

Compilation of Family Engagement Activities from Early Years Agencies March 2020 to Present COVID Times

The goal of the Family Engagement Committee is to promote family engagement through collaborative planning and implementation of strategies across the Child Care and Early Years system in the City of Peterborough and County of Peterborough.

We know that family engagement is a key element in supporting young children's development and learning and adapting family engagement practices to families' current shifting needs is important. Families are experiencing stress and anxiety about their own well-being as well as that of their children. Many families were already concerned about their child's health and well-being in a group setting and now their fears may have grown.

A total of 16 different agencies submitted their family engagement methods and activities that they were involved with from March 2020 to the present. Many of the agencies represented several different locations. There were many common methods and ideas that were used by most agencies but there are also many ideas that only one or two agencies were using during the last 7-8 months. We are hoping that you will find some new ideas that will inspire you to engage with families in new meaningful ways.

Methods of Communication

Technology Tools to Communicate with Families

SeeSaw/Sandbox/HiMama

More agencies began to use apps, such as SeeSaw, Sandbox and HiMama, or they expanded the use of these programs into their school age programs. This allowed agencies and families to share videos, pictures, and documentations. Families were encouraged to share photos of their children and what they were doing as a family.

Facebook

Public Facebook pages that gave updates on reopening plans and procedures. Posted pre-recorded videos, activities, and adventures to share with families. Inquiries and themes for the day provided families with ideas to explore. They were encouraged to share their discoveries.

Private Facebook page where they would post activities for families and asked that families would share photos and ideas that they were doing with their own families. New ideas as well as familiar activities were shared with families. Written provocations and invitations to play were posted by staff

Private Facebook pages were also developed to use solely for staff. Staff would connect daily with co-workers and any new changes or develops for their workplace were shared on the Facebook page to ensure that employees were getting the same information at the same time.

Zoom

This app was used to present weekly interactive story times, crafts, dancing, singing, show and tell and science activities. Zoom was used for staff meetings and meeting with families and children. Some used Zoom for group meetings while others used it for one on one meetings with children and their families. Zoom meetings were offered for check-ins with families. Some were done with the children while others were specifically with parents to provide any support, resources, or information regarding their child's needs.

Other Communication and Engagement with Parents/Caregivers

- More time has been spent communicating by phone, text, and email, depending on the preference of the family.
- Supports and coaching was also offered to families through telephone conversations and other online venues.
- Agencies emailed out monthly newsletters, monthly activity calendars, links to activities and children's mental health websites
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Family Engagement with New Families

- Videos that introduced staff with and without their PPE were made available for families.
- Virtual tours of the centre that showed each playroom, hallways and outdoor space so families could see where their child would be spending their days.
- After hours tours inside offered to new families introducing them to their child's educator while maintaining their social distances and wearing masks.
- Parents peeked in through the windows to see the different rooms in the centre.
- Meet and greets between staff and parents were also offered in the parking lots while maintain social distancing.
- New parent orientation held outside with social distancing in place
- Family Engagement with Graduating Families
- Power point presentations were made and given to graduating families showing their child's development from their first day to their last day attending the program.
- Appointments with families to pick up their stuff and when they arrived, treat bags, balloons, photos and story books about each individual child and/or graduation diplomas were found in their lockers.
- Drive by the family's homes and dropped off similar special items for each child.

Specific Supports, Resources and Engagement Activities for Parents

- Virtual school transitions
- Self Regulation Sundays offered online
- Ann Douglas virtual event
- Book club for parent/caregivers
- Online workshops on managing stress, mental health
- Virtual town hall chat about reopening plans

- Surveys for parents and care givers about reopening plans, ideas for online programming
- Virtual family coffee chats
- Forum for parents and staff on sharing challenges and solutions when home with children
- Offering one on one support to parents/caregivers - providing strategies for challenging behaviours
- Informal small group gathering outside while maintaining social distance
- Pizza party contest for families and whoever could identify the most children books (from provided clues) won a pizza delivered to their house
- Online workshops for parents provided in the evening when the children were in bed

Other Engagement Strategies that are Currently Happening

- Educators intentional in having meaningful engagement during pick up and drop off times.
- Displaying children's projects outside for parents and families to discover
- Walks around neighborhoods to see what is happening in their community
- Participating in virtual community events – virtual pumpkin patch
- Photos of families continue to be displayed and updated in the center. This can be on a wall display or in photo album
- Gathering safely outside with social distancing for quick meeting/chat