



Prekindergarten Program Policy Brief

Home Visits

Policy: (*Better Beginnings: Better Futures*, page 15)

Home visits are an important element of the Prekindergarten program. Visiting with parents and family members in their homes is a highly effective way to establish and maintain communication and to foster trust between home and school.

Question: Why are home visits recommended?

The relaxed atmosphere of the home may be more conducive to conversation and trust. Often parents will share personal information about both the child and the family that they would not necessarily share in the formal school environment. This information can help the teacher provide the most effective learning opportunities and supports for children in the program. For those parents who may have unpleasant memories of their own school experience, meeting in their home may be a positive option. A home visit may alleviate the child's anxiety about school and the teacher. If parents are uncomfortable having a teacher come into their home, try to meet the family in a neutral spot such as the local coffee shop or community room.

Home visits allow opportunities to observe family dynamics, meet siblings and to be a positive role model that is accepting and respectful to all family members. A child and their family will feel more accepted in the classroom when you can refer to a pet or sibling by name in conversations. Visiting a child's home improves understanding of the home environment and how the child functions in it. The visit provides an opportunity to explain the program to parents and issue a personal invitation for their involvement.

The important thing in home visiting is to let the child and their families know that you care and respect them. Being sensitive and non-judgmental can make strong connections for future home-school communications.

Home Visiting Strategies that work

1. Be well prepared for home visits.
In advance, prepare any materials to be left with the family to support the transition to school.
Prepare questions that will give you information about the strengths and interests of the child and family. Questions should be open-ended.
2. Bring a book to read to the child during the visit – an option may be to leave the book as a gift to the child and family.
3. Provide paper and crayons so the child can make a picture while you talk with the parent.
4. Have toddler size crayons or puzzle available for younger siblings.
5. Let parents know what to expect during the home visit when making arrangements.
6. Go to the home with a partner such as teacher associate, community school coordinator and/or principal.
7. Ask parents if you can take notes during your visit.
Tell the child what activities to expect at school: for example, the water table and sand table. Show pictures of these activities.
8. Model a one-to-one play situation with child.
Ask about family interests and resources that they might be able to offer to the classroom.
9. Leave time for questions that families may want to ask.
10. Relax and enjoy the opportunity to get acquainted.
11. Model a one-to-one play situation with child.
12. Complete registration forms with the family.
13. Ask about family interests and resources that they might be able to offer to the classroom.
14. Leave time for questions that families may want to ask.
15. Relax and enjoy the opportunity to get acquainted.

Checklist for communicating with families

When reflecting on your visit with a family, ask yourself, Did I

- Establish a partnership with the family and express the important benefits for the child of working together?
- Use open-ended questions?
- Gather information by asking what, when, where and how – but not why?
- Notice body language and consider what the signals and cues mean?
- Use encouraging facial expressions?
- Listen more than talk?
- Share information in a clear, concise way?
- Anticipate family concerns and discuss them?
- Provide reassurance?

Adapted from Bennett, T., page 23; 2006