lives is their families. And many families today are struggling because they don't get the support they need — they may be far from extended family or familiar places, or they may be facing challenges that they simply don't have the resources to meet. Because of your close connection with families, you are in a unique position to support them in raising strong, healthy children.

Most child care centers and family child care homes are already stretched thin, in both time and money. You don't have the resources to become a family support center! But you can help connect parents with the community resources they need — and with each other.

The national "Family Strengthening through Early Childhood Education" program has identified five "protective factors" that help families weather challenges and raise healthy children: concrete support in times of need, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, parental resilience, and children's social/emotional competence.

Their website at http://www.cssp.org/reform/strengthening-families explains many ways that child care centers and family child care homes can help strengthen these "protective factors." Some of the steps they suggest take only a little extra time — and a new perspective on your potential as a leader.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS

When you build personal, trusting relationships with parents, it's easier for you to offer information, advice, and support when it's needed.

- Make sure you learn parents' names and take some time to get to know them.
- Try to talk for a few minutes with every parent every day, to share information about how the child is doing. These exchanges give you an opening to tactfully and respectfully offer information about child development or suggestions on parenting.

HELP PARENTS CONNECT

Many parents today are isolated — they may not have opportunities to share emotional or practical support with other parents of young children. Because they come to your program every day, you can help them find each other. You could:

- Set aside a corner with a couple of chairs, a coffee pot, and a bulletin board, for parents to meet each other and find information.
- Create a bulletin board where parents can post notices about ways they would like to connect with other families. You may have to get the ball rolling by suggesting some possibilities: getting the kids together on the weekends, sharing rides, buying/selling/sharing equipment, organizing group outings, trading babysitting or household chores.
- Invite parents who might be interested to help organize activities like potluck dinners or family picnics where families can get to know each other.
- Invite parents to participate in a work day to make needed repairs or improvements.

For more ideas:
See 4Cs Provider Tip Sheet
"Parents as Partners"

HELP PARENTS LEARN

All parents want to do the right thing for their children, but some have not had the opportunity to learn effective parenting skills. You can:

- Print a schedule of workshops available at 4Cs.
- Print out short articles on parenting topics from http://families.naeyc.org/ and provide copies on an information table or in envelopes you hang on the wall.
- Provide brochures and schedules for the 12-week "Positive Parenting" course offered in English or Spanish in Fremont, San Leandro, and Oakland by the nonprofit Family Paths. Fee is on a sliding scale depending on income, but no one is turned away. More information at www.familypaths.org.

TEACH SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL SKILLS

You can support families by teaching their children social and emotional skills, such as naming their feelings, solving problems, sharing, and resolving conflicts.

- Use circle time to read and discuss books about children's feelings and interactions.
- Teach children simple steps for problem-solving and conflict-resolution.
- Use puppets or dolls to act out common problems or conflicts and ask children for ideas about solutions.
- Step in early when trouble seems to be brewing and remind children about positive steps they can take.

HELP FAMILIES FIND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Whether families need emergency help with food, shelter, or utility bills, or more long-term support with job training, domestic violence issues, addiction, or emotional problems, you can provide critical information on where to find these services.

1. **Print out and provide copies of information on where to find help**.

- Information on the 211 referral system in English, Spanish or Chinese at : http://www.211alamedacounty.org
- Get a list of resources and support programs in Alameda County, with contact information, at: www.acphd.org/resource-guides.aspx

2. Help families find services with an online resource-finder available in 7 languages at: http://www.alamedaco.info.

3. Build ties with your local family resource center (FRC):

- Provide copies of their brochures listing their programs.
- Invite someone from the FRC to speak to a meeting of staff and parents. This will give people a personal connection, making it easier for parents to contact the FRC when they need support and for staff to call with referrals.
- FRCs in southern Alameda County are:

  Davis Street Community Center, 3081 Teagarden St., San Leandro, 347-4620

  Fremont Family Resource Center, 39155 Liberty St., Fremont, 574-2000.

4. Provide information on where to get free income-tax assistance, available in six languages: http://www.4c-alameda.org/index.php/parents-menu/vita. 4Cs provides free income tax assistance in Hayward from January through April every year. For information, call 510-690-2141.

For more ideas:

See 4Cs Provider Tip Sheet
"Promoting Positive Behavior"