

FAMILY LITERACY STARTER KIT



**VIRGINIA ADULT LEARNING
RESOURCE CENTER**



FAMILY LITERACY

STARTER KIT

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Introduction

The Family Literacy Starter Kit offers general background information and an overview of the issues for adult education and literacy staff members and/or volunteers. It is written for adult educators who are planning a new family literacy program or expanding family literacy-related services, but it may also be helpful information for a new staff person in an existing program. It is intended as a first reference, not a complete guide. The family literacy field grows richer in resources every day, and we do not need to duplicate existing materials.

The first section is devoted to a discussion of program design options, including a brief overview of possible program sponsors and collaborative partners. The second section deals in some detail with the lessons learned in the field about recruitment and retention of participants. Recruitment and retention are familiar concerns for adult educators, but new challenges arise when working with families. The next two sections focus on curriculum only in those areas specific to family literacy: parenting education and parent and child interaction. We chose this emphasis because these program components may be most unfamiliar to adult educators. Finally, we introduce program evaluation using a framework similar to the one used in the National Reporting System (NRS) for adult education programs.

The Kit is written for adult educators, so we chose not to include detailed information about the adult education component. We recognize the special challenges involved in planning curriculum for adult education in a family literacy program and integrating that instruction with the other components, but we felt this Kit was not the place to address them in detail. Similarly, because most adult education programs planning services that directly involve children will have to work with schools and preschools, we also chose not to focus on educational services for children. Again, integrating the components requires planning and skill, but all the partners' needs must be addressed in this process, and a starter kit is not the appropriate vehicle for that challenge.

As a next step, we encourage readers of the Family Literacy Starter Kit to explore the family literacy-related materials in the Resource Center's collection and the websites we have identified. These are listed on our website at <http://www.vcu.edu/aelweb> Click on Literacy Resources for Teacher/Tutor; go to favorite links; then click on family literacy for an extensive list of sites organized by subject.

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Staff Development Coordinator

Family Literacy Starter Kit: A Guide for Practitioners

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Part 1: Understanding Family Literacy

Understanding Your Program

The first step in implementation, expansion, or improvement is to examine what you have and where you are now. Take a few minutes to answer these questions about your new or existing program before reading the rest of this section. Remember to focus only on your agency's current or proposed *family literacy services*.

~ *What do you know or assume about the needs and strengths of parents and families in your community (or the specific population you will serve)?*

The needs you identify help to define the nature of the services you provide. (If you are not sure about this question, read your grant proposal.) Your assumptions should be explored (See "Program Philosophy: Assumptions" in this section.)

~ *What goals and outcomes are you aiming for?*

This seems almost too obvious to be stated, but you must know exactly where you are trying to go. You must specify your objectives and the measurable outcomes you expect for parents/caregivers and/or their children. Again, your grant proposal, program plan, or mission statement should specify goals.

~ *Whom will (do) you serve directly?*

Is yours a program for adults, perhaps with a focus on developing skills for their role as parents or caregivers? Do you also provide services for children? (See "Program Approaches" in this section.)

~ *Who else will be (is) affected by your services (family impact)?*

What kind of impact do you expect on young (not participating) children or other family members? Will your program change your agency? Will collaboration result in changes in your partner organizations?

~ *What services will (do) you provide?*

Be sure you understand all the services you will be (are) providing: classes, home visits, workshops, tutoring, family activities, etc.

~ *What agencies/organizations will be (are) actively collaborating to provide services and what will (do) they contribute? What other agencies will (do) provide support and how?*

Collaboration is often difficult. Be sure you understand the roles of all individuals and agencies involved.

~ *What do you do well? How would you like to improve your services and outcomes?*

Surveying Programming Options

Family literacy programs and services take many forms. As you review the material below, consider how compatible each of the options is with your beliefs and assumptions, your community's needs, and the resources available.

~ *What is family literacy?*

Proponents of particular models answer this question differently. The National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) and the federal Even Start¹ legislation support *comprehensive programs* and define "family literacy services" as

"services that are of sufficient intensity in terms of hours, and of sufficient duration to make sustainable changes in a family and that integrate all of the following activities:

- Interactive literacy activities between parents and their children [often called Parents and Children Together, or PACT Time]
- Training for parents regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in their education [often called Parent Time]
- Parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency [Adult Education]
- An age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences [Children's Education]"

¹ According to the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994, Title I, Section 1202, the federally funded Even Start program aims to " help break the cycle of poverty and illiteracy by improving the educational opportunities of the Nation's low-income families by integrating early childhood education, adult literacy or adult basic education, and parenting education into a unified family literacy program, to be referred to as 'Even Start'." The programs are "implemented through cooperative projects that build on existing community resources to create a new range of services . . ."

Regular and frequent sessions of all components are a hallmark of these programs, which usually provide long-term services (months and years) to enrolled families.

If this is our definition, we may want to call less ambitious and comprehensive programs something else—perhaps family reading programs, family-focused education services, or services “in support of” family literacy. However, despite the advocates for one model or another, we find the “family literacy” label on an immense variety of programs. In this manual, family literacy is an “umbrella” term, embracing the variety in the field.

❖ The Parent Role: Support for Children’s Learning

The family literacy concept is based on the understanding that parents play a powerful role as their children’s first teachers. Although they may not conceive of parenting as teaching, parents—both consciously and unintentionally—transmit skills, knowledge, values, and attitudes to their children. Proponents of family literacy programs believe they can tap into this power source by developing parents’ skills and/or encouraging them to support their children’s learning and schooling in a variety of ways.

❖ The Parent Role: Motivation for Adult Participants

Although some programs aim first to make a difference with children, adult education-based family literacy programs usually give parents’ needs at least equal attention. Staff members in these programs understand that the desire to help their children is an important motivator for many parents. They seek to use this motivation to entice adults to enroll in classes where they can improve their own skills, get a GED, or get a better job. They may also create basic skills curriculum around the parent role, using children’s literature and parenting resources as instructional materials.

❖ Family Literacy: A Good Deal

You may hear it said that family literacy programs offer “twice the bang for the buck,” by serving both parents and children. In addition, they attempt to meet current demands for adult education and/or job skills, while reducing the need for adult remedial programs in the future. The family literacy concept seems almost intuitively valid—something “everyone knows” is true. But individuals and agencies translate the concept into services in different ways.

~ *What kinds of programs are there? How do they vary?*

Programs range in intensity from one-hour open-attendance workshops for parents on choosing children's books to nearly full-time programs that provide literacy instruction for both parents and their children, parenting education, and regular activities for parents and children together. Programs vary in philosophy and goals, recipients of services (adults, children, or both), emphasis and type of services, intensity of services, agency sponsorship, and community support and collaborations.

❖ **Program Philosophy: Identifying the population to serve and defining needs**

Program planners should clearly identify the groups they will serve, the challenges these families face (in education, employment, childcare, etc.), and which of these perceived needs the program will address.

Families in Need

Most family literacy services attempt to reach low-income populations and others considered "most in need." Need is generally defined broadly, most often by program planners who are outside the community of families to be served.

Demographic data provide information on areas of high unemployment or poverty and segments of the population without a high school diploma. *Social service agencies* may help identify specific families or groups they serve. Program services are most often based on generalizations about what such families need, rather than on demand for services from the families themselves.

Adults often recognize they need a GED or better reading skills to get a better job, but are less likely to recognize the complex roots of their difficulties or the value of integrated family-focused services. Since most of those considered to be "in need" would be unlikely to envision and request such programs if they didn't exist, it seems likely that the initiative for service development and goal setting will remain with community agencies.

However, many programs give more than lip service to the philosophy of *empowering parents in program planning*. Parents may be surveyed to identify needs the program should address, may take on the planning of activities for their children, and may participate collaboratively in curriculum development for the adult education component. This

involvement of participants is especially important where there are cultural differences between families and program staff relating to appropriate roles for family members and interactions between parents and children.

Critics of the family literacy approach take offense at what they call the "*deficit model*." This model is said to assume that families are "broken" in important ways and need "fixing." Most proponents of family literacy are quick to respond that they operate from a "*strengths model*"—that is, they assume that all families have strengths and attempt only to build on those strengths to meet self-identified needs.

Families in General

Some programs offer services to all interested participants, without regard for financial or educational needs. This approach may be justified by citing common needs of all parents and the scarcity of accessible parent-support programs.

If you recruit from the general population, you may easily reach your enrollment goals. However, you may also find you are "preaching to the choir"—that is, not reaching those you originally intended to serve. If you are undecided, remember that you don't have to choose one or the other. You might consider offering *different levels of service* to meet different families' needs.

Parents and/or Caregivers

While most program materials speak of "parents," the overwhelming majority involve only mothers. This focus may be justified by the research showing a strong link between a mother's level of education and her children's achievements. Nonetheless, some programs work hard to attract fathers and many provide special activities and events for the whole family. Program staff must also define the *eligible* adult. The primary caregiver is usually the appropriate program participant, and that person may be a grandparent or guardian.

Whom will (do) you serve? How were needs identified? What needs will (does) your program address?

❖ Program Philosophy: Assumptions

You or your program planner based this program on assumptions about the families you serve. These may be explicit and acknowledged, but often they have not been examined. You may find it helpful to analyze the assumptions inherent in your plan and the beliefs held by you and your staff. Consider these examples:

“Most families seek to improve the general conditions of their lives...
Most families make special efforts to improve the lives of their children...”
(Strickland, 1996)

The list below comes from the National Center for Family Literacy:

“All families have strengths.

Parents can and should set goals for their own and their families’ literacy development.

Families are culturally and individually diverse; this diversity is healthy and natural and enriches the community.

The family is a system of influence, and the transmission of values happens within that system.

The family unit is the appropriate focus if we plan to influence the attitudes, values, and expectations communicated in the home.

Families struggle with multiple problems, concerns, and issues and may require regular support and assistance with those non-educational needs.”

(National Center for Family Literacy, 1995)

What are the assumptions underlying your program? Are these assumptions valid?

❖ Program Goals

Your goals are of course related to the needs you have identified and the assumptions you have made. Logically then, your goals determine your program design or approach (See Program Designs/Approaches in this section.) Your program may have one, two, or many goals. But you should have at least one goal for each component of your program. Here are a few examples.

Adult Education Component

Sample Goals:

- Assist parents to improve basic literacy/English language and math skills
- Assist parents to improve employability and/or job skills
- Help parents develop skills to support their children's learning and development

Early Childhood Education Component

Sample Goals:

- Support developmentally appropriate learning of preschool children
- Prepare children for success in school
- Encourage development of pre-reading skills
- Help children to appreciate and enjoy books and reading

Parenting Education/Parent and Child Interaction Component(s)

Sample Goals:

- Help parents to understand and support their children's learning and development
- Show parents how to encourage their children's language development and promote reading and writing at home
- Teach parents how to communicate with school personnel, work with teachers to help their children, and advocate for their children to obtain needed services

What are your goals? What outcomes do you expect?

❖ Program Designs/Approaches—Four Types

Ruth Nickse (1990) suggested a useful way of categorizing program approaches based on focus of services. According to Nickse there are four generic types:

Type 1: Direct services for both children and adults

Type 2: Indirect services for both children and adults

Type 3: Direct services for adults and indirect services for children

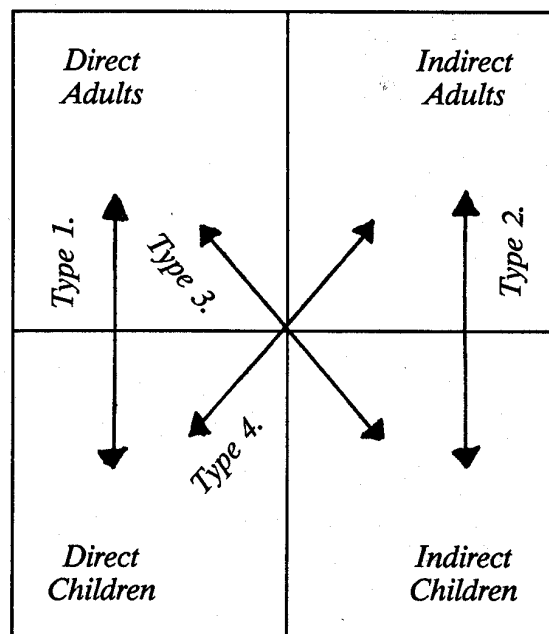
Type 4: Indirect services for adults with direct services for children.

Type 1: Direct services for both children and adults

The program provides learning activities of some kind for both parents/caregivers and their children. Educational services vary.

Examples:

- Literacy activities for children provided while parents attend a literacy program or classes
- Adult education/literacy/ESL program for parents combined with Head Start or other preschool program for their children
- Comprehensive, three- or four-component model (like Even Start) with 3-5 sessions per week over many months



Some comprehensive programs include pre-employment or job-skills training for parents, provide home-based services (usually in rural areas), or include home visits among other services.

Since Welfare Reform, this model has been adapted in many localities to focus more on work by providing education on the work site, offering job training, and scheduling family literacy classes and activities around parents' work shifts.

Type 2: Indirect services to both children and adults

Services are more informal and short-term, sometimes involving special events that don't require a formal commitment to attendance. These programs may simply provide books and other resources, in the hope that making the "tools" available will encourage activity.

Examples:

- Free books for kids
- Take-home parent-child reading and activity kits for families to borrow
- A Family Literacy Fair to make parents and children aware of agencies, activities, and resources that offer support for family learning or to involve them in literacy-related activities that are fun and motivating

Type 3: Direct services for adults and indirect services for children

This model serves adults, often by teaching skills that will allow them to work with their children.

Examples:

- Workshops for parents introducing them to children's books and ideas for sharing books with their children
- Instruction and support for parents as "first teachers" at home and as advocates for their children in gaining access to appropriate services from the school system

Type 4: Direct services for children and indirect services for adults

School-based family literacy programs are most likely to focus on children, while involving parents to build support for their children's education.

Examples:

- Head Start and other preschool programs with parent involvement
- Chapter 1 (school-based) services for children with a family involvement component

The above section was adapted from *Family and Intergenerational Literacy Programs: An Update of the Noises of Literacy* by Ruth S. Nickse.

In which category does your program belong?

❖ Group-based and Home-based Services

Regardless of which type of program you offer, you have a choice of service delivery options: center-based, home-based, or a combination of the two. Most programs are *group-based or center-based*: participants come to a school or other location and meet as a group. In urban areas, where public transportation is available and/or population is concentrated enough to gather a group without unreasonable travel requirements, group-based programs are common.

The group-based option offers numerous advantages. It is time effective and cost-effective, and participants generally benefit from the opportunity to work and play together, to share concerns and help each other, and to expand their social networks. In addition, if all program services (for adults and children) are offered at the same site, staff can communicate and collaborate to provide integrated, individualized services. “Co-location” also improves attendance and retention.

Some programs, especially in rural areas, take the program to the families, by providing *home-based* services. Program staff members (alone or in pairs) may visit each family once or twice a week at a prescheduled time, to work with parents and/or children. They may also leave reading or study materials, assignments, or suggested activities for the families to do between visits. Many home-based programs also offer occasional group meetings and special events.

Home-based services allow families to participate even if they do not have transportation or childcare for infants. They also give staff the opportunity to individualize services to suit the unique situations of families.

Other programs offer a *combination* approach, with weekly group-based activities and less frequent home visits. Some programs offer a less intensive, temporary home-based option for parents who are not ready to join the group for some reason, or are making a gradual transition out of the program. Even Start programs are center-based but include a home-based component.

Which service-delivery option is best for your program? Which is best for your agency? For your community?

❖ Intensity of Services

Intensity may be considered a function of two variables: (1) the amount of direct teaching and active learning, and (2) the amount of time parents and/or children spend in program activities and services. One-to-one tutoring in specific skills is fairly intensive; a study hall is much less so. Classroom instruction is more intensive than a children's story hour. Saturday morning workshops involve less time on task than classes that meet three times a week. The particular combination of instruction and time spent defines the level of intensity.

Type 2 programs (indirect children-indirect adults) are typically less intensive than many Type 1 programs. However, within the Type 1 category, great variation exists. Some programs offering direct services to parents and children meet only once a week, while others meet every morning. Some comprehensive programs offer services for a full school day, three or four times per week. One program may provide less instruction for children—maybe childcare, supervised play, and story hours; another may offer a full preschool program.

Generally, programs offering relatively intensive services expect relatively significant parent and child outcomes. Less intensive services may produce positive, but more limited results.

How intensive are your services? Are your expected outcomes realistic?

❖ Other Program Services:

Family literacy programs may offer other regular or occasional services. Here are a few examples.

- Transportation for parents and/or children
- Meals for program participants or families
- Celebrations and field trips for participants and/or families
- Childcare for infant children of participating families
- Education for parents at their work site

Identifying the Players—Program Sponsors and Partners

Traditional education services focus on individuals, and our schools are set up to work that way. For families in need this system often results in fragmented or overlapping services, inefficient processes, and unmet needs. Family-focused services (especially more comprehensive programs) require a new approach. All the organizations and agencies providing services to parents, children, or family units are potential partners in the family literacy effort. Who you work with depends on what you are trying to do in your program (your goals), what barriers the families face, and what kinds of resources you need. Following is an overview of the organizations typically involved in family literacy services.

~ *Who offers family literacy programs?*

❖ Local Organization/Agency Sponsors

Most commonly, *the primary provider* is an adult education program, a K-12 school system, a preschool program, a private community-based adult literacy program, or a public library. As a result, the main agency involved may be a public school district, a community college, a private agency, or a division of local government. (Even Start programs are required by law to be collaborative, but one partner must be a local school district.) Less frequently programs are initiated and administered by a church, an Indian tribe or school, or a private business.

❖ Local Partners

Because family-focused services usually require collaboration among agencies to provide services and resources for both parents and children, the program partners are numerous. Here are just a few:

Head Start programs – Departments of Social Services – local service organizations (Kiwaniis and others) – bookstores – universities – foundations – public health departments and hospitals – immigrant aid organizations – churches – private schools – libraries

❖ National Organizations

National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL)
325 West Main Street, Suite 200
Louisville, KY 40202-4251
(502) 584-1133
<http://www.famlit.org>

National Even Start Association
2225 Camino del Rio South, Suite A
San Diego, CA 92108
(800) 977-3731
<http://www.evenstart.org>

Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy
1112 16th Street NW, Suite 340
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 955-6183
<http://www.barbarabushfoundation.com>

~ *How do local agencies work together?*

Collaboration is the key to success in family literacy. One agency or organization working alone is usually unable to provide intensive services for two generations and the supplemental services families often need in order to take full advantage of the program. The excerpts below summarize the experience of local programs and national organizations.

"A family literacy program requires careful planning and a combination of many services to achieve maximum results. . . .These tasks usually transcend the role of any one person's or agency's responsibilities in the community. Therefore it is desirable to organize a collaborative group to help prepare your community for family literacy. . . .Collaborative partners vary in their involvement. Decision making, staffing, in-kind contributions, services, and funding are possible methods of involvement." (*Policy Maker's Guide to Understanding Family Literacy*, National Center for Family Literacy, 1994)

"Family literacy staff often work with collaborators to provide instruction, health and social services, counseling, job training, and/or job placement. Partners also assist with recruitment and retention of families. Through partnerships with other agencies, family literacy programs can provide better and more comprehensive services, use funds more efficiently and effectively, establish a common vision and goals in the community to address problems, and open windows of opportunity for families.

Here are some typical examples of the benefits of collaborative efforts in family literacy:

- Integration of early childhood, adult, and parent education into a comprehensive family-focused curriculum

- Shared facilities serving both children and adults
- Provision of transportation for both children and their parents through agreements with the public schools
- Provision of meals for both children and parents through the school lunch program or through funds provided by local sources
- Shared cost of teacher salaries using a variety of funding sources
- Child-care services for younger children of the parents in the program
- Improved public relations through local media and the 'networks' of the collaborating agencies
- More effective recruitment and increased retention of families because of higher visibility and the pro-active approach of collaborating agencies
- More effective use of volunteers with both children and parents
- Better access to counseling and support services for the family, not just individual members of the family
- Additional sources of books and materials through public and school libraries
- Access to computer training through public schools, area technical centers, community colleges, or universities
- Assistance in making transitions—as children enter kindergarten and parents move on to further education, job training, and/or employment
- Increased funding to enhance and/or expand family literacy in the community”

(The Family Literacy Answer Book, National Center for Family Literacy, 1997)

Seeking Other Resources for Family Literacy Program Design

❖ References and Other Print Resources

- Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy. (1989). First teachers: A family literacy handbook for parents, policy-makers, and literacy providers. Washington, D.C.: Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy.
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Van Horn, B., Ovaert, V., & Eunice, N. (1992). Development and evaluation of a model family literacy program. University Park, PA: Institute for the Study of Adult Literacy, College of Education, Pennsylvania State University.

Weinstein-Shr, G., Quintero, E.P. & National Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education. (1995). Immigrant learners and their families: Literacy to connect the generations. McHenry, IL: Center for Applied Linguistics and Delta Systems.

❖ Video Resources

National Center for Family Literacy. (1994). A success story. Louisville, KY: National Center for Family Literacy.

Head Start Family Literacy Project. (2001). Parents and children learning together. Louisville, KY: National Center for Family Literacy.

❖ Web Addresses

Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy <http://www.barbarabushfoundation.com/>

Family Literacy in Canada:
Profiles of Effective Practices <http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/family/famlit/cover.htm>

Family Literacy Resource Notebook <http://literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/famlitnotebook/>

National Center for Family Literacy <http://www.famlit.org/>

National Even Start Association <http://www.evenstart.org/>

National Institute for Literacy
Family Literacy Special Collection <http://literacy.kent.edu/Midwest/FamilyLit/>

Work-Related Learning Guide for Family Literacy and Adult Education Organizations
(available in the publications section on the Jobs For the Future website)

<http://www.jff.org/>

The Resource Center has identified additional family literacy-related websites found at <http://www.vcu.edu/aelweb>. Highlight *Literacy Resources*; click on *Teacher/Tutor*; then on *Family Literacy* for an extensive list of sites organized by subject.

Part II. Recruitment and Retention of Participants

Reaching the Families

Recruitment and retention may be the biggest challenges you face. Like other voluntary programs for adults, the first (and continuous) goals for your family literacy program are to find the people who can benefit from the service, convince them to give it a try, and keep them coming long enough to make some sort of difference in their skills and their lives. Welfare Reform, with its work requirements, has made these goals even more challenging. Most clients in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program have work requirements that make participation in a comprehensive family literacy program difficult if not impossible. As a result, many programs have adjusted their schedules to suit working parents and/or altered program goals to match TANF requirements for job training and work experience. These and other issues must be considered in planning for recruitment and retention.

~ *Whom will you serve?*

The so-called "target population" of family literacy programs is usually undereducated parents and/or parents with limited English proficiency and their young (often preschool) children. Programs may focus on particular sub-groups, such as TANF recipients, children in Head Start and their parents, teenage parents, or incarcerated parents. As discussed above, you (and your funding source!) decide whom you will serve and whether you will have eligibility requirements.

~ *How do you reach them?*

❖ Planning

Budget for recruitment and make a plan. Begin several weeks before your intended start date, and use multiple media and strategies. General strategies involve use of newspapers, radio, TV, brochures, posters, flyers, mailings, home visits, and referrals from churches, housing authorities, clinics, and social service agencies.

❖ Policy Issues

Think ahead about policy issues related to enrollment. Will enrollment have an upper or lower limit (Will you close the class with 15 families? Will you cancel the program if only three enroll initially?) Is enrollment open to all, or are there eligibility requirements or families with "favored status"?

If you offer more than one component, do all family members have to enroll in all parts of the program? For instance, can parents drop off their children, but not attend themselves? Can parents go to literacy classes but skip the parenting workshops or parent-child activities?

This question of mandatory participation should be addressed directly, because you may find that some components are much less well attended than others, unless you enforce the rule that families must commit equally to all parts of the program. You may decide that parents should have free choice. Some programs offer a sort of smorgasbord of services and allow families to pick and choose. Family Resource Centers often take this approach. Either policy may be defended; just consider your options and decide.

❖ A Word to the Wise

Expect a slow start, because family literacy is still a relatively new idea. Unless you are funded to serve a group that is mandated to participate, you may find recruitment to be an uphill struggle for a long while. Keep it up; efforts must be ongoing, using different approaches.

"Word of mouth" works best in many programs. Of course, you have to have a track record to get a reputation, so expect your numbers to grow after the first several months. In general, personal, *face-to-face contact* often proves most effective. For this reason, some programs make home visits to recruit potential participants. It is especially helpful to have teachers making the first contact, because then parents know whom they will be working with and may feel more comfortable walking through the door.

❖ Collaboration

Agency referrals are also important. Make sure your community "partners" include related agencies, and make their staff members aware of your services. Help them understand which of their clients are appropriate for your services. Everyone benefits from strong collaboration among agencies and organizations that serve families in a variety of ways. But collaboration is much more easily said than done, much more frequently advocated than truly supported—even with the best of intentions.

Joint planning and ongoing communication among key players is vital to successful collaborative efforts.

~ *What is your message?*

❖ Addressing Your Audience

First, know the families you want to reach—their interests, needs, literacy skills, and cultures. Then prepare your materials and message with them in mind. If the population is diverse, consider preparing different materials for different groups. (Also prepare different materials for different purposes, such as agency referrals or fund raising.)

Tell the whole story as clearly and attractively as you can. If you have activities for children or for parents and children together, use photos with real participants (get permission to publish their photos!). If you offer individualized instruction for parents, stress your focus on *their* goals. Detail the benefits of participation and any special services you offer, and tell the truth. Be honest about what you have to offer and the commitment you expect. Clear and complete information results in fewer “surprises” and better retention of those who enroll.

Make it readable. Consider your audience. For undereducated parents, use large print, short sentences, and pictures. In a brochure aimed at encouraging agency referrals, you can include more text, but be sure you put the most important information first. Don’t expect a busy staff person to wade through a river of small print.

❖ Choosing a Name

What you call your program matters. For instance, some programs have found resistance to the idea of *parenting instruction*. Adults may resent the implication that they are not good parents. They may feel that being a parent “comes naturally” or is their private business. As a practical matter, they may assign low priority to improving parenting skills and choose to spend what little discretionary time they have on what they see as a more pressing need: learning English, getting a GED, or getting a better job. Be aware of class and cultural differences. Parents care about their children, but may not see parenting classes or support groups as appropriate or necessary activities.

However, those same parents, once involved in program activities, may enjoy your parent support group or workshops. Parents are often surprised to find they enjoy and benefit from this component, so don’t give up. Consider renaming the parenting component if you encounter resistance.

Even the word *literacy* may offend those parents who consider themselves literate. *Family education* may be a more acceptable term. Better yet would be specific references to job training or career exploration or computer skills. Many parents will be drawn to a program that promises to help their children. Even if they are unaware of or unwilling to acknowledge their own skill deficits, they may enroll in the program for their children's sake.

However, even more important than what you call it is what you do. If what you offer is not what people want and need, they will not come back even if your initial message is attractive.

~ *What other factors affect recruitment?*

❖ The Importance of Attitudes

In successful programs, staff members are

- friendly and welcoming
- nonjudgmental
- comfortable with cultural and other diversity
- aware of strengths as well as needs
- empowering
- respectful of families' rights to self-determination

Pay attention to the unstated messages you send. *Those who answer the phone* are a potential participant's first contact with your program. Their attitudes can make or break your recruitment efforts. *Teachers' attitudes* are important, too. Research shows that parents who succeed in these programs cite the support of caring teachers as one of the most important reasons for their persistence in pursuit of their goals.

Parents' attitudes are equally important and in part reflect what they perceive in the staff.

Families benefit most from programs when parents

- trust the staff
- see themselves as life-long learners
- are ready to change
- accept responsibility for their lives and their families' futures

In recruitment, look especially for *parents who are ready to commit* the time and effort required. After enrollment, encourage them to believe in themselves, to set goals, and to take responsibility for their own learning. Your understanding of these attitudinal success factors is vital to recruitment and retention.

~ *What about the ones you can't reach?*

❖ **Hard-to-Reach Parents**

Adults may be unwilling to enroll in educational programs because they had negative school experiences as children. Low self-esteem, weak skills, and embarrassment about their deficits may make them uncomfortable in a school setting. They may believe they are incapable of teaching their children. Others may see education as the school's responsibility and may not understand their role as "first teachers."

Many of the families you find hard to reach are overwhelmed by the struggle to meet their families' basic needs. Working parents who can barely make ends meet may lack the time, support networks, transportation, and other resources they need to take advantage of the services you offer.

❖ **Support Services and Flexible Programming**

Programs may address specific barriers like transportation, childcare, and conflicting work schedules through collaborative arrangements with other agencies and employers. Work-site programs, evening classes, private tutoring, and home-based services may increase participation.

❖ **Incentives**

For those who need just a nudge and a bit of external reinforcement, incentives have proven effective. Programs may offer free meals or snacks for families, gift books for children, or may award "bonus bucks"—for attendance and/or achievement—that are exchangeable for small personal items, books, or gift certificates. Local businesses will often donate these items.

❖ Recruitment Tips

Make sure all staff can talk knowledgeably about the program with parents and agency staff making referrals; be sure the person answering the phone has the answers about the program.

Encourage program staff to face their own fears and look closely at their assumptions, beliefs, and prejudices about poor people and people of other cultures (Ohio Literacy Resource Center, 1998).

If possible, locate the program in a school or a building that houses other services for families, such as a clinic or family resource center.

Get the local school district's cooperation so you can send recruitment materials home with children or get a notice in school newsletters.

Consider scheduling evening or weekend classes or family activities to accommodate busy weekday schedules.

Don't rely on informal word-of-mouth alone; involve current participants in recruitment activities.

If making recruitment home visits, take something for both parents and children and leave recruitment materials behind. Take two Polaroid pictures of parent and child and leave one behind with your name on it (National Center for Family Literacy, 1994).

Keeping Them Coming

Retention efforts must begin with recruitment. It doesn't matter how many you attract if they leave too soon to benefit. If you are an adult educator, you know that retention is a continuing challenge when working with voluntary participants in adult education or literacy programs. You will find some of the same problems in family literacy. In fact, if your program requires a significant time commitment, you may find attendance in family literacy to be an even bigger problem. However, if you offer services for children, retention may improve.

You enable more parents to participate in basic education if you provide care or learning activities for their children. In addition, many parents are drawn to family literacy primarily because they want to help their children or get them into preschool. Finally, once the children are "hooked" on school, they often encourage their parents to attend.

~ *What are the barriers to attendance and retention?*

All the same factors that deter parents from enrolling may lead to erratic attendance and dropping out:

- low self-esteem
- fear of school
- transportation and childcare problems
- lack of time
- lack of supportive friends and family

❖ **The “Significant Other” as Barrier**

Another barrier may be specific to family literacy programs. These programs most often involve women, who develop strong support systems among their peers and teachers and become empowered to attempt real change and growth. These changes may be threatening to their spouses and “significant others.” Lack of support and sometimes active discouragement make continued participation difficult for women who are committed to their relationships and/or are emotionally and financially dependent on their men.

❖ **Impact on Other Relationships**

It’s not only spouses who are affected. When an individual changes, other relationships also feel the impact. Sometimes friends and families encourage old habits and patterns because they feel threatened when they see a peer bettering herself, achieving new goals, and “growing away.” It takes courage to maintain commitment if the price is the loss of a long-term social support system. Sometimes the new support system of the program can fill the friendship gap, but change is difficult in any case.

~ *What has worked in other programs?*

Experienced family literacy program staff members cite the following factors as keys to retention:

Make sure parents understand all components of the program when they enroll.

Make a ceremony of intake and orientation, stressing both staff members’ and parents’ commitment to program and individual goals.

Build good rapport between staff and parents.

Empower parents to take charge of their own and their families' learning; do not encourage dependence on program staff.

Work with parents to set individually appropriate goals for their families, and keep careful track of progress of all family members toward those goals.

Celebrate achievements, even the small steps.

Let parents see that their children are succeeding.

Involve parents in planning curriculum and special events; give them regular responsibilities in the classroom, too.

Use a mix of instructional methods—discussion, project work, job shadowing, individual study, tutoring, computer-assisted instruction—to appeal to different learning styles and preferences.

Provide services (transportation, infant care) to reduce barriers to attendance.

Follow-up after absences (peers can help with this), and stay in touch with families who are taking a break from the program.

Provide coffee and refreshments for study breaks if possible.

Invite parents to share their family's or their culture's traditions: cooking for special dinners, decorating for holiday celebrations, etc.

Keep attendance charts and provide rewards for good attendance: points or certificates that can be exchanged for books, discount coupons, etc.

Document progress toward goals and recognize achievements with certificates, newsletter notices, student of the month awards, and other "pats on the back."

Provide personal attention and peer support; consider a buddy system or peer mentor for new enrollees.

Include parent discussion and support groups as a regular component. Although often resistant at first, many parents develop friendships and learn to use group members to commiserate and solve problems.

Make home visits to cement the relationship between staff and families and allow teachers to individualize services to meet unique family needs.

Involve "significant others" as much as possible so they understand the program and begin to feel a part of the changes in their families.

Part III. Parenting Education

Defining Your Goals

~ *Why do you need a parenting component?*

The *Family Literacy Answer Book* (National Center for Family Literacy, 1997) suggests some answers to this question.

“The parents enrolled in a family literacy program need a variety of supports to help them deal with the critical issues in their lives. Prior to enrollment in the program, they may have felt isolated in dealing with these issues. In addition to the information, new ideas, and skills provided by this component, parents sometimes need a friendly ear, a pat on the back, and a group to brainstorm solutions to a problem. They receive encouragement and support from other adults who understand because they are facing similar issues in their own lives. However, some things are too big for the group to handle. When this happens, the group process functions as a means for identifying needs and making referrals out of the group to service providers or agencies who are trained to deal with serious issues.”

The federal Even Start Family Literacy Program’s definition of the overall goal of parenting education is “to strengthen parents’ support of their young children’s literacy development and early school success.” (Powell & D’Angelo, 2000).

Based on research on parent and child interaction (see page 32), Even Start has defined goals for parents in the following areas:

- Engage in language-rich parent and child interactions
- Provide supports for literacy in the family
- Hold appropriate expectations of the child’s learning and development
- Actively embrace the parenting role
- Form and maintain connections to community and other resources for meeting individual and family needs

These goals and their related objectives are the basis for a content framework for parenting education in Even Start. Other comprehensive programs also may find the framework instructive. (Find details in *Guide to Improving Parenting Education in Even Start Family Literacy Programs*, Powell & D’Angelo, 2000.)

~ *What do you want to accomplish?*

The views described above suggest a number of possible goals:

❖ Sample Parenting Education Goals

- Help parents to understand and support their children's learning and development
- Show parents how to encourage their children's language development and promote reading and writing at home
- Teach parents how to communicate with school personnel, work with teachers to help their children, and advocate for their children to obtain needed services
- Help parents build a personal support network and connect with community resources to assist with parenting
- Encourage and assist parents to acquire knowledge and skills in topic areas they identify, such as health maintenance, nutrition, child-behavior management

You or your program planners define one or more goals appropriate to the agency(ies) and purpose(s).

❖ Considerations in Defining Goals

State your goals clearly and have realistic outcome expectations. Research suggests that parenting instruction of various kinds may produce changes in parental attitudes and behavior, but you cannot assume that it will have an impact on children's achievement (St. Pierre & Lazer, 1996).

In stating your expectations for parents, *be aware of cultural differences.* Who defines competent parenting? People from other parts of the world have beliefs and behavior patterns that worked well in their home countries. When families move to another country, they often experience a culture clash. Family literacy program staff may naturally espouse and model the norms of the dominant culture, and may not understand that others' ways of doing things are not wrong, only different. At the same time, it may be necessary for immigrant families to adapt their ways, to succeed in our environment. (When teaching strategies at home are similar to those in school children are more likely to be successful.) But changing ingrained patterns relating to something as basic as parenting will be stressful for families. Staff must be respectful of other cultures' beliefs. Nickse (1990) Use "neutral language" if possible.

Considering Approaches to Parenting Education

The list below suggests possible approaches to achieve goals in the parenting component:

- Adopt a prepared parenting curriculum
- Provide workshops on different topics, led by local “experts”
- Offer a regular discussion/support group for parents
- In class or special workshops for parents, directly teach literacy and language-use strategies, such as “how to read books with your child”—e.g. curriculum developed by the MotherRead/FatherRead² program or *Parents as Partners in Reading* (see references).

~ *What has worked in other programs?*

Intensive Services

Experience tells us that you need intensive services if you want to have an impact. According to Douglas Powell (1996), more significant outcomes result from “long-term, multi-contact” interventions. Powell reminds us that parenting skills cannot be taught “on the cheap.” Change, he says, requires “*long-term, intensive work* with parents, especially those in high-risk circumstances”.

Empowerment

Another lesson comes from teachers in family literacy and social service providers: don’t become over-involved in families’ lives. Remember that *the goal is empowerment* of parents. They mustn’t become dependent on you. Let them do it. Resist the temptation to be too helpful. Teach strategies for problem solving, and allow the answers to come from the group.

Curriculum Development

Many programs allow parents to define the curriculum. Survey them to find out what they want to learn. (See *Family Literacy Answer Book*, NCFL 1997, for a sample parent survey.)

Problem-Based Discussions

Experience has proven that *discussion is a powerful tool*. Powell says successful programs use an “everyday, *problem-oriented approach* versus a fact- or

² The MotherRead/FatherRead program trains facilitators of workshops for parents. The program is coordinated in Virginia by the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities and Public Policy. See their website at virginia.edu/vfh/mread

discipline-oriented approach” to parenting. Ideas are discussed in the context of real children and situations and are more likely to be tried. The National Center for Family Literacy says a parent education and support group allows discussion of critical issues and builds group and individual problem-solving skills. The teacher acts as facilitator, rather than expert; this approach takes the pressure off staff to know all the answers (NCFL’s *Policymaker’s Guide to Family Literacy*, 1994).

Respectful Parenting Instruction

Another word to the wise comes from those who have encountered difficulties working in the controversial area of parenting behaviors and discipline strategies. Staff members working in the parenting component should be respectful and non-intrusive. *Don’t pressure parents to change their ways* or to adopt the beliefs of the dominant culture or those of “experts.” Parents in family literacy programs often lack respect for those who claim to be experts or specialists in childrearing. They may see parenting as “instinctual”—skills you learn from your own parents and/or acquire naturally as a mother. Many see parent and child relationships as their own business. Many firmly believe that spanking is the right thing to do and resent interference. Tread lightly here! Group discussion allows airing of different points of view without need for the facilitator to present her/his opinions (no matter how well founded) as the best answer.

Teamwork

NCFL suggests that children’s and adults’ teachers should work as a team in planning and facilitating parent group discussions. In this way, parents profit from expertise in both fields, and all teachers learn about parents’ and families’ concerns (*Family Literacy Answer Book*, NCFL, 1997).

Integrated Instruction

Experience shows that parenting skills may be effectively integrated with other skills instruction, especially interpersonal skills, and even in a workplace context. Adults who learn participatory strategies at work may use the team meeting approach at home (Powell, 1996).

Seeking Other Resources for Parenting Education

❖ References and Other Print Resources

Bercovitz, L.S. & Porter, C. (1995). Parents as educational partners: A school-related curriculum for language minority parents. Des Plaines, IL: Adult Learning Resource Center

Bodel, M. (1997). Brain building basics: A parenting and literacy program. Alexandria, VA: Brain Injury Association.

Behm, M. & Behm, R. (1995). 101 ways to help your child learn to read and write. Bloomington, IN: ERIC/EDINFO Press

Cramer, L. (1991). Parent time curriculum guide. Chicago: Family Resource Coalition

Curtis, J. & Talan, C. (1997). P.A.R.E.N.T.S. curriculum guide: Parental adults reading, encouraging, nurturing, teaching, supporting. Sacramento, CA: California State Library Foundation.

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Powell, D.R. & D'Angelo, D. (2000). Guide to improving parenting education in even start family literacy programs. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Planning and Evaluation Service and Even Start Family Literacy Program.

Rasinski, T.V. (Ed.) (1995). Parents and Teachers: Helping children learn to read and write. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.

St. Pierre, R. & Layzer, J. (1996). Informing approaches to serving families in family literacy programs: Lessons from other family intervention programs. In Benjamin, L.A. & Lord, J. (Eds.). Family literacy: Directions in research and implications for practice (pp. 81-87). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education

Sapin, C. & Padak, N.D. (1998). The family literacy resource notebook. Kent, OH: Ohio Literacy Resource Center.

Thomas, A., Fazio, L. & Stiefelmeyer, B.L. (1999). Families at school: a handbook for parents. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

University of the State of New York, Office of Workforce Preparation and Continuing Education. (1995). Educating parents: Parents and children learning through play. Albany, NY: University of the State of New York Office of Workforce Preparation and Continuing Education.

❖ Video Resources

Children's Television Workshop. (2000). Sesame street beginnings: Language to literacy, parts 1-4. New York: Children's Television Workshop.

Paull, S. & Brown, C. et al. (1993). Empowering parents: Parent groups. Louisville, KY: National Center for Family Literacy.

❖ Web Addresses

Family Literacy Resource Notebook <http://literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/famlitnotebook/>

Learning Activities for Parents and Children
<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/learnact.html>

MotherRead/FatherRead <http://www.virginia.edu/vfh/>

National Even Start Association <http://www.evenstart.org/>

National Institute for Literacy
Family Literacy Special Collection <http://literacy.kent.edu/Midwest/FamilyLit/>

The Resource Center has identified additional family literacy-related websites found at <http://www.vcu.edu/aelweb>. Highlight *Literacy Resources*; click on *Teacher/Tutor*; then on *Family Literacy* for an extensive list of sites organized by subject.

Part IV. Parent and Child Interaction

Defining Your Goals

~ *What do we know about parent and child interaction?*

Larry Mickulecky summarized the research on parent and child interaction in 1996, and his summary offers a clear way to view this topic. According to Mickulecky, research over two decades has identified the following aspects of parent and child interaction associated with children's later success in literacy learning:

❖ Aspects of Parent and Child Interaction

- Parental reading to and with children
- Complexity of language and strategies used between parents and children
- Parental conceptions of the roles of education and literacy
- Literacy modeling and support present in home environment

You may use this information for goal setting and program planning.

Parental reading to and with children

More reading together is important, but research suggests that what happens during reading is more important than how frequently parents and children read together. *It seems important that reading be seen as "fun,"* that parents focus more on getting meaning than on decoding words, that parents encourage children's questions and use humor, and that children get attention, support, and feedback as they read.

Complexity of language and strategies

Explanatory talk during mealtimes and other family activities plays a significant role in predicting children's literacy achievements. Parents of good readers find opportunities in everyday conversations to encourage *"predictions, elaborations, and linking new ideas to previous experiences."* (Mickulecky, 1996) Similarly when reading with children, parents may take the lead at first in discussing stories with their children and modeling the questioning and prediction strategies, then gradually offer less support, encouraging children to take a more active role in reading, thinking, and talking about their reading.

Parental conceptions of education and literacy

Although parents from many different backgrounds and cultures share respect for the value of education, important differences exist in their understanding of the nature of literacy. Some parents emphasize *naming letters and decoding strategies*, while others see reading as *a means of entertainment and a way to learn about the world*. Parents' conceptions obviously affect their children's understanding of literacy. In addition, research suggests that parent-child literacy relationships are "*bi-directional*." Not only do parents influence children, but children influence parents. Children's experiences with and attitudes toward literacy learning affect their interactions with their parents, for good or ill. Children who struggle to read make the experience of shared reading painful also for their parents. Understanding the dynamics of this aspect of the parent-child relationship is important for program planners and teachers.

Literacy modeling and support in home environment

This aspect has generated considerable debate. Apparently contradictory findings about *literacy materials and the use of literacy in middle- and lower-income homes* make conclusions difficult. In middle- and upper-income families, parents and children own more books and magazines, parents model reading for pleasure and take their children to the library. Low-income parents may use literacy more for practical tasks in their daily routines, may make fewer visits to the library, but are sometimes more likely to engage in literacy-related activities like singing and story-telling. The significance of these differences is not established. However, practitioners would do well to keep in mind that *differences exist*, so they can both encourage current practices and support expansion of reading and writing activities in the home.

❖ Interventions in Parent and Child Interaction

Mickulecky (1996) cites several experimental studies showing that parents can be directly taught effective strategies for reading with their children. However, evidence that these new skills are transferred to the home setting is much less common. Parents may learn strategies, but for a variety of reasons, find it difficult to initiate and maintain new interaction patterns with their children.

Programs that involve both parents and their children often include opportunities for parents to introduce and practice new strategies with their children during scheduled parent-child sessions. So-called "type-1

programs" that offer direct services to both parents and children include comprehensive four-component programs like Even Start. (See page 7 for a review of program types.) Staff members in such programs typically see the parent education component as a time to learn skills and strategies and the parent and child interaction component as the time to practice them.

In the 1990s, these comprehensive programs showed mixed results in their impact on literacy practices in the home. Early evaluations of the federal Even Start program showed little effect on adults' parenting attitudes and behaviors. But Mickulecky and Lloyd (1995), in a study of comprehensive family literacy programs in five cities, documented significant gains in parent-child home reading, library visits, literacy materials in the home, and children's literacy activities. Sometimes the data show that parents have increased the time spent with children in literacy-related activities, but the nature of those activities does not reflect the beliefs promoted by program staff. Parents who view literacy development as a "task" may spend more time with children using flash cards and work sheets and less time having fun with storybooks. **Note:** Comparing evaluation results is often difficult because programs may define outcomes differently, provide varying service-intensity levels, and choose different outcome measures. (See "Part V. Program Evaluation" for a discussion of outcomes and measures.)

❖ The Intervention Controversy

We know that parent and child interactions have a significant impact on children's literacy and school success. But we do not all agree on how to intervene to improve interaction. In fact, many question the assumption that intervention is either necessary or appropriate. These critics of the "deficit approach" argue that parents should not be asked to adopt behaviors that may seem alien and unnatural because of cultural and personal differences. Others cite evidence that parents want to know specific ways to help their children.

And then there's the matter of transfer. Even if parents learn new ways, they don't necessarily use them at home. Even successful programs have been unable to demonstrate long-term, significant impacts on family behavior patterns.

So, what do we do with this conflicting data? Supporting parents in their role as "first teachers" is so central to the concept of family literacy, that program staff cannot ignore this issue. The suggestions below come from the experiences of successful programs.

Examine Assumptions

As a first step, examine your *assumptions* about those you serve, *survey parents* to discover what they want to learn, and *use group discussion* to identify interests and concerns arising out of "real life."

Recognize Differing Perspectives

However, because staff and parents often have different perspectives and assumptions and use the same language to mean different things, use *care and sensitivity in trying out approaches*. Listen and observe parents carefully, and "check in" frequently to ensure comprehension and acceptance of new ideas.

Integrate Adults' and Childrens' Curriculum

Provide *opportunities for parents to share what they learn* in their own classroom with their children, in planned activities that connect the adults and children's curriculum. In this way, parents naturally use the language and concepts they are acquiring in conversation with their children. Successful programs schedule time for adults' and children's teachers to plan together for regular integrated activities.

Provide Practice and Reflection

After teaching new strategies in parenting education, provide practice opportunities during parent and child interaction. Then ask parents to reflect on their experiences and consider how new behaviors might fit in with existing routines.

Assess Changes in Behavior

Finally, don't assume that new learning is applied in the home: find ways to assess changes in behavior. But don't expect major or lasting change without significant time for parents to learn, accept, practice, and internalize new strategies.

~ Why do you need a parent and child interaction component?

Consider the issues discussed above, and define your assumptions and beliefs. Do you believe that the parents in your program need and/or want to learn specific ways to become better parents? If so, what exactly does better parenting mean? And what can you realistically expect to accomplish? Are you aiming for a narrow, specific set of skills and behaviors, such as using effective strategies when reading to children? Or do you want to have an impact on a wider range of communication in the home? Even more ambitious, do you hope to provide parents with better ways to manage their children's behavior?

~ *What do you want to accomplish?*

Following are examples of goals for the parent and child interaction component:

❖ **Sample Parent and Child Interaction Goals**

- Help parents to understand and support their children's learning and development
- Show parents how to encourage their children's language development and promote reading and writing at home
- Teach parents strategies for reading to/with their children
- Help parents choose and acquire books for their children
- Help parents to recognize and take advantage of reading and learning opportunities in daily activities at home

Considering Approaches to Parent and Child Interaction

The goals of your program obviously dictate the approach you take. Following are general types of parent and child interaction services:

❖ **PACT (Parents and Children Together) in the preschool classroom**

In the comprehensive, four-component model, parents and their children spend regularly scheduled time (daily or weekly) interacting in the children's classroom. Typically each parent works and plays with her/his own child. Activities may include reading books or playing in one of the classroom centers (drawing, building with blocks, using a computer, etc.). When choosing activities, the National Center for Family Literacy recommends child choice instead of teacher planning. In other words, each child chooses the activity for the day and the parent follows his/her lead. This approach promotes expanded use of language in a natural context.

❖ **Workshops and Special Activities**

Most programs plan teacher-directed activities that involve parents and children in learning or creating something together: cooking, crafts, games, etc. Even teachers who advocate child choice in PACT Time schedule planned activities from time to time. Programs that serve parents directly and do not offer regular services for children often schedule "family nights" with special activities and meals for parents and children. Family nights may attract fathers, who otherwise may be hard to involve in program activities.

❖ Family Computer Labs

Each parent-child pair works on a computer with a teacher available for assistance. Activities vary: playing computer games, story-telling/writing, or using children's educational software.

❖ Take-Home Books/Activity Kits

Programs that do not provide direct services for both parents and children often encourage literacy activities in the home by loaning books or activity kits for family use. Activity kits usually include a child's book, suggested discussion questions, and story-related expansion activities for parents and children to do together.

❖ Field Trips

The sky's the limit here: zoos, museums, parks, etc. Program staff might look into a visit with parents and children to the local elementary school, especially for those children entering school soon.

❖ Home Visits

Usually, teachers plan an activity for parents and children and bring the required materials. If appropriate, they may model a technique or strategy for the parent and assign or suggest a follow-up activity for the family to do before the next visit or program session. Some home visitors prefer to demonstrate how language and literacy can be taught using everyday household materials and routines, such as setting the table or folding the laundry. In any event, practicing in the home setting may encourage transfer of skills.

Seeking Other Resources for Parent and Child Interaction

❖ References and Other Print Resources

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❖ Video Resources

Children's Television Workshop. (2000). Sesame street beginnings: Language to literacy, parts 1-4. New York: Children's Television Workshop.

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❖ Web Addresses

Family Literacy in Canada:
Profiles of Effective Practices <http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/family/familit/cover.htm>
Mother Goose Program <http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/family/familit/page119.htm>

Family Literacy Resource Notebook <http://literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/familitnotebook/>

Learning Activities for Parents and Children
<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/parents/learnact.html>

National Center for Family Literacy

<http://www.famlit.org/>

National Even Start Association

<http://www.evenstart.org/>

National Institute for Literacy
Family Literacy Special Collection

<http://literacy.kent.edu/Midwest/FamilyLit/>

The Resource Center has identified additional family literacy-related websites found at <http://www.vcu.edu/aelweb>. Highlight *Literacy Resources*; click on *Teacher/Tutor*; then on *Family Literacy* for an extensive list of sites organized by subject.

Part V. Program Evaluation

Understanding Program Evaluation

Evaluation has been defined as “the collection and use of information to make decisions about an educational program” (Knell & Geissler, 1990, cited in *Family Literacy Resource Notebook*, Ohio Literacy Resource Center, 1998). This definition implies that program evaluation is a natural part of program implementation. It is done primarily *for you*—the planners and staff of programs—and *with your input*. It provides information you can use to improve services, which in turn may improve participant outcomes. And it begins with the goals you have defined.

Evaluation helps you (1) understand and document the implementation of your program (show what you are doing), (2) assess the outcomes of your program (show how well the program is working for participants), and (3) plan for program improvement. The evaluation plan is in the works at the beginning of the year; it’s not something you do at the end of the reporting period to satisfy your funding agency.

Of course, your community and your funders have a stake in your program, and therefore your evaluation must also “speak” to these audiences. A well planned, comprehensive evaluation provides information for program improvement as well as for reporting and accountability. You may want to work with a professional external evaluator who has experience with educational and/or social service programs and can help you plan an evaluation that works for all your purposes. However, even if you do not have professional services, you will want to understand the evaluation process.

~ How does the evaluation planning process work?

You may find it helpful to plan your program evaluation using the following framework, adapted from the National Reporting System (NRS)³ for adult education programs:

(1) Program Goals

If you have clear goals, you know what you are aiming for. These goals drive your program design and implementation and define the outcomes you hope to achieve.

• Program Design/Services/Activities/Inputs

What you do is based on your goals, and what you do suggests what you will document and what you will measure.

³ See the NRS website at <http://www.air-dc.org/NRS>

(2) Indicators/Outcomes

Your goals and services must be stated in terms of participant outcomes. How will you know you have achieved your goals? What will people produce or be able to do?

(3) Outcome Measures

How will you document these outcomes? How will you and others recognize these indicators?

~ How does the National Reporting System (NRS) for adult education use this framework?

The NRS includes family literacy as one of three basic program goals.

NRS Program Goals:

- (1) Assist adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency
- (2) Assist adults who are parents to obtain the educational skills necessary to become full partners in the educational development of their children
- (3) Assist adults in the completion of a secondary school education

NRS Core Indicators (Learner Outcomes):

- (1) Improved literacy skill levels in reading, writing, and speaking the English language, numeracy, problem solving, English-language acquisition, and other literacy skills
- (2) Participation in, retention in, or completion of post-secondary education, training, unsubsidized employment, or career advancement
- (3) Receipt of high school diploma or its recognized equivalent

NRS Core Outcome Measures:

- (1) Educational Gains
Learner completes or advances one or more educational functioning levels as measured by standardized tests or a standardized performance assessment
- (2) Follow-Up
Learner entered/retained employment
Learner entered postsecondary education or training
- (3) Credential
Learner received a secondary school diploma, GED credential, or other high school equivalent

~ How does it work for family literacy program evaluation?

You may choose to apply this kind of analysis separately to each component of your program: adult education, job training, preschool education, infant-toddler care, elementary education, parenting education, parent and child interaction. Your adult education evaluation is in part determined by NRS requirements if you receive federal funds. But you may add other goals, indicators, and measures if you are providing additional services.

Planning Evaluation of a Family Literacy Program

Your evaluation plan will be largely unique because it will be based on your goals and services. The samples below are just that: samples. They are neither comprehensive nor in any way “approved.” You may use them as jumping-off points for your thinking and planning.

~ What do the component plans look like?

❖ Adult Education (Sample Plan)

Program Goals:

- Assist parents to improve basic literacy/English language and math skills
- Assist parents to improve employability and/or job skills
- Help parents develop skills to support their children’s learning and development

Indicators/Adult Outcomes:

- Improvement in basic literacy/English language and math skills
- Improvement in practical reading and writing skills necessary for job performance
- Development of basic computer literacy skills
- Acquisition of skills and knowledge necessary to support children’s developing literacy and help with school work

Outcome Measures:

- Educational Gains: Improvement in scores on standardized tests of basic skills or English-language usage (see *Educational Gains*, National Reporting System, above)
- Work-Related Outcomes: Satisfactory completion of employability skills course requirements; portfolio of products demonstrating work-related reading, writing and math competence and computer skills
- Parent-Related Outcomes: Journal and/or log documenting parent-child learning activities and homework assistance

❖ Early Childhood Education (Sample Plan)**Program Goals:**

- Support developmentally appropriate learning of preschool children
- Prepare children for success in school
- Encourage development of pre-reading skills
- Help children to appreciate and enjoy books and reading

Indicators/Child Outcomes:

- School readiness
- Development of language and pre-reading skills
- Success in grades one-three
- Active participation in book reading with parent and teacher

Outcome Measures:

- Improvement in scores on standardized vocabulary assessments
- Improvement in scores on teacher and parent rating scales
- Evidence of development from follow-up reports of elementary school teachers (similar to *Follow-up* measures, National Reporting System)
- Notes or journal entries showing specific behaviors observed by teachers and parents during circle-time reading and parent-child activities

❖ Parenting Education/Parent and Child Interaction (Sample Plan)**Program Goals:**

- Help parents to understand and support their children's learning and development
- Show parents how to encourage their children's language development and promote reading and writing at home
- Teach parents how to communicate with school personnel, work with teachers to help their children, and advocate for their children to obtain needed services

Indicators/Parent and Child Outcomes:

- Knowledge of the preschool curriculum
- Knowledge of appropriate child behavior and skills for different stages of children's development
- Increased time and quality of time spent in parent-child reading together at home
- Use of effective strategies in reading to children
- Use of classroom or public library to borrow books or family activity packets to use with children at home

- Understanding of the services offered by schools and ability to communicate effectively with school personnel

Outcome Measures:

- Parent journal entries reflecting understanding of children's development, preschool curriculum, and school services
- Log of parent-child reading and learning activities at home
- Notes of behaviors observed by teachers during parent and child interaction in classroom or home visits
- Classroom or library records showing use of books and materials
- Parent interviews documenting knowledge, beliefs, and home behaviors

Implementing Family Literacy Program Evaluation

~ What are the outcome measures?

Family literacy programs are complex and, if effective, result in changes in individuals and interactions between individuals, changes in families, and even perhaps in agencies, neighborhoods, or communities. To understand and document a range of outcomes you will want to choose a variety of measures and assess changes from more than one point of view. No single instrument or approach will document the outcomes—both anticipated and unplanned—that may result from a program component or a comprehensive set of services.

A good mix of measures might include

- (1) standardized assessments for adults and/or children, to gauge overall growth in basic skills, language development, etc. in a relatively objective way that allows comparisons across classrooms and programs;
- (2) classroom- or curriculum-based assessments that directly measure what is being taught; and
- (3) alternative/supplemental measures that may capture a broader range of outcomes and assess aspects of change that are meaningful on a personal and individual family level.

Here are a few examples:

(1) Standardized Assessments

Adults

- Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE)
- Basic English Skills Test (BEST)

Preschool Children

- Child Observation Record (COR)

- Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT)

School Children

- Iowa Test of Basic Skills
- Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement
- State-developed assessments

(2) Curriculum- and Classroom-Based Measures

- Teacher-made tests
- Computer assisted instructional program tests

(3) Alternative/Supplemental Measures

- Journal entries and writing samples
- Individual and family portfolios
- Interviews and questionnaires
- Preschool teachers' anecdotal notes
- Individual and family goal records
- Activity logs
- Products of classroom projects or parent-child activities

~ Who is responsible for program evaluation and how does it "fit" with everything else we do?

If evaluation is "the collection and use of information to make decisions about an educational program" then it must be a part of initial planning and integrated in regular program activities. If assessment is to be valid, it must be done consistently by all teachers, volunteers, and other staff. If outcomes measurement is to be comprehensive enough to capture changes related to all components and services, it must be done intentionally and implemented regularly by staff who understand what they are doing and why. In other words, an effective evaluation is planned, managed, and systematic.

Your program may find it helpful, if funds allow, to work with an external professional evaluation consultant to identify or develop measures and work with you to design a complete system that will meet your needs and satisfy accountability requirements. But regardless of whether you have a professional evaluator, you will need your collaborative partners to help identify appropriate goals, indicators, and outcome measures, and perhaps to conduct assessments and collect data. And of course, every staff member and volunteer has a role to play. Be sure *you* understand the system and provide input for improving it.

Evaluation is an integral part of family literacy services and is vital to program improvement. You can work within your agency and with your collaborative partners to plan and maintain an effective program.

Seeking Other Resources for Program Evaluation

❖ References and Other Print Resources

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❖ Web Addresses

Family Literacy Resource Notebook <http://literacy.kent.edu/Oasis/familitnotebook/>

National Evaluation of the Even Start Family Literacy Program Final Report 1994-1997

http://www.ed.gov/pubs/evenstart_final/index.html

National Institute for Literacy
Family Literacy Special Collection

<http://literacy.kent.edu/Midwest/FamilyLit/>

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