

## 3.6 Parents as partners

### Parental involvement in everyday school life

#### General introduction

This project is focused on better recognition of values bound to parent teacher cooperation. The participants of the 8-hour training session are encouraged to share their experience later in monthly workshop meetings.

The benefits for child development created with parental involvement have to be based on a teacher's know-how.

The topics of the training therefore include:

- recognizing differences and advantages of the school and family environment,
- supportive role of parental involvement in school issues,
- dealing with educational and behavioural obstacles in teacher – parent cooperation.

Open communication between teacher – parent and cooperation in updating information are essential for reaching the best possible child development.

Parents who are willing to participate in or coordinate school events are welcome and treated as a responsible member of school staff.

How to make parents interested in everyday school life? This could be achieved through encouraging parents to attend lectures on psychological topics and a healthy lifestyle.

#### Target group

The project is aimed at teachers of all school types and grades and for preschool teachers.

#### General aims

The most important aims of the project are

- developing long-term intercultural competence as a key competence for teachers in teacher education and in-service training
- a training session is offered in which we present and discuss examples of good practice and subsequently publish them in current publications.



## Sessions in practice

### Session 1: Basics of cooperation with parents

#### Aims

- Learning about legal regulations concerning parents' position at school
- Learning about mutual expectations
- Displaying the variety of cooperation opportunities
- Preparing teachers for solving mail problems

#### Participants

Variable, up to 12 participants

#### Step 1 Teachers/ course participants in groups write an invitation letter to parents.

The lecturer presents the options and rules for parent – school cooperation, information about Polish educational law, EPA and the mutual expectations of teachers and parents.

During the multimedia presentation teachers are asked to participate in exercising. There is no universal aid for a good relationship between teachers with parents. There are some hints to be followed:

1. Building up the feeling that parents are partners for the sake of the child
2. Cautiously talk to parents especially to those whose children cause behavioural problems
3. Parents should be respected
4. Parents have to feel supported by the teacher
5. Integration of parents in order to reach the common goal

What can the teacher do to involve parents in cooperation? The letter should contain answers to such questions as:

- what kind of cooperation is proposed
- what should the teachers offer to the parents
- what do you expect of parents?

#### Examples

*Dear Parents,*

*We strongly believe that that we are all deeply interested in aiming at the children's wellness. We want to support you and share with you the effort of upbringing.*

*We recognize your children to be fragile, intelligent and good, but they need the grown-ups' support. We are always here to share with you all the good and bad moments.*

*We invite you for a cup of tea together with your children. We shall try to solve the problems that have come up. Each Wednesday from 5 pm, WE can discuss topics such as;*

- what to do when the parents are always busy,*
- what to do when the child tells lies and neglects school*
- how to calm your nerves*
- how to meet your own and the child's needs*
- how to avoid criticism*

*etc.*

*We are looking forward to meeting you!*

**Step 2: Teachers write a letter to the parents including information that we want to strengthen the best possible relationship between school and parents for the sake of the children**

Examples

***Dear Parents***

*Your children are the biggest treasure, so it is important to share your love with them*

*Be their friends*

*Support their daily efforts*

*Listen to them and talk to them. That makes it possible to understand their feelings.*

*Appreciate the efforts and notice each success. That will be the proof that their affairs are important for you.*

*Don't hesitate to ask.*

*Be consistent in what you tell your child.*

*Make them believe that it is you who they can always trust.*

*Respect their individuality.*

*By doing so you create the right atmosphere to enhance their development.*

*Wishing you success,*

***Your teacher***

***Dear Parents.***

*Congratulations on having such a good son. Jacek is a well brought up young man, caring for others, deeply involved in volunteering at school.*

*His example shows the values promoted at home.*

*Many other parents could benefit if you could share your experience and achievements.*

*We would greatly appreciate it if you agreed to cooperate.*

***Jacek's Teacher***

## Session 2: Basics of cooperation with parents

### Aims

- Constructing a contract between teachers and parents
- learning about different ways of parental meeting

### Participants

Variable, up to 12 participants

#### Step 1:

The course participants sit at the desks as if they were students. The tutor teacher stays at the front desk facing the classroom. The teacher shortly tells the group of parents about school problems and how naughty their kids are. The teacher refers only to the negative side of students' behaviour. The school grade reports are distributed and few names of those students causing most problems are mentioned. Their parents are requested for further talk. The meeting finishes after ten minutes.

#### Step 2:

The course participants sit in a circle. The leader discards the previously prepared documents, for instance: achievement record, the upbringing schedule, contract of conduct. Parents are asked to name their child's strengths and favourite activities as well as ways of spending free time in the family.

Each parent receives a detailed report on the child's development and some of the parents are asked to maintain further contact with the teacher.

We ask the course participants which situation was preferable?

What did they feel like in both situations? What are their remarks?

### **Consequently they work out the rules of good cooperation with parents.**

After the meeting we establish the rules of good cooperation with parents:

1. Praising the best achievements of the class members
2. Difficult situations are discussed with reasonable respect
3. Creating a good relation with parents
4. While dealing with parents – we criticize only his/ her behaviour, never a person himself/ herself
5. Sticking to good communication rules, remember about non-verbal communication
6. Presenting your intentions clearly
7. Keeping your promises
8. Paying attention especially to educational and protective matters, not organizational and financial ones
9. Treating parents as partners with care and friendliness
10. Informing parents about the students' progress in education

## Session 3: Good practice

### Aims

- Presentation of particular examples of starting cooperation with parents
- Sharing the knowledge about the possibilities and various methods of cooperation
- Defining the criteria of the best practice

### Participants

Variable, up to 12 participants

### Step 1: Presentations of cooperation with parents

Teachers who are the participants of the course share their experiences and the project which is being accomplished in their schools, for example the project: “DAD, Are You For It?” – School in Chludowo, and others such as:

- Common cultural and sport events,
- Voluntary work,
- Reciprocal help,
- Supporting parents

The best practice is understood as a set of the best examples of parents’ involvement in children’s education and upbringing. The advantage of it is that it can be adjusted to various circumstances and cultural conditions. Good practice, involving parents in the process of education should:

- Help parents in their child’s education process,
- Appreciate the role of parents as the first teachers,
- Develop partner relations between a family and school society,
- Respect and appreciate the values of different cultures and languages.

## Session 4: Individual meeting

### Aims

- Support for parents in need,
- Improvement of communication abilities,
- Getting to know various ways of inviting and hosting parents.

### Participants

Variable, up to 12 participants

### Notes

For good communication between teachers and parents the form of invitation and the place where the conversation is going to take place are very important.

We revise the rules of good communication, active listening, paraphrasing – a short lecture.

#### Step 1: invite parents

The teachers/ course participants in small groups prepare invitations for parents.

#### Step 2: Attitude towards parents

Think which parents you like and which you don't like as you have difficult relations with.

Fill in the chart:

The contact with (e.g.) John's parent...	Makes me ... (write in your emotions)	Because (Try to name parent's behaviour)

Teachers/ course participants, in pairs, try to change the colleague's negative attitude towards a particular parent into a positive one.

### Step 3: Act it out

A scene to act – a parent with a serious problem enters (the teachers/..... choose a problem themselves, adjusted to the level of the class they work with) – the head teacher tries to start a conversation with the parent and support him/her

- Parent should be thanked for coming,
- The teacher should use language full of emotions,
- He should ensure a good atmosphere of the meeting and a comfortable place.

### Exemplary questions concerning a child and relations with parents:

- Enumerate advantages of your child, please,
- What does your child do in his/ her free time?
- What are his/ her interests?
- What are his/ her chores?
- Do you spend your time with your child?
- Who else, apart from you takes care of your child?
- What are your child's reactions towards success and failure?
- Do you know your child's friends?
- What are your expectations towards your child?
- What rules are applied in your home?

### Step 4: Difficult talks

How to criticise the parent's behaviour, to make him/her listen to us?

You need to be really well prepared to conduct difficult talks with parents. You should refer to facts and be friendly.

### Example:

Ania from the first class of lower secondary school hasn't had her homework done a couple of times. We try to communicate with the parent using FAE procedure: FAE = **F**acts + **A**ttitude + **E**xpectations

Facts: *Dear Madam,  
Ania hasn't done her homework a couple of times so far this week,*

Attitude: *I am helpless, this makes my and her work more difficult,*

Expectations: *I expect that Ania will do her homework systematically.*

Other teachers provide different examples.

## Session 5: Stereotypes

### Aims

- Revision of knowledge about various stereotypes and prejudice,
- The ways of preventing stereotypical thinking.

### Participants

Variable, up to 12 participants

### Notes

We equip the teachers with possible categories of stereotypes, negative perception may disturb good relations between teachers and parents. Representatives of foreign nations – prejudice specific for certain nations, for example:

The Rumanians – the beggars, The Italians – shout a lot, The Germans – tidy Representatives of foreign nations – racism, the belief that some people are better than the others.

- The worshippers of different religions – are often perceived as the core of evil,
- The dwellers of different regions – Poznan dweller is considered to be tidy, a Warsaw dweller – cunning,

- The disabled – we don't know potential abilities of these people,
- The addicted and the sick – believed to be responsible for their own illness,
- Body types – the obese, the thin, the blond,
- Representatives of various professions – the blue and white collar workers.

### Step1 | Stereotypes

Write down your associations concerning the characters of the people presented below:

For example:

- A man, with dirty hands, not shaved, wearing a tracksuit and a cap.
- A blond haired woman, smartly dressed with good manners.

### Alternatives:

To dissolve the stereotypes we ask the teachers to prepare a screenplay of meetings common for parents and teachers, for example concerning multicultural day, an exhibition about the country they come from.

## Session 6: The key to good contact

### Aims

- Preparation of complete information for parents,
- Looking for a way of involving parents in cooperation.

### Participants

Variable, up to 12 participants

#### Step 1: preparation of leaflets

The teachers/ course participants prepare a leaflet for parents. To do so, they read the school's documents carefully, the education programme, the mission of the school, its prevention programme and the statute.

The leaflet is handed to the parents during the first meeting.

Parents should be informed about everything that is important for the school, class and his/her child.

### Working on the ways of informing parents

1.	face to face meeting
2.	letters and notes – also congratulation letters
3.	mark and absence cards
4.	individual copybooks
5.	class newsletter
6.	information and invitations
7.	a calendar of important dates
8.	cards of observation
9.	telephone calls
10.	the open day for parents
11.	the guide to the course
12.	a website
13.	others

## Session 7: Extra lessons and preparation of a family day at school

### Aims

- integration of parents into the school,
- preparation of practical classes for parents,
- sharing abilities – taking advantage of parents’ jobs.

### Participants

Variable, up to 12 participants

### Summary:

Advantages of cooperation with parents:

Benefits for the head teacher	Benefits for parents	Benefits for students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support for the head teacher</li> <li>• Good exchange of information</li> <li>• Good recognition of a student</li> <li>• Common educational influence</li> <li>• Increase of work effectiveness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete participation in child’s school life</li> <li>• Obtaining support in difficult situations</li> <li>• Influence on the way the school works</li> <li>• Feeling of importance in personal contacts with teachers</li> <li>• Possibility of support for the child in difficult situations</li> <li>• Education after years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase of the feeling of importance</li> <li>• Feeling of belonging to community</li> <li>• Subjective treatment</li> <li>• Feeling of safety and friendliness</li> </ul>

### Step 1: Extra lesson

Parents may conduct extra lessons for students and other parents. They may share their professional knowledge and their abilities. Teachers and parents organise a family day at school.

Teachers/ course participants prepare a screenplay of a family day at school. They ascribe various tasks to parents, students and teachers.

### Step 2: Evaluation

After completing the course the teachers/ course participants sit in the circle and everyone finishes sentences

- during the course I learnt new abilities ...
- I found out that ...
- I discovered that ...
- I was surprised by the fact that ...

## 3.6.1 Evaluation: Parents as partners

### Participation and perspectives for further planning

This training module tries to make the members of the education community more sensitive towards the need to reduce the gap between the school and the families. This module could be integrated in our Teacher Training Centre as a training course for teachers in service training with the main goal of developing the professional competence of the new teachers in order to achieve a positive and real involvement of fathers, mothers in the school community.

### General evaluation and suggestions for project improvement

In general, the structure, content, development, timetabling and methodology used are all adequate.

- First Meeting: Basics of cooperation with parents

The first exercise presents key subjects to be taken into account for making an appropriate invitation letter to the parents as they are the type of cooperation which is proposed, which is given by the parents to the students and is what is expected of the parents.

The second exercise shows orientations and advice on how to treat one's children. The example of the written letter does not correspond to the objective set in the activity of encouraging the relationship between the family and the school.

- Second meeting: Parental meeting

The way the example of good and bad practise is presented is positive. The scenes proposed make things very clear and can help to favour a more empathetic focus among the teachers, by putting them in the parents' shoes.

The objective established in this meeting to write a contract between teachers and parents is not carried out.

- Third meeting: Good practice

The presentation of specific experiences of the centres is positive, which shows the others examples of good practise which confirm or touch on the subjects raised.

- Fourth meeting: Individual meeting

The module structure should be highlighted:

- Exercise 1: making the parents' invitations.
- Exercise 2: the analysis made on the negative attitudes which are generated in dealing with some parents is interesting and also the importance of making them positive.
- Exercise 3: practical case which establishes questions which rather refer to matters to be dealt with in an initial interview to get to know the student as opposed to in a problematic situation.
- Exercise 4 how to obtain cooperation from the parents. Getting commitment to collaborate is essential for good cooperation.

- Fifth meeting: Stereotypes

The subject of stereotypes is one that needs a more exhaustive development. The proposed activity of analyzing the attitudes which certain groups of people provoke in us could be developed and enriched with activities to personally experience the sort of discrimination that society practices against certain social groups in order to expose common prejudice.

- Sixth meeting: The information-key to good contact

The activities of this meeting can be introduced directly in the initial meetings, whether 1 or 2 given that they cover the subject of informing the parents via a leaflet.

- Seventh meeting: Extra lessons and preparation eg a family day at school

As a first step it is all right, but we think that counting on the parents for the family day at the school is just one specific participation. It would be interesting to see the parents' potential in the first few sessions and to involve them in the centre's life in an organized and voluntary way.

It is very important to promote a continual and structured participation. Equally we must try to open up for the participation of all the centre's departments.

## Evaluation

It is not well developed. The following items are proposed:

- Resources criteria:
  - o Suitability of the installations
  - o Suitability of the equipment and materials
- Development criteria:
  - o Interest of the content
  - o Utility for application in class
  - o Suitability of methodology- innovation
  - o Timing distribution
  - o Atmosphere. Environment of realization.
  - o Global assessment of the trainers
- Results criteria:
  - o Degree of fulfilment of the expectations
  - o Degree of individual use
  - o Development of professional competences
  - o Commitment to application in class
  - o Satisfaction with the training realized

It would be interesting to complete it with a practical work of application to the centre and after some time to look at the possibility of opening it to the rest of the group, assessing the results and establishing the weak points and areas of improvement.