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18

## INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITY

Learning and development are continuous through life, and especially in young children. Development of young children takes place in different atmospheres such as at home where they are surrounded by their parents, grandparents and other family members. The formal, friendly atmosphere of the community, and the first ladder of learning i.e. ECCE centre or preschool are also important learning theatres for them. Whatever might be the settings, parents play a very important role during these early years of children's lives. A well-coordinated quality partnership between the school and the parents and good communication between both during ECCE and early primary years is very important.

"There is a notable consensus across the education policy statements and practice guidelines in many countries that parents are children's first and most enduring educators." (source : OECD, 2012). We need to remember that young children are dependent on their parents and families, and it is the family who is the young child's first educator. In fact, the mother is considered to be the first teacher. Thus, parents have a lasting influence in the development of young children's thinking process, feelings, attitudes and ideas. A positive link must be established between the preschool and the home. Quality partnership system also provides support for expected learning outcomes by our young children which in turn help in smooth transition from preschool to primary classes. In short, supportive parents and understanding teachers can contribute to the growth and development of children.



### LEARNING OUTCOMES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain the importance of parents and community involvement in ECCE programme;



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- discuss contributions of parents and community in the functioning of an ECCE centre;
- identify the benefits of parent-teacher involvement; and
- describe activities that can be organised for active participation of parents and community.

## 18.1 THE NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITY AWARENESS IN ECCE

It is not only the parents but other family and community members who share the responsibility of caregiving. Looking after the well-being of children is equally important at home, as compared to the preschool. What do we mean by involving or working with the family? Let us now understand what we mean by parental or family involvement.

### 18.1.1 Defining Parent Involvement

In ECCE, we talk about two very important components. The first one is 'parents are supporters in their children's early education and care'. The second is parents are active partners in their children's early learning. Involvement of parents in ECCE could be seen as when parents participate in the early education, growth and development of their children from birth. They are the primary source of influence in their children's lives. The early years of a child's life are the impressionable years. Whatever is said or done to them by caregivers is deeply embedded in them for life. It would become very difficult or rather, impossible, to change their attitude in later years. Therefore, the parent's involvement at the right age is very important.

In order to understand the meaning of parental involvement, we need to understand the following:

- i. Helping parents to establish a stress-free, harmonious home environment that help children flourish freely and learn without fear.
- ii. Encouraging parents to volunteer and help during cultural programmes in the preschool or accompany the children during a theme-based or project-related excursion where additional adult supervision is required.
- iii. Keeping the communication channels open between home and preschool and encouraging exchanges of children's activities. This two-way communication is essential for children's overall development as it helps to know the children better. For example, how a child is learning phonics; why a child is having problem in relating with other children; why a child has a fear to climb on slides; why a child is a reluctant reader but enjoys

writing, and so on. Talking with teachers provides information to the families about how to help their children at home by engaging them in various activities in a play-way manner.

- iv. Finally, involving community means identifying the resources from the community and then utilising the same to strengthen the preschool programme, family practices and young children's learning. For example, providing the relevant information to parents; taking support from village Sarpanch for making provision of space for cultural programme of an ECCE centre; creating awareness for sending children regularly and timely to the ECCE centre; taking help of a community doctor to develop health awareness among family members and so on.

Parental involvement in a quality ECCE programme helps the community members understand that a child deserves to live in a healthy and happy family environment. Bonding between teacher and parents is critical in strengthening the school and community environments which ultimately enables teachers and parents to encourage their children's educational process. In a quality ECCE programme, the families take part in programme planning and monitoring and therefore, they are not only recipients of information but are full partners in the implementation of the ECCE programme.

All the above can be achieved through parental education, training and family support programmes.

### 18.1.2 Why We Need Parents and Community Awareness

In practical terms, the quality partnership means the preschool teachers and staff need to respect the knowledge and understanding that parents have of their children. Parents should acknowledge that preschool teachers know about their children and their development. Children can only benefit when each partner talks and listens to the other.

The National Early Childhood Care and Education Policy 2013 recognises that young children are best cared for in their family environment and thus strengthening family capabilities to care for and protect the child will receive the highest priority. A major deterrent to ensuring the right kind of ECCE is the lack of understanding of developmentally appropriate ECCE programme among the parents and other stakeholders. In order to address this deficit, extensive use of media will be made, including folk, print and electronic media, to reach out to parents, caregivers, professionals and the larger community and create awareness of the appropriate kind of ECCE.

Parents of poor families or those belonging to low-income families do not find Early Childhood Education (ECE) necessary for children between the ages of



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three and six years, for whom it is mainly intended. Most parents who send their children to ECCE centres or preschools have altogether different ideas about the purpose and implications of ECE. For example, the parents whose children are going to an *Anganwadi* think it is a place for getting supplementary nutrition. Then, there are such parents who think that they would get some free time for themselves and thus, they send their children to preschool. Yet, some parents send their children for formal learning of reading, writing and mathematics. Such parents also pressurise the preschool teachers to do more formal teaching that involves rote learning. The purpose and objective of a high quality preschool is not to teach for formal learning for reading, writing and number work but help young children learn through developmentally appropriate practices/ activities informally.

Children develop in the warmth of their families and communities that are characterised by diversity in family composition, languages spoken, their own religious belief systems and cultural practices. Families serve as the primary context for their children's development. Therefore, preschools and *Anganwadis* comprise a vital context that in turn impacts children's development through quality care and early education as provided in the centres. Resources from parents and the community are essential for creating an emotionally supportive environment in which children develop optimally. We need to understand that communities that adequately support parenting as well as early childhood education at the right time, contribute significantly to the quality of life of all people in the community. This allows everyone in the community to grow and develop socially and economically. Therefore, it becomes important for preschool and primary teachers to guide and educate the community in general and parents in particular and to bring about awareness of the advantages of quality early childhood care and education.



## INTEXT QUESTIONS 18.1

State whether the following statements are true or false:

- Children can only benefit when each partner-parents, teacher and community talk and listen to each other.
- Parents of high income families do not find ECE necessary for three to six year old children.
- Most parents who send their children to ECCE centres have different ideas about the purpose and importance of early childhood education.
- It is not important for preschool and primary teachers to guide and educate the community and parents.

- (e) The National Policy on ECCE (2013) recognises that young children are best cared for in their family environment.



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### 18.2 ROLE OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITY IN FUNCTIONING OF AN ECCE CENTRE (PARTNERSHIP)

A lot has already been discussed about the role and importance of parents in ECCE programme. Parents need to be involved as partners in their children's education. As we discussed, parents know how their children behave at home, learn at home, bond with their extended family, and other significant people. The culture, health, behaviour and other issues related to each individual child are certain points on which parents can give information to teachers. Family members are a source of information to the preschool teacher. For example, what are the child's previous experiences and how is the child doing presently? What are parent's observations of ongoing development of their child? When teachers have knowledge about the needs and background of all her/his children in preschool, it becomes easier to provide ECCE programme in a more organised manner.

It is the preschool teachers' duty to involve the family members as per as advocates for their children's development and learning. Parents are very supportive when they communicate openly and honestly with the school staff about issues and concerns. Effective partnerships with family and community are characterised by mutual trust and respect for the each other, their willingness to collaborate and find solutions to any problems.

### 18.3 BENEFITS OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The involvement of parents and community in the actuaries of the ECCE centre benefits all i.e., the children, families, community and the ECCE programme.

#### Children Benefit When:

- Teachers understand and respect the family regardless of family structure, religious beliefs, languages spoken at home, socio-economic status and educational level of family members.
- There is a link between home and the ECCE centre/preschool.
- Parents provide appropriate and correct information to teachers, who are able to tell parents about what and how children are learning, what progress they have made and what the teachers might do to support their children for further learning.



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- Parents and family members reach out to them and encourage them to participate preschool activities.
- Parents update teachers about any significant changes in the child's home environment that may hinder their children's learning such as, arrival of sibling, moving to a new house, separation of parents, abuse, death in the family and so on.

**Parents Benefit When:**

- They are encouraged to take interest in the work of the preschool/ ECCE centre and engage themselves as partners in their children's learning.
- They are adequately prepared to understand child-rearing practices. This kind of guidance helps the parents to understand more about their child's development and thus, they can see their child's strengths and weaknesses more positively.
- They understand that the transition from home to preschool and from preschool to primary are very important milestones and that there should be continuity and strong linkages.

**Preschool Programme Benefits When:**

- Preschools involve the members of the community to work for the benefit of all. ECCE centres/preschool do not exist in isolation.
- Teachers collaborate with family and community members to solve developmental problems if any, by giving and receiving appropriate information.
- Practitioners know and use a variety of formal and informal communication strategies to establish and maintain positive relationships with families and community.
- Community and families both work towards collaborative partnerships. For example, teachers can modify the ECCE programme after getting relevant information from parents.
- Practitioners use opportunities for professional development and training in parental involvement.
- Practitioners try to learn about the different backgrounds of the children in their care, and accordingly communicate with families from diverse backgrounds.
- Practitioners make parents and families feel welcome in the setting, beyond just dropping off and picking their children.

## Involvement of Parents and Community

- Practitioners facilitate parents' work schedules and create suitable parental involvement opportunities.
- Practitioners inform parents about the performance and activities of their children through meetings, phone calls, portfolios etc.
- Teachers allow parents to visit the preschool, observe activities and provide feedback.



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## INTEXT QUESTIONS 18.2

Fill in the blanks:

- (a) For parents to be involved in their children's education, they need to be seen as .....
- (b) Effective partnerships with family and ..... are characterised by mutual trust and respect for the each other.
- (c) Children's development would be optimised when there is a linkage between the home and ..... in terms of experiences and expectations.
- (d) A quality preschool setting should provide opportunities for parents to visit the setting, observe activities and provide .....
- (e) The role of a teacher is to build on the knowledge and to encourage parents to work with the ..... in the best interest of each child.
- (f) ..... are best able to rear children when they are adequately informed about work of the preschool/ECCE centre.

## 18.4 WAYS OF EFFECTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITY IN FUNCTIONING OF AN ECCE CENTRE /PRESCHOOL

As discussed earlier, the early education of young children is a shared responsibility of parents, schools and community as a whole. Therefore, parents and communities have a reciprocal responsibility to engage with preschools/ ECCE centres. The quality of this partnership will certainly determine the quality of the ECCE programme. There are many ways that can be adopted to promote the parent-teacher relationship. For example, as they get to know the parents, teachers can ask each parent's particular interest in being involved in the children's education and care. Some parents may be happy participating in classroom activities. Others may prefer to contribute as committee, member of a board, write in a newsletter, design a web page or participate in fund raising efforts.



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First of all, teachers need to communicate with the parents and for this s/he has to find out ways to communicate to parents about their children.

### 18.4.1 Communication

ECCE settings or preschools should ensure that the staff and parents have both formal and informal opportunities for communication and information sharing about the child. While the formal opportunities may be quite apparent (e.g., meetings with parents), due consideration should also be given to creating informal interaction with parents, and may begin with something as fundamental as making them feel welcome within that setting. The practitioners/personnel need to ensure that this communication supports the child's learning and development and could be achieved through:

- communicating information to parents about their child's development and learning;
- integrating parents' knowledge and input into the planning and assessment of children's learning and development; and
- supporting parents in understanding children's learning and development.

The problem may be, how to communicate with parents. Many parents are working and they often do not get time to interact with the teachers and sometimes they do not even come for Parent Teacher Meeting (PTM). So, the teacher needs to find the way to involve and communicate with these parents.

#### 18.4.1.1 Strategies of communicating to parents and community

Effective and meaningful communication between preschools, parents, community and children must be there to form the foundation in developing and maintaining quality partnerships.

- **Using a range of communication tools and channels**, including newsletters, websites, e-mails, assemblies, parent/teacher interviews, and PTMs.
- **Developing a preschool activity calendar** outlining activities, celebrations, events and holidays in the preschool year where engagement of the parents and community is very important. Specific activities can be used to engage them for example, volunteer parent coming to tell a story/rhyme.
- Using **Parent Teacher Meeting (PTM)** to talk about children's development and their progress.
- Planning **Home Visits**, if required, as it will help the teachers, get acquainted with the families of the children. The teacher can learn about the family's culture and special talents, etc.

## Involvement of Parents and Community

- The teacher can communicate with the parents **during drop off and pick up time**. This allows parents to informally interact with the teacher.
- Use **bulletin and notice board** specifically meant for the parents to share notice for the meetings, nutrition menu, and other relevant issues.
- Involve parents on **field visits/excursions**.

There are number of other ways and strategies through which parents can be involved such as:

- helping in fund raising;
- cleaning and painting plant pots;
- preparing Teaching Learning Material (TLM);
- reading stories to children;
- helping in the classroom and working with small groups for activities like clay modeling;
- helping during festival celebrations;
- helping during annual function and cultural programmes

## 18.5 COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION

Community ownership and participation of community members are important in the smooth functioning and success of the centre. Teachers need to talk to and convince members of the community about the significance of ECCE. Preschools, along with the help of the primary school, can plan and organise village camps for spreading ECCE and childcare messages. Community members including the Sarpanch and other panchayat members need to be explained the benefits of ECCE. It can be done through role plays, street play or nukkad natak, group discussions, exhibitions and using advocacy posters. This should be done by community motivators. Some notes in this regard could be:

- Teachers need to win the trust of the community to develop a school alumni group, and then ask for help to market materials such as preschool /ECCE centre banners and fence signs/logos, etc.
- As health is a priority for everyone, teachers need to generate and maintain contact with the relevant health professionals in the area to support referrals.
- As reciprocal responsibilities, preschools also need to provide ECCE centre/preschool facilities for community use, including library/adult learning, community meetings, etc.
- Involve village Sarpanch and community members in doing certain things for the ECCE centres such as provide safe drinking water, repair



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classroom material, help organise PTMs, send young children regularly and punctually to the centres.

- Preschools can organise a 'Fixed Monthly ECCE Day' at the ECCE centre as suggested under the guidelines for fixed monthly ECCE day by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India. This Fixed Monthly ECCE Day will allow communication channels to open between teacher and parents/community. Teachers and all others attached to the ECCE centre can organise activities for advocacy, spread awareness involvement of parents and community.

### 18.5.1 Key Features of Sound Partnerships between Early Childhood Centres and Parents

Some of the key features are:

- Parents' role in their child's early education is acknowledged by the teachers and other caregivers in the preschool;
- Recognition of the role played by parents in early education of their child and their continued involvement is crucial to successful learning;
- Parents feel welcome in the preschool and there are opportunities for collaboration among parents, teachers and children;
- Preschools provides access to information about their ECCE programme to the parents in a variety of ways;
- Recognition of expertise of parents and other adults in the family, and this expertise is used to support the learning opportunities provided within the preschool;
- Parents contribute to, and are kept fully informed of their child's progress and growth;
- Parents and children feel secure in the new setting; and
- Opportunities for learning provided through parent conferences, parents workshops, parents resource centre, etc.



#### ACTIVITY 18.1

Interview some parents who have children in ECCE centre/Preschool. Ask them about their experiences with early education, their concerns and centre practices they found helpful.

## 18.6 ACTIVITIES TO BE ORGANISED FOR ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITY

A list of suggestive activities to be organised on the **Fixed Monthly ECCE Day** at the preschool to involve the parents and community members is given. Preschool teachers may select the activities for each ECCE Day and ensure that selected activities are organised as per the time plan. The activities of the Fixed Monthly ECCE Day should be organised by involving all parents and community members.

### 18.6.1 Activities for Fixed ECCE Day

- i. Display work of all children from the daily activities of the ECCE Programme (Art and craft work, worksheets etc).
- ii. Performance by groups of children such as dance, drama, rhyme recitation, etc. (ensure participation of all children attending the preschool).
- iii. Celebration of Sports Day (ensure participation of all children attending preschool).
- iv. Demonstration of activities done by children for parents and community and explaining the rationale for conducting the activities.
- v. Participation of all young children and parents/community in fun activities such as Bal Mela/Diwali/ Local Festival/Fairs, Exhibits etc.
- vi. Parent-Teacher interaction which will include sharing assessment and taking overall feedback of the child.
- vii. Development of play and learning material through parent and community participation.
- viii. Display of advocacy material on ECCE (Charts/Audio-Visual).
- ix. Development of play material through participation of local artisans/crafts persons.
- x. Talks for the parents on topics listed in the 'Issues to be discussed with Parents'.
- xi. Involve community for awards and incentives to children/teachers/caregivers/ helpers.
- xii. Toy Bank/Activity Bank/Book Bank: Creating an area in the preschool where parents can donate toys, games, books, puppets and other play and learning material.
- xiii. Collection of local cultural stories, rhymes, songs, games, drawings, art forms for activity bank.
- xiv. Setting up 'Activity Corners or Interest Areas' at the preschool for example, block building area, manipulative play area, art and craft area, language area, dolls area and science area.

Source: - Guidelines for the Fixed ECCE Day, Ministry of Women and Child Development.



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### 18.6.2 Issues to be discussed with Parents and Community on Fixed ECCE Day or during Parent Education Conference

A list of topics to be discussed with parents and community is given :

- Early stimulation;
- Importance of early childhood;
- Child growth and development;
- Learning and playing;
- Healthy nutrition for young children;
- Childhood diseases-prevention and treatment;
- Preparing children for preschool/ primary school;
- Managing difficult behavior;
- Encouraging and providing early literacy experiences;
- Early identification of children with special needs;
- Child abuse;
- Other issues may be identified as per the needs of the community or children.

### 18.6.3 Steps to Organise a Successful Parent Teacher Meeting/ Parent Conference

- Identification and arrangement of venue;
- Providing advance information to the parents and community about venue and timings of the conference;
- Preparing a list of activities identified for the conference;
- Holding meeting at parents level in a friendly environment;
- Providing baby- sitting services with the help of preschool helpers;
- Making seating arrangements in such a manner so that everyone feels involved and included;
- Allowing time to parents to interact with one another;
- Encouraging active and meaningful discussions; and
- Using warm up activities and games to reinforce the advocacy and parent education messages.



### INTEXT QUESTION 18.3

1. List any eight activities which can be organised to involve parents and community in the functioning of an ECCE centre/preschool.



### WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

In this lesson, you have learnt:

- Parent and community participation in children's learning and in the school community should be acknowledged and valued. This shows the value of early childhood education.
- Teachers not only have to develop trusting relationships with their children but also have to build effective working relationships with parents and community members.
- Active participation of parents and community members in quality early childhood education enhances positive outcomes for children.
- There are a number of ways and strategies through which parents can be involved in their children's early education.
- ECCE Day would facilitate involvement of parents and community in early childhood care and education of children and establish partnerships for optimum development of young children.



### TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. What is the need and importance of parents and community awareness in ECCE?
2. Explain any five benefits of parent's participation in ECCE programme.
3. How preschool is benefited when parents and community members actively participate in the preschool activities?
4. Suggest any five activities which can be organised for active participation of parents and community.
5. Suggest some strategies to effectively communicate with parents and community members.
6. How a successful ECCE Day/Conference should be organised?



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**ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS****18.1**

- (a) True
- (b) False
- (c) True
- (d) False
- (e) True

**18.2**

- (a) partners
- (b) community
- (c) early childhood care and education centre
- (d) feedback
- (e) preschool/ ECCE centre
- (f) families/parents

**18.3**

- (a) Celebration of cultural programme
- (b) Workshop on ECCE issues and concern
- (c) Celebrating a Bal Mela/local festival
- (d) Collection of local series and rhymes
- (e) Exhibition of children's art work
- (f) Celebration of sports day
- (g) Parent as a storyteller in the classroom
- (h) Presenting drama on ECCE for Community



## GLOSSARY

- **Activity areas:** Clearly defined and well equipped places in the preschool classroom which allow young children to explore materials on their own. These include dolls area, manipulative area, dramatic area, discovery or science area, water area, art area etc
- **Advocacy material:** Material which may influence decisions and mindsets
- **Child abuse:** Physical, sexual or emotional maltreatment or neglect of child/children
- **Collaborative partnership:** Participation of two organisations or parties who agree to share resources, for example, sharing knowledge of child development during parent conferences; helping and supporting school during school sports and cultural programme etc.
- **Consensus :** A general agreement ; accord
- **Early stimulation:** Activities which aim to optimise cognitive, physical, social and emotional development of young children
- **Learning outcomes:** Statements that help teacher understand the essential learning children have achieved
- **Sarpanch :** The head of a village

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### WEB RESOURCES

- Siolta Research Digests. Parents and Families. [http://www.siolta.ie/media/pdfs/siolta\\_research\\_digests](http://www.siolta.ie/media/pdfs/siolta_research_digests).