



COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILIES

Articles for Teachers and Parents



The following articles include various topics to communicate to families with information and instructions for teachers to follow prior to handing families the corresponding article.
Please enjoy these articles and share them with your families!

Communication Articles

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Beauty in Nature

A family scavenger hunt based on a nature-related theme could be launched over a weekend or even over a period of a week or two. Each child could be assigned to find with his or her family two or three items, or children could be asked to describe and draw their observations.

Of course, you'll have to tailor the hunt to your environment - urban, rural, or suburban, as well as region and season. Be creative and make the hunt an educational adventure not only for the child, but also for parents and other family members.

When all the items are gathered, the children could put together an exhibit. Parents would be invited to visit at their convenience.

Or plan a family field trip to a nature setting (botanical gardens, nature center, state park, and other such places). Families could meet at the point of destination. Invite along a naturalist or an amateur naturalist to help identify and interpret the flora and fauna.

Please see the sample article on the next page. You can send it home to parents to help their children discover the beauty of nature.

From (Family-Friendly Communication for Early Childhood Programs) – Deborah Diffily and Kathy Morrison, editors (Page 105)

Beauty in Nature

Natural beauty can be seen everywhere. White fluffy clouds float above the playground, a spider's web flutters in a gentle wind, the moon sometimes graces the day sky, and flowers shoot up in a nearby garden.

Short nature walks give children a chance to observe the wonders of our natural world. At school, we plan nature walks to listen for environmental sounds or to look for insects. We also take advantage of everyday opportunities such as exploring puddles after a rain shower, capturing snowflakes during the first snowfall, or playing with streamers outside during a strong wind.

Catching fireflies, smelling honeysuckle, or tossing stones into a creek can be aesthetic, relaxing experiences for kids and adults alike. Noticing nature's wonders helps children become more observant and respectful of the world around them, helps build their vocabulary as they hear adults describe what they see, and encourages drawing and painting to document their observations.

From time to time, draw children's attention to things they may not notice. Point out different rocks. Collect leaves of various kinds. Discuss the similarities and differences in flowers. (Children may be tempted to pick flowers, but be careful that they take only common ones – not rare species.) Talk about what the squirrel eats or where the robin lives. Enjoy the changes of the seasons together.

Parents can further stimulate a child's interest – say, in stars or snakes – through library visits. Field guides are available on a wide range of subjects (insects, wildflowers, mammals, trees, and so forth).

Keep specimens, drawings, magazine pictures, photos, stickers, and summaries of your child's special experiences in a scrapbook. A theme may be carried throughout the book, but young naturalists should be allowed to put in anything that strikes their fancy.

One discovery leads to another. We adults have much to learn from the natural curiosity of children.

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Communicating with Children

Parents are better able to ask open-ended questions that spark the child's response (as opposed to the lead-balloon what-did-you-do-today variety) when they have specific information about upcoming events. For example: Learning from the newsletter or monthly events calendar about some special activities in the 4-year-olds' classroom, a parent can ask,

"What did you like most about Mr. Insect Guy's visit today?" Or, "Tell me about the insects that you saw."

It takes little difference whether the event information is provided through computer-generated calendars, narrative letters, or newsletter articles/lists. What is important is keeping families informed of the day-to-day activities of the program.

To fill in parents on something special their children did that day, send a note in the backpack or leave a brief message on the family's answering machine.

Please see the sample article on the next page. You can send it home to parents to help them ask meaningful questions to their child!

From (Family-Friendly Communication for Early Childhood Programs) – Deborah Diffily and Kathy Morrison, editors (Page 10)

Asking Open-Ended Questions

A question like “What color is that block?” evokes a one-word answer. But an open-ended question, “Tell me about the blocks you are using,” encourages a child to describe the blocks or explain what she is doing. There is no right or wrong answer here.

An answer to an open-ended question gives us a window into what the child is thinking and feeling. And the response is sometimes wonderfully creative. In explaining or describing, children also using language more fully.

In our program, we trying to think of good questions to ask children. You might hear one of us say to a child,

- Tell me about your picture.
- What else can you do with the playdough?
- What could you use to make the tower stand up?
- What do you think would happen if_____?
- Is there another way to _____?

It is difficult to change the closed-ended question habitat. But when we ask open-ended questions, children reap great benefits as they think through their responses to express what they want to say. And with their answers, we find out more about what they think and feel.

From (Family-Friendly Communication for Early Childhood Programs) – Deborah Diffily and Kathy Morrison, editors (Page 10)

To Button, Zip, and Tie

Getting dressed on time in the morning can be a real challenge for many of us, but it is particularly difficult for young children who have to contend with buttons, zippers, and shoe laces when their fine motor skills are still developing.

When families are trying to get ready to leave the house at a certain time, parents will probably need to help young children with the dressing process. Preschool children want to be independent but get easily frustrated when the buttons won't do what they want them to do or the zipper will not cooperate.

That frustration leads to an even more stressful morning.

Helping kids learn to contend with the logistics of buttoning buttons, zipping zippers, and tying shoelaces is best done during less stressful times. Concentrate on one skill at a time. Work together and assure children that they will be able to do this with practice. As a parent, you might want to consider shoes with Velcro fasteners, as well as other clothing items that young children can manage more easily as these skills are developing.

Learning to control hands and fingers according to information received from sight is a coordination skill that will aid children in early attempts of reading and writing.

We adults can provide many different opportunities for children to develop these skills. Dressing and undressing dolls and dramatic play with clothes that have buttons and zippers are good for practice. Activities such as shaping playdough, stringing beads, and placing pegs into pegboards also enhance the fine motor skills needed for dressing.

With appropriate experiences, your child will gradually master all the intricacies of getting dressed and undressed.

From (Family-Friendly Communication for Early Childhood Programs) – Deborah Diffily and Kathy Morrison, editors (Page 78)

Helping Children Cope with Stress

Children's behavior at school is often different than it is at home. Any child can have an "off" day, but if you observe behaviors that might indicate unusual stress, be sure to tell parents about them. These conversations may not be easy to initiate, but parents need this information. It will be much easier to express your concerns if you have had several previous conversations with the parent about the more positive behaviors you've observed in their child.

Please see the sample article on the next page. You can send it home to parents to help them assist their child cope with stress!

From (Family-Friendly Communication for Early Childhood Programs) – Deborah Diffily and Kathy Morrison, editors (Page 80)

Helping Children Cope with Stress

Any major change in a child's life can cause stress. Common sources of stress are the birth of a new sibling or the divorce of parents. Stress also can be caused by the death of a relative or a pet, a family move, separation from parents for extended periods, pressure to succeed, overly strict discipline, and natural disasters (even when the child has only seen them on television).

Not all stress can, or should, be avoided. Young children do not view the world as adults do. Misunderstandings of feelings of confusion can build up and leave children with stress they cannot handle along. Young children cannot easily verbalize these feelings, so we adults must be aware of physical or behavioral changes: loss of appetite, sleep troubles, nightmares, headaches, stomachaches, or regressive behaviors such as thumb sucking.

Children often deal with stress through their play. They may act out events they find disturbing. One child may re-create an airplane crash after hearing about a real airline accident. Another may use dolls to have a conversation about divorce. This type of play helps children cope with events and feelings that might otherwise be overwhelming.

Adults play an important role in helping children cope with stress by providing a supportive atmosphere in which to talk about or play out concerns. We need to acknowledge and accept the feelings children express and give them our support, at home and at school. An attitude of love, understanding, and acceptance helps children get through difficult times.

From (Family-Friendly Communication for Early Childhood Programs) – Deborah Diffily and Kathy Morrison, editors (Page 80)

The Art of Books

In previous articles about literacy, we suggested that you highlight an author a week to expand your literacy program. To expand the book/art connection, you might focus on an illustrator instead. Collect books illustrated by a particular artist. After reading a book, point out colors and lines the illustrator used and identify the medium (watercolor, oil, chalk, ink, collage). Feature that medium in the art center, then display the children's artwork beside the work of the illustrator.

Please see the sample article on the next page. You can send it home to parents learn the importance and tips for reading books for children.

From (Family-Friendly Communication for Early Childhood Programs) – Deborah Diffily and Kath Morrison, editors (Page 85)

The Art of Books

You don't have to go to art galleries to appreciate beautiful artwork. Watercolor, oil painting, pen and ink, collage, and other forms of artwork can be found in quality children's literature. In our program we choose books not only for the stories they tell, but also for their wonderful artwork.

A trip to the library or bookstore offers the opportunity to compare the styles of different illustrators. Eric Carle, Tomie de Paola, and Ezra Jacks Keats all have distinct artistic styles that even young children can learn to recognize with very little adults assistance.

Children enjoy experimenting with the art materials used by illustrators they know. One of their favorite artists, Stephen Gammell, illustrator of *Monster Mama*, *Old Henry*, and *Song and Dance Man*, uses watercolor and chalk to create splashes of color across the page.

Check out these books from the library and offer watercolors and chalk to your child. Create Gammell-like pictures together.

Extending literature in this way expands a child's horizons in many ways. But more than that, it's just plain family fun!

From (Family-Friendly Communication for Early Childhood Programs) – Deborah Diffily and Kathy Morrison, editors (Page 85)