

Group Connections That Work!

Group Connection Guidelines and Tips

DESE Requirements:

- Primary goal is to provide child development information
- Families have opportunity to network with other families
- Families have opportunity to discuss parenting issues
- Parent Educators provide meaningful information regarding growth and development
- Parent Educator must have planned format
 - Developmental Play Hour (DPH)
 - Small Group Discussions
 - Topical Discussions or Presentations
- Group Connections are focused on parent-child Interactions; development-centered parenting, family well-being

Required documentation to be kept in State Record book:

- Group Connection Planning Guide and Record
- Handouts that provide additional parent education
- Sign-In Sheet

Guidelines for Facilitator:

- Introductions/welcome
- Be an energizer
- Positive Tone
- Hot Topics and Presentations
 - Keep discussions on focus
 - Encourage participation
 - Protect participants: non-judgmental
 - Protect participants: from one person's dominance
- Developmental Play Hour
 - Activities across domains
 - Talk to each family
 - Make observations of children-answer questions
 - Key developmental information posted on tables



Strategies for Questions and Answers

- PRER
 - Begin with your **POINT**-the single word or answer
 - Give a **REASON** for your response-what is the rationale? Prove your point with **ELABORATION**- How this relates to development and or parenting
 - Close with a **RESTATEMENT**-a paraphrase of your point or reason
- Offer more than one strategy: Another consideration can be.....
- 3 part question? Focus on key point-what's most important?

Tips for Group Involvement

- Group parents by elementary site/child's age
- Use a circle or semi-circle for discussions
- Give participants a task
 - For example: Literacy focus-write down to share (optional) what influence reading had on them as a child
- Use prompts or open-ended questions to the group
- Start with an inclusion activity (a.k.a. an ice breaker)
- Have parent write down a response to a question they will later share with the group
- Plan an beginning/ending activity
 - DPH-brief opening-purpose for gathering-flow of meeting/brief ending-what observations did you make
 - Hot Topics-An ending song, children's story related to the topic or easy make and take
- Turn questions back to the group: Does anyone else have a suggestion?

Sample Meeting Descriptions and Outlines Family Reading Night

Meeting Description:

Family Reading Night is a parent-child activity. Parents and children experience a variety of stations designed to highlight methods of enhancing the reading experience. Guest Readers lead out in each room. These can be preschool teacher, librarian, firefighter, school administrator, legislator, police officer, or any community member available to read. If this meeting is presented yearly, it is a good idea to vary your guest readers.

Goal:

To provide multiple methods of engaging a child in reading.

Objectives:

1. Families will participate in 4-5 reading activities
2. Families will be provided information on early literacy
3. Each reading activity will demonstrate a method to enhance the reading experience. Some suggestions are:
 - a. Make a craft related to the story
 - b. Provide a storytelling experience to demonstrate reading without a book
 - c. Make and eat a snack related to the story theme
 - d. Participate in an activity related to the story (for example: retell the story with felt board pieces or answer questions about the story)

Outline:

1. Families gather for a group activity such as reading to their child on mats or listening to the storytelling activity.
2. Families will rotate through remaining activities per preassigned groups.
3. Choose a different theme for Family Reading Night yearly. Some examples are:
 - a. Some of Our Favorites-current or classic popular books
 - b. Fables and Folklore
 - c. Outer Space

Resources:

Community Helpers

Access to Clifford, the Big Red Dog-we borrowed him from Scholastic Books-or another character that will fit your theme

Fun For Fives

Meeting Description:

Fun for Fives meeting is a parent-child activity specific to families with children enrolling in Kindergarten the next school year. This meeting is held at individual elementary sites.

Goal:

To support transition to Kindergarten

Objectives:

1. Parents will become familiar with activities that support kindergarten readiness.
2. Parents and children will become familiar with the building layout of their future elementary site.
3. Parents will have the opportunity to network with other families with children entering kindergarten.

Outline:

1. As families enter, they are provided a map of the school to complete a scavenger hunt of rooms. Prompts and information to share with their child are provided to use during the activity. Children mark the location on the map with a sticker when located.
2. After 15 minutes, families divide into three groups to experience activities. At each station, parent educators present the activity and rationale.
 - a. Patterning
 - b. Kissing Hand Book
 - c. Music and Movement

Resources:

Elementary school

People In Our Neighborhood

Meeting Description:

People in Our Neighborhood is a large parent-child activity meeting. Parents and children participate in a wide variety of activities representing a variety of community helper jobs. Suggestions for community helpers include: Firefighter, police officer, ambulance driver, baker, chemist, architect, engineer, chef, yoga or fitness instructor, conservationist, 4-H volunteer, sanitation engineer, mail carrier, school nurse, carpenter (Home Depot volunteer), etc.

Goal:

To teach children about community helpers through a variety of hands-on engaging activities that promote development.

Objectives:

1. Families will be exposed to a variety of community helpers.
2. Children will participate in extension activities related to the community helper role.

Outline:

1. Planning for this event needs to start early so you can reserve your community helpers. Aim for about 10 stations so participants can be spread out.
2. Aim for fall or spring choosing a date it will be light outside in the early evening (or plan for a Saturday event).
3. Community helpers can bring their own activity or you can design one related to their role. A few ideas are:
 - a. Baker: sensory table filled with flour and baking utensils, play dough with rolling pins and cookie cutters
 - b. Chemist: make individual batches of slime to take home
 - c. Mail Carrier: Child write letters and "mail them" in the classroom toy mailbox
 - d. Architect: Build structures from toothpicks and mini marshmallows
 - e. 4-H: get donations of plant cutting and potting soil. Fill the sensory table with dirt and allow each child to plant a cutting to bring home
4. Choose handouts related to pretend play for families to take home.

Resources:

Building space that allows you to spread out providing individual space for participants. We take over one of the preschool buildings and use individual classroom space and the multi-purpose room.

Variety of community agencies dependent upon space and availability

Hot Topics

Meeting Description:

In order to provide parents a variety of topics specific to the age of their child, Hot Topics pair two topics of interest to an age group that parents can attend back to back in one evening. The format is a small group discussion. The setting is designed to be less formal with a circle of chairs.

Goal:

Specific goals vary per the meeting topic.

Objectives:

1. Parents will gain additional information on a specific area of development or parenting.
2. Parents will connect with other parents of children in a similar age group.
3. Specific objectives vary per topic.

Outline:

1. Determine the number of specific age groups desired.
 - a. Birth – 8 months, 8-14 months, 14-24 months, 24-36 months, 3-5 years
 - b. Birth-18 months, 18-36 months, 3-5 years
2. More frequently discussed topics/questions asked about in the home are selected.
3. Parent educators are paired together to develop discussion points and information to share.
4. Meeting is advertised that parents can attend the two sessions back to back. Each session is 45 minutes.
5. Potential topics are:
 - a. Brain development/Attachment & Post-Partum
 - b. Early Literacy/Social Development-Temperament
 - c. Nutrition/Language Development
 - d. Self-Regulation/Learning Through Play
 - e. Kindergarten Readiness/Value of Play

Resources:

PATNC Curriculum

Zero to Three

Topical Discussion

Meeting Description:

Ready, Set, Go! It's Potty Time

Goal:

To support family understanding of the toilet learning process

Objectives:

1. Parents will be able to recognize signs of readiness for toilet learning in their child.
2. Parents will be able to formulate a plan for toilet learning individualized to their child.
3. Parents will be able to work effectively with their childcare provider in an effective program for toilet learning.
4. Parents will understand the broad age range of readiness for toileting.

Outline:

1. This meeting is a topical discussion with a presentation format.
2. Parent educator researches toileting processes using a variety of resources and PATNC curriculum.
3. Information shared includes 4 stages of toileting and common problems associated with toilet learning.
 - a. Signs of readiness
 - b. Preparation for Toilet Learning
 - c. Toilet Learning
 - d. Independence
 - e. Soiling
 - f. Bedwetting
4. Opportunity for questions from parents after each section of presentation.
5. Resources for parents and children's books on the topic will be displayed.

Resources:

The Parents Book of Toileting; Joanna Cole

Toilet Training, Vicki Lansky

PATNC Curriculum

There is a wide variety of children's books available to share. Some are specific to toileting, some address the issue of getting comfortable with bowel movements on the toilet.

Other possible topics:

Positive Discipline

Raising a Responsible Child

Understanding Your Child's Temperament

Sibling Rivalry

Welcoming Home a New Baby