

Coaching Corner – Planning a Dynamite Family Night

The beginning of the school year can be overwhelming for everyone – children, parents, and teachers – whether you've been there before or it's the first time. Families and teachers have the same goal for children: to be successful. Create a circle of support around the child by working together! Families are a child's first teacher, but nurturing and building partnerships with families may provide challenges. Hosting a Family Night is a perfect way to get families and children excited, informed, and more relaxed about what's ahead for the upcoming year.

When planning your family night, think about the following:

What do you want families to know by the end the night?

Most families want to know that their child is well taken care of, learning, and having fun. Share how you strive to meet the needs and interests of every child, the learning areas to be explored, and stress the importance of play in an early childhood classroom to ensure a fun-filled environment.

What do you want families to do after Family Night? How will you encourage them to become partners in their children's education?

Invite families to take an active role in their children's learning by setting a collaborative tone. Host a roundtable discussion to brainstorm ways everyone can get involved. Can they share their knowledge and expertise on a topic being explored? Do they have materials to donate for art projects? Is there a time they can come to share a special skill they have (quilting, building items using tools, etc.) or maybe just come to share a story with your class?

What will make parents want to attend Family Night?

- Ask for volunteers to provide childcare so families can focus and be attentive.
- Plan a fun activity that families and teachers can do during the evening to bring everyone together. Seeing families and teachers working together helps children connect to a learning community.
- Provide light snacks as a natural way to bring people together. It also sets a caring and nurturing tone.
- Send out a survey to see what time(s) would work best for most families.
- Send home a "save the date" card well in advance. Follow up with an official invitation nearer to the date to officially announce the event. Personally invite families with a quick phone call as a reminder. You may also choose to post a flyer for the event at your site and in your classroom.

Be sure to tackle topics in ways that hit home. For example, it's important for families to know the significant impact early literacy can make now and throughout their child's lifetime. Provide simple ways families can support development of early literacy at home in their existing routines (reading books together, asking what their child's favorite part of the day was, engaging in back-and-forth conversations, etc.). This provides a great segue for introducing HighReach Learning family connection components that are part of the Curriculum for Toddlers, Twos, Threes, Pre-K, and Passports programs.

Relax, be yourself, get to know your families, and let them get to know you. The collaboration that comes from this Family Night promises to make a positive and productive learning journey for all!