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Coach's Corner



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Throughout the past year, many of us have spent time separated from our loved ones. While many aspects of our lives have been turned upside down, one thing has certainly been made clear, the importance of community and support. We have seen firsthand how our early childhood community has shown up for the children and families of Delaware. Yet it goes deeper than that. Because of the dedication of our programs, families have been able to continue working and thus, keep the economy going. This is a perfect example of communities working together.

Connecting with organizations in your program's community benefits for the program and the families that are served. These relationships provide meaningful connections for children. In addition, it can be a great way to make connections with potential families. While our current health and safety guidelines make it tough to form relationships in person, technology provides us with alternative options.

Communication has been vital during the past year. While many of us have been unable to gather with our loved ones, technology has provided us with opportunities to stay connected. Phone calls, text messages, Zoom hangouts, and video calls have been the cornerstone of our pandemic social lives. Thankfully, because of advanced technology we can still engage with different members and organizations within our communities.

Reaching out to YOUR Community

We know that community relationships are important, but how do we begin to reach out? Consider the organizations local to your program. Also, think about the needs of the children and families in your program. Are there community connections that could help your program to serve them better? Put together a family survey to assess the needs of the families in your program. The survey data will help you to make a list of organizations that you may be interested in contacting and how the partnership would be beneficial.

- **Community Connections**

- Connect with local support agencies such as, food banks, housing organizations, and clothing banks. Relationships with these types of organizations are important when putting together a plan to support potential needs of families.
- Police stations and fire stations are always a good connection. Many local stations have education presentations and are willing to come to early childhood programs. In addition, they can provide safety information for families. While we are unable to have in-person visitors, consider a Zoom visit or sharing educational material.
- Local libraries are a great resource for programs and families. By partnering with a library, your program can stay up to date with community events and workshops, in addition to new materials to borrow.
- Community centers often have a variety of services available. You may want to reach out to see if their leadership would be willing to meet and brainstorm ways you could support each other.

- **Activities that focus on community**

- Pen Pals-Consider connecting with another early childhood program and have the children draw pictures or write letters to each other. Allow the children to put their creations into envelopes and involve them in the process of actually mailing them. **Be sure to consider COVID-19 guidelines if applicable**
- Care cards- Have the children make cards to mail to local nursing homes or children's hospitals. Talk with the children about how their cards will bring joy to the people that receive them. **Be sure to consider COVID-19 guidelines if applicable**
- Letters to family members- Have school-age children write a letter to a family member. Let them choose what they would like to write about. Teach them how to address the envelopes. Younger children can draw pictures and then educators can help them write a word or sentence about their picture. For family child care programs, allow school-age children to assist the younger children with writing.

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- Service projects-
 - Partner with a local food bank or homeless shelter. Engage the children in collecting items to donate. Talk with them about the importance of giving back to our community that we live in.
 - Choose a service project for staff members. Plan a few volunteer days throughout the year in different community organizations. This also provides an opportunity for staff members to take the lead on these projects. Focusing on the importance of community can be woven into just about any lesson plan. It helps children to see how the world works and how we are all linked to each other. Even during a time when many are feeling socially isolated, we can still find ways to connect. We just need to get creative!

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Resources

- [Community Engagement- Head Start ECLKC](#)
- [Building Reciprocal Relationships with Communities- NAEYC](#)
- [Connect Families to Community-based Services and Resources- Penn State, Better Kid Care](#)