Partnerships with Families and Communities

What does ‘partnerships with families and communities’ mean?
Partnerships with families and communities are reciprocal relationships where the knowledge, skills and experience of all parties are respected, recognised and shared.

Why are partnerships with families and communities important?
Families are the first and most influential educators of their children. Educators in schools and care centres need to work in partnership with families and communities to strengthen the children’s educational foundations.

The same principles for effective partnerships with other professionals apply equally to partnerships with families and communities, viz.
- Active involvement of all parties
- A sharing of decision making powers
- Recognition of complementary expertise and roles
- Sharing and agreeing on the aims and processes of what is to be achieved
- Negotiation of disagreements (acknowledging that these will probably occur)
- Mutual trust and respect
- Openness and honesty
- Clear communication.

What do partnerships with families and communities look like in practice?
All families and community members will be visible in school and care settings – though not necessarily in the same way or at the same time. For some families and community members it may be sufficient for them to be able to visit the school and feel comfortable to talk with educators at all levels. Others may be willing and able to work in classrooms or activity centres on a regular or irregular basis sharing their skills and knowledge with the children and staff. For some there may be occasional times when they come into the school or care centre to help with work needing to be done inside or outside the buildings. No longer can it be assumed that parents are the ones who will be interested in the children’s education and well being – or even that the parents will necessarily be together to communicate with the school or centre staff. Grandparents, older siblings, other family members may be the primary care-giver of some of the children in your school or care centres – and are equally entitled to share their information with you and will expect you to share your information respectfully with them. Nor are the communities from which the children in your school or care centre one homogenous group. They may be many and varied. The needs and capacities of families and communities are not identical and schools and care centres need to be creative in the ways in which they integrate them into their own community.

What you will not see
- Families excluded from schools or care centres by physical, social or emotional barriers
- Some families welcomed but others rejected
- Family and community members only welcomed for special occasions
A lack of information in appropriate formats to assist family and community members understand the school or care centre, its operations and the ways in which they can become involved

Some questions to think about
• What is the nature of the partnerships between you, the school or centre and the families and communities of the children who come to you?
• What other community members have or should have partnerships in your school or care centre?
• What are you doing in your centre, school or classroom to enable partnerships to be built with families and communities?

Some things to do
• Use your next school assembly or some other event as a vehicle for building partnerships.
• Showcase something your school or centre is doing in a way and in a place that families and communities will see the children’s learning.
• Review your program and identify ways in which you could build partnerships with families and communities.

Some more to read
The Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau
http://www.familyschool.org.au/
http://www.teachers.tv/video/3237 - Partnerships with Families

