

Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre

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Building Relationships between Child Care Programs and Schools

Positive relationships with school personnel and school boards are essential to the success of child care programs located in school facilities or on school board property. A collaborative, cooperative partnership will enhance the services that both the school and your child care program can offer children in the community. This partnership goes far beyond simply sharing space; it is about a shared commitment to the well-being of families.

Here are some things to consider as you strive to develop and maintain the relationship between your child care program, school personnel and the school board.

Know Your School Board

- Learn about your School Board's policies, mandates, and attitudes toward child care.
- Identify who to contact at the School Board regarding the facility, rentals, student services and community programming.
- Get to know the School Board trustees.
- Look for opportunities to inform them about child care in general and your program specifically.

Know Your School

- Introduce yourself to the principal(s) and teachers. Make sure you meet the school engineering staff, secretary, supervision aides, school counselor and child care workers as well as the school nurse.
- Familiarize yourself and your staff with school rules, routines, expectations and emergency measures as well as procedures for dealing with challenging issues related to the school, children and families. Maintain confidentiality at all times.
- Honour the expectations that school administrative, teaching and engineering staff have of your child care program regarding use of space, equipment, cleanliness and maintenance of the facility.
- If you are located in a school, ensure you fully understand all aspects of the lease/operating agreement. The lease should address the costs you will be charged, the services the school will provide, information on use of space, equipment and supplies, hours of operation, facility maintenance, what will happen in the event of school closures and process for renewing or terminating the agreement. Keep a copy of the lease/operating agreement on hand for easy reference.

Communicate! Communicate! Communicate!

Regular, respectful and positive communication is the key to effective relationships. While it is important for you to learn all you can about the operations of the school, it is equally important for you to share information about your child care program with the school. There are numerous ways to go about this.

1. Make sure your child care program is visible in the school.

- Look for or create opportunities for school staff to learn about your child care program.
- Post information about your child care program on the school bulletin boards.
- Submit a regular article about your child care program in the school newsletter.
- Take the time to introduce yourself and your staff to every teacher and other school personnel.
- Send information about your child care program to school personnel.
- Host a “welcome back” event for school personnel (an open house, coffee break, luncheon or tea time) at the beginning of the school year or after winter or spring breaks.
- Ask for time on the agenda of school staff meetings and Parent Advisory Committee meetings. Share your philosophy, routines, rules, expectations, and emergency procedures with school personnel and parents.
- Become part of the team at school functions (hot dog days, sports day, concerts, fundraisers, etc.).
- Make copies of your Annual Report available to school staff and parents if you operate a not-for-profit child care program.

2. Build an active partnership with the school.

- Invite school staff to visit your child care program on a regular basis.
- Offer to participate in the kindergarten orientation.
- Offer homework support to school-age children.
- Invite school personnel to special events in your child care program like Open-Houses, parent nights, concerts, Annual General Meetings, etc.
- Indicate that you are available to participate in case conferences and school meetings as appropriate.
- Provide opportunities for school personnel to give feedback about your child care program.
- Ask if you and your staff can share in the school’s professional development activities.

3. Be ready to do little extras that can make a BIG difference

- Thank school personnel every chance you get. Create specific opportunities if you can.
- Treat school staff to special snacks made by the children in your child care program.
- Offer to share your equipment and resources with the school.
- Offer use of your child care space for childminding during Parent Teacher interview times, Parent Advisory Committee Meetings, etc.
- Organize noon hour programs for children at the school. (e.g. board games, science activities, sports, arts and crafts, etc.)

Working in partnership with school personnel and school boards helps to maximize support for children and their families. When using school facilities, keep in mind that use of school space is a two-way responsibility requiring “give and take.” Strong relationships develop when the child care program is recognized as a complementary component of the school. Shared commitment to children and families builds strong communities. Networking with other child care providers may help you identify other ways to work in effective partnerships with schools.

Adapted with permission from School Age Child Care Association of BC, Fact Sheet #3, 1998.

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