

Encouraging parent involvement at StrongStart BC centres

One of the key components of StrongStart BC is parent/caregiver involvement in the program. All children attending the program are to be accompanied by a parent or caregiver. The job of the StrongStart BC Facilitator is to lead early learning activities, including stories, music and art to encourage the holistic development of children, and to support parents and caregivers in encouraging early learning in their children's daily lives.

Here are some ideas for StrongStart BC Facilitators to encourage parent/caregiver involvement:

Environment

- Make sure that parents/caregivers feel welcome and comfortable.
- Provide a quiet, comfortable space for parents/caregivers and their child to read together.
- Place cue cards in the environment that list questions or comments that parents/caregivers may choose to use with their children. For example: "Can I play with you", "What can I do to help", "What happens next", "What else can you show me", "How did you do that", "How can you solve that problem?", "What do you think?", "Give simple instructions" "Talk about shapes, numbers or colours", "Talk about feelings", "Let your child lead you", "Pretend along with your child", "Give your child choices", "Give names to things you see and do", and "Seek first to understand, then to be understood."
- Ask parents/caregivers if the centre's activities are ones that the child does in their home environment.
- Design activities that build on children's home experiences.

Model Best Practices

- Teach parents that activities such as modeling reading behaviour and reading to their children increase children's interest in learning.
- Suggest that parents/caregivers ask their child to tell them a story about a picture they have drawn.
- Have children select books for their parent/caregiver to read to them.
- Ask parents/caregivers to narrate what their children are doing.
- Prompt parents/caregivers with questions for their children.

Encourage Participation

- Encourage parents to be curious about their children's activities.
- Ask parents/caregivers what they would enjoy about the program.
- Ask parents/caregivers if they would change anything about the program.
- Lead group activities that involve both adults and children
- Suggest to parents that they "ask permission" from their child to play with them
- Encourage parents/caregivers to introduce themselves to other parents/caregivers, and ask that they assist their child in introducing themselves to other children

- Provide activities where the children lead the adults

Provide Information

- Offer parents/caregivers information on child development, health, safety and nutrition, and adult-child communication.

Communication

- Encourage parents/caregivers to talk with their child. The more you talk and the more words you use, the stronger a child's language skills will be.
- Encourage parents/caregivers to talk about what they are thinking. This will show children the importance of curiosity and how to be problem solvers.

Celebrate

- Celebrate major milestones in the lives of families: a new baby, a lost tooth, learning a special song.

Keep these ideas in mind when working with parents/caregivers:

- Parents and caregivers have important perspectives about their children.
- All families have strengths.
- Cultural differences are both valid and valuable.