

PARENT ENGAGEMENT



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Introduction

“The key to parent engagement and overall satisfaction at your child care center.”

What is the biggest predictor of a child’s academic success? Obvious answers might be IQ, work ethic, quality curriculum, or qualified educators. Evidence shows, however, that the best predictor of success is actually connected to the extent education is prioritized in the home, and the involvement of parents in their child’s education.

This means one of the biggest predictors of a child’s success is independent of a child’s ability, work ethic, or even anything that occurs in the classroom! This surprising truth is a wake-up call to childcare providers that if we want to provide quality education and care, we need to look beyond the classroom to prioritize engaging parents in the learning process.

A child’s learning process begins even before they are born. Babies begin to learn words in the womb - so be careful what you say to a pregnant woman! The learning process speeds up after birth and continues to function at some level for your entire life.

Especially at an early stage, a child’s brain is like a sponge. Whether they are learning to bring their hands to their mouth, speaking their first word, or learning algebra, every step of the learning process is vital.

As child care providers, our job is to determine where each child is in the learning process and involve teachers, parents, and the child in the education process in order to achieve optimal development. By doing this we are making deep rooted connections between school and home that will last a lifetime and lead to better outcomes for all.

What does Engagement Look Like?



Parent engagement doesn't have to look the way you traditionally picture it, with letters and numbers on report cards, or selecting pre-made form comments. Be creative in how you engage the families in your center.

It's less about communicating grades or scores, and more about creating habits that involve parents in their child's development and build genuine relationships. There are four simple ways you can increase parent engagement at your child care center.



Photos and updates

Sharing photos and updates with parents throughout the day is a great way to keep them connected with their child throughout the day.



Monthly Newsletter

Keep parents and prospective parents informed with what's going on at your center. Send out an email and focus on sharing center updates, exclusive offers, and other helpful information.



Sharing Curriculum and Teaching Strategies

Learning and development is important for the child and important to the parents. Be sure to keep them in the loop with what the children are learning at your center.



Parent-Teacher Quarterly Meetings

Stay connected with parents by meeting them either in person or virtually. Use this time to provide an update on how the child is doing and discuss any items specific to their child.

Use these engagement strategies to boost parent engagement at your center. If you find overwhelmed with these new engagement ideas, start by adding one and then add the others one at a time.

The Keys to Parent Engagement



Feeling a little overwhelmed? Don't worry, there are four key factors to developing parent engagement in your child care center that can help you build communication over time. Parent engagement isn't a one-time transaction, it's about building relationships and that's an ongoing process. Each of these keys can be implemented separately in any order and can be added quickly or accumulated slowly over time.

1. Connect a child's learning with their home life

- ✓ Send activities home for parents to work on with their child
- ✓ Let parents know what you're working on each week so they can reinforce it at home.
- ✓ Bring families into the center so they see what you're doing firsthand

2. Build and Develop Relationships

- ✓ Greet families each day with a smile, a wave, and a kind word
- ✓ Create opportunities to get to know each other
- ✓ Know everyone by name - or at least try with these [memory hacks!](#)

3. Involve parents by offering hands-on ways to help

- ✓ Implement parent volunteer programs
- ✓ Request field trip volunteers
- ✓ Create Interactive packets or suggestions for parents to help with their child's learning

4. Collaboration: Listen to parents and put their ideas into practice

- ✓ Create an opportunity for families to give monthly or quarterly feedback
- ✓ Record and track feedback over time
- ✓ Put their ideas into action when you can - and let them know you're doing it!

Boosting Collaboration



“Listen to parents and put their ideas into practice”

As childcare providers we not only want to create a space for parents to engage and interact, but also a place where they can share ideas. The true magic happens when we listen to parents, take the great ideas they have, and implement them into our centers. Listening to parents is HUGE.

Toyota used a similar feedback strategy that was so effective that books have been written about it. By taking parent feedback you will show that they are an important part of the process and promote their engagement in their child’s development.

Here are a few ways to encourage collaboration:

- ✓ Consider parent’s perspectives when planning curriculum
- ✓ Solicit feedback by reaching out through polls, surveys, or social media
- ✓ Encourage parents to get involved with their child’s learning from the start
- ✓ Hold regular meetings with parents throughout the school year to discuss their child’s progress
- ✓ Stay connected with instant messaging in childcare software

Make Parent Engagement easy and effective by utilizing tools such as Sandbox Software to help.

It’s our goal to help you increase your level of engagement with families in your center because we know that’s the best way to encourage our early learners.



Exploring Communication



In order to truly understand communication we must explore it at a deeper level. First, let's look at a few different forms of communication. You're probably familiar with written communication. Most centers send written emails weekly or monthly to keep families informed and up-to-date.

As you build on your current parent engagement, consider adding in a few new ideas. You'll be surprised how easy it is to diversify your communication efforts and how much of a difference it makes for parent engagement. Here are some examples of the different forms that parent communication can take:

Forms of Communication

Verbal	Nonverbal	Oral	Visual	Written
In-person conversation	In-person Hand Gestures	In-person conversation	Pictures	Email
Video	Gestures in video message	Video Message	Video	Text Message
Voice Message		Voice Message	Graphics	Social Media Message
			Handout	Formal Newsletter

As providers if we want to effectively communicate with the families in our center we must hit two or more of these styles of communication at all times. By communicating in more than one form you also tend to hit a broader range of learners and personality types.

Pandemic Impacts:

As we experienced the ups and downs of the pandemic a number of these communication styles were interrupted. Limiting in-person meetings makes verbal, nonverbal and oral communication more difficult. In a time like this we need to do our best to hit all areas of communication. This might take some creativity such as creating pre-recorded videos or planning socially distanced meetings or activities.



Communication Options

If you're reading through the list of communication forms and feeling overwhelmed, don't worry! Although the current status of the world has made it difficult to communicate in some of these areas, it's not unmanageable, I promise.

The idea is to get started with one thing and to creatively use available tools to help you. There are 3 modes of communication that you can build into your daily habits that will help you solve these communication difficulties.



Use an App

Having a parent app for communication is essential. The Parent App which Sandbox software offers will provide parents with a better understanding of what their child is up to each day, while allowing you easy access to update information, view invoices, and take payments. Using this app will improve parent engagement at your center immediately, all while saving you time and energy!



Email Updates

Yes, continue to send emails, but keep it short and sweet. Many parents spend their work lives on email, so the last thing they want to do when they come home is check email. Make sure to limit the number of emails you send to your parents so they know it's something important when they see one from you.

When crafting your parent emails, break it up into bullet points and use visuals and graphics when possible. This is a great way to communicate updates without overloading parents with information. Bullet points allow those who skim emails to go straight to the important information. Along with bullet points you can also use ALL CAPS and italics in moderation as these can be great ways to grab their attention. Just keep in mind that too much becomes annoying, and all caps is interpreted as shouting if used for more than one or two words.



Send Home Mail

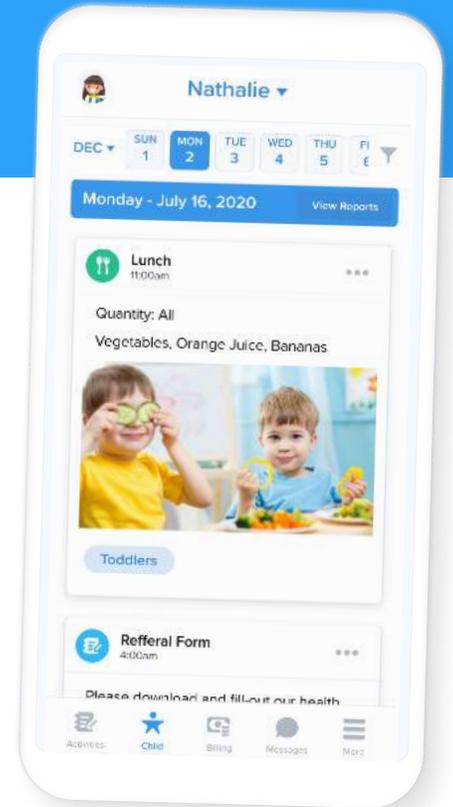
In this day and age where we're dealing with the loss of in-person interaction, good old snail mail is a great addition to your modes of communication. Sending home a monthly paper newsletter to families is an amazing way to help families stay engaged.

If you send home mail, address it to the child and add something personal inside. Children love to get mail! Adding in a few coloring sheets, stickers, or a card with their name on it will add to the excitement.

Here are a few things to consider including in your monthly mailout:

- ✓ General Newsletter
- ✓ Coloring sheets or stickers for the children
- ✓ Monthly Calendar
- ✓ Monthly Snack updates
- ✓ Feature a staff of the month (parents love reading about the teachers!)

How does Sandbox help with parent engagement?



Why should you consider childcare software to boost parent engagement? Since there are so many layers to parent engagement, having a few helpful tools can make a huge difference. No matter the size of your center, having a way that parents can engage straight from their mobile device is huge.

Sandbox software not only saves you time with online registration, billing, and payments, it allows you to track and share classroom activities and includes access to the parent app, a great feature that keeps your center and their child's education just a few clicks away at all times.



Class Activities

One amazing feature of the Sandbox App is tracking and sharing classroom activities. With our app you have the ability to create daily reports, decide what activities you want to track and share them with the families straight to their phone. This makes staying connected and keeping parents up-to-date a piece of cake.



Photo Updates

Another feature that our app gives you access to is sharing photos. Sharing photos is the best way for parents to feel connected to their child and the center throughout their work day. There is nothing like being at work and being able to see a photo of your child happily playing. On the teacher side, you can upload a photo to the newsfeed with just a tap of a button on a center device.



Instant Messaging

The instant messaging feature in the sandbox app is a huge game changer as well. This allows parents to message from the app to the center or classroom teacher. This makes notifying about absences, communication about behavioral issues, or any other communication easy and straightforward. Parents are busy and life can be complicated so they love having a simple and easy way to communicate directly with the classroom teacher from their phone.

Final Notes

If I've seen one thing in my years as director it's that parents want to engage! They desire to be known, seen, and acknowledged but they don't always know how to start the conversation. As leaders it's our job to open up as many communication channels as possible and make sure that families feel comfortable in our center and able to communicate in the ways we have made possible.

Just remember that not everyone will communicate best in-person or through email, and phone calls may not always be practical. Everyone is different and that's why we need as many ways to engage as possible. By expanding your business onto social media or creating communication channels via childcare management software you can create centers where families feel welcome, where they are heard and listened to, and where they play an important part in creating and developing their child's learning opportunities.

Reach out to your parents today and see how getting them involved with their child's education can be a win-win that makes your center stand out from the rest by boosting your children's attitude, engagement, and attendance, leading to the success that we all want our little ones to have!

If parent engagement is important to your center, make sure that you have an app to help. To learn more about sandbox software and how we can help with engagement, schedule a web demo today!





Grow your business with Sandbox

To stay up to date with the latest child care business tips and news, subscribe to our blog. It is our desire to come alongside and help you navigate the craziness of the child care world.”

“Child care centers help provide an amazing service to their communities and its considered an essential service in today’s world. We wish you all the best as you continue to develop and grow your childcare business!

[GET STARTED FOR FREE!](#)

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