

## Family Living Programs

### Connecting with Families in Early Care and Education: A Curriculum For Professionals and Families

#### Situation

Early care and education programs often focus their efforts on children, as if children arrive at the program without their families, neighborhoods and cultures. However, we know that children's development is affected by each of the different social systems of which they are a part and by the way in which different systems interact with one another. Relationships between important adults in a child's life are as important as relationships between children and adults. By partnering with children's families, early care and education professionals can have a much more lasting impact on children's development. Research indicates that family participation in pre-school activities and regular communication between the family and provider are associated with enhanced child language, self-help, social, motor, adaptive, and basic school skills.

#### Response

Members of UW-Extension's "Building Community Connections with Families" Team recognized the need to increase early care and education professionals' knowledge about family-centered care and to improve their skills in developing relationships with families. Together they collaborated to create a ten-hour, five-module, research-based curriculum.

Development of the curriculum, "Connecting with Families: Make a Difference that Lasts!" was guided by the belief that *good* early care and education programs help children grow and learn, but *great* programs find ways to include families in their programs.

#### Outcomes

Team members trained 24 of their Family Living colleagues on this new curriculum, and one year later, as a result of their joint efforts, 868 child care professionals in Wisconsin are now doing a better job of communicating with children and their families.

A summary of evaluations by early care and education providers completed immediately after training in one or more of the modules indicated:

- A significant increase in knowledge following the training
- 87% reported being more committed to family involvement
- Consistently strong satisfaction with the quality of the training

A total of 55 early care and education professionals completed training on all five of the Connecting with Families modules. Three-month post-session analyses confirm that this new curriculum is really helping to make a difference for providers and for families. Strong support for the curriculum is

indicated by the reports of early care and education professionals' following the training:

- 93% increased their knowledge and skill at connecting with families
- 84% had made their environments and activities more family-friendly
- 84% established stronger communication and relationships with families

After attending the Connecting with Families training and then organizing a family event in her program, one southeast Wisconsin child care professional enthusiastically claimed, "Nearly all families attended. That was the first time ever that so many families came to one of our events." Other participants commented:

*"UW-Extension helped me focus on changing the way I communicate with parents."*

*"UW-Extension helped us implement and try new ways to connect with our families."*

*"I'm so thankful for the classes. Our family activity was such a success story."*

Team members included: Tina Ginner, Early Childhood Education (ECE) Training Coordinator, Racine County; Kathy Hetzel, Family Living Educator, Dodge County; Joan Laurion, Family Living Educator, Dane County; Sue Nagelkerk, Family Living Educator, Sauk County; Cheryl Rew Stapleton, Family Living Educator, Columbia County; and Mary Roach, Wisconsin Child Care Research Partnership.

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