



Networking and Collaboration Amongst Child Care Providers

Why?

Meeting with others who understand the issues and challenges you face and can share success stories is one way to recharge your batteries and prepare to forge ahead. Networking and collaborating with others provides opportunities to strengthen the services we provide to children, families and the community, increases the resources available to us and strengthen community partnerships. Working together provides opportunities to identify common issues, make our needs known, and work on finding solutions to shared problems. The old adage “More heads are better than one” is never more true than it is when we are looking for innovation.

How to Start

1. Look for Allies

Determine which child care programs and providers offer services that are comparable to yours and may be encountering similar issues. Invite a few providers to help plan a meeting. This is the first step towards building a network of colleagues with whom to share information and explore collaborative initiatives.

2. Identify Some Topics of Common Interest

Work with your planning group to brainstorm a list of topics that require attention. Consider ideas for speakers or other resources that could provide information on each topic of interest. Keep a record of this discussion for future reference in planning networking meetings.

3. Plan a first meeting

Discuss with your planning group when and where to hold a first meeting. Think about how you will invite others in your community. Try to identify barriers to participation and find ways to minimize these as much as possible.

Introduce yourself to the staff of your local Child Care Facilities Licensing Office and Child Care Resource and Referral Program. They may be able to support your networking and collaboration efforts by helping you to organize and promote meetings. If these organizations publish newsletters, you can spread the word about your plans by submitting articles and announcements.

Points To Consider

- **Time and Place**
Check with the Licensing Office and Child Care Resource and Referral program for ideas of free meeting space. Community/recreation centres, libraries, churches, banks, even coffee shops, sometimes offer meeting space to community groups. Perhaps your own child care space would be appropriate. Schedule the meeting at a time that is convenient for most care providers.
- **Refreshments**
Think about the refreshments that might be needed. If the meeting will be right after work, perhaps a pot luck meal would be helpful.
- **Sign in Sheet**
Provide a sign in sheet for participants to indicate their name, work place, phone number, mailing address and email. This is the beginning of your network contact list.
- **Welcome and Introductions**
Help participants feel welcome. Have them introduce themselves and their program. Sometimes a fun ice-breaker activity can help people relax. Ask staff from your Child Care Resource and Referral program for some ideas.
- **Setting the Stage**
Introduce the list of issues and topics the planning group identified. Ask meeting participants to add new ideas to the list and choose priorities. Seek suggestions for resources to assist the group to learn more about the identified topics.
- **Making the Plan**
The group will have some decisions to make. For example:
 - 1) Location
You may want to rotate meeting at a variety of child care programs or meet at a central community location.
 - 2) Times and Dates of Future Meetings
Choose dates and times suitable for the majority. It may be helpful to set a consistent day and time each month.
 - 3) Format
Decide whether to adopt a formal or informal structure.
 - 4) Responsibilities of Participants
Who will arrange for speakers, set the agenda, bring snacks, etc.? Try to share the work!
 - 5) Advertising/Informing Others
Who will call participants to remind them of future meetings? How will the group inform others?

6) Snacks

Decide whether to have “pot-luck style” or a “snack fund” to which everyone can contribute. You might also contact your local coffee shop for donations.

Distance Networking

Networking over long distances can work very well. Technology makes it increasingly easier.

Telephone

Child care providers in nearby communities can come together via conference calls to make contact and discuss current issues.

Email and Social Networking

Issues and concerns can be discussed with others in the field through email, Facebook and other social networking. Just remember what you say will not necessarily remain confidential!

Newsletters

Create a newsletter or submit articles to other newsletters. Community Care Facilities Licensing, Child Care Resource and Referral Programs, Early Childhood Educators of B.C. (ECEBC), BC Family Child Care Association (BCFCCA), School Age Child Care Association of BC (SACCA) and other child care associations produce regular newsletters that can be a good way to raise interest about particular topics or concerns.

Letters

Connect with others in the province by mail. You might ask them questions or write up issues and invite them to respond. Writing and mailing a letter can be time consuming, but it is a way to communicate with others who share common interests and who also may feel isolated.

Adapted with permission from School Age Child Care Association of BC, Fact Sheet #2, 1998.

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