Children's learning: The gift of shared responsibility

Each child care provider plays an important role in planning with others for children’s success.

Children learn from multiple experiences and in a variety of settings, not just in programs. These learning experiences will continue and change across a child’s lifetime, bringing multiple people and programs into the child’s world. A child’s learning and care becomes a shared responsibility.

The term shared responsibility means devising ways to work together and support the outcome of children’s learning and of quality care. When professionals consider shared responsibility in children’s learning, it’s important to ask:

Who are the important people, sources, and programs in the child’s life?

This could be their families, caregivers, neighbors, doctors, bus drivers, service programs, and more. How might these people and programs share responsibility for the child’s learning?

How are professionals accountable for shared responsibility?

For example, an early educator is responsible for connecting with parents to plan and review the child’s learning process. The early educator may show accountability by planning parent conferences.

How are others accountable for shared responsibility?

Think of all the people and programs that are involved with the care and learning of the children in programs - there are many! In terms of sharing responsibility for children’s learning, what might professionals expect of one another? For instance, an early educator may expect parents to attend conferences and read programming information, and a parent may expect daily communication regarding their child. A bus driver may expect to be informed of children’s special needs, such as allergies, and providers may expect the bus driver to share observations of children’s behaviors on the bus.

Families are essential in shared responsibility. Families know their children better than anyone and are the strongest influence in their children’s life. Partnering with parents/families unveils directions for shared responsibility and creates allies in building quality learning and care. In developing partnerships with families, shared responsibility has a chance to be discussed, defined, and planned for. Children receive better education and care while families and programs learn strategies in shared responsibility that they can carry on.

According to the National PTA (Parent Teacher Association), when families, schools, and communities work together:

• Student achievement improves
• Teacher morale rises
• Communication among parents, teachers, and administrators increases
• Family, school, and community connections multiply

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment, early childhood practitioners have ethical responsibilities to children and their families. It is necessary to develop mutual trust and create partnerships with the families served and encourage them to be involved in shared decision making.

Shared responsibility is not a new concept but is increasingly proving its worth in children’s learning. It is especially important when engaging families. Look not only at the child’s current experiences, but also to past and future experiences, as they all make important marks in the learning process and may impact current development. Shared responsibility continues throughout the child’s life – all building on one another.
Shared responsibility actions for early educators

• Set the tone for partnerships. Create a welcoming atmosphere. With others, define goals of shared responsibility, listen to each others’ ideas, and plan together.

• Communicate. Implement tools that work in communicating, such as meetings, e-mail, phone meetings, newsletters, etc. Be sure communication is meaningful and two-way.

• Provide specific information about child development (tips, handouts, workshops). Also share how you plan for children’s learning and development.

• Plan for learning outside of your program. Offer ideas for learning to continue at home and in other settings. Tap into community resources.

• Provide others, particularly families, opportunities to be involved in the decision-making about the child’s learning. Support equal partnership and shared power.

• Create program-wide strategies. Share your intentions and visions for shared responsibilities and how everyone involved can help. Clear expectations are needed for accountability.

• Review shared responsibilities on a continual basis. Determine what’s working, what’s not, and what’s needed.

To develop shared responsibility find and use the steps and activities that work best. To develop strategies for shared responsibility think about these questions:

1. What are the goals of shared responsibility and how will they impact children?

2. How can you build common ground and effectively work together?

3. How do you develop mutual plans for the success of each child?

Through shared responsibility a method of collaboration that works is uncovered. Through shared responsibilities of children’s learning, everyone learns.

References:


Harvard Family Research Project:


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