Tips for Teachers:

Supporting parent and caregiver involvement in early literacy practices with young children from diverse backgrounds and abilities: tips for teachers

Tips for Teachers are a continuing series of practical strategies that teachers and other caregivers can use in their classrooms and other early learning settings. These tips are based on research evidence and professional knowledge.

Research has demonstrated the importance of parental and caregiver involvement in young children's early literacy experiences. Early literacy experiences within natural settings, including the home, provide powerfully motivating learning opportunities for young children from diverse backgrounds and abilities. Not only do such opportunities stimulate the development of early language and literacy skills, these naturally embedded learning opportunities encourage parents and caregivers to become active partners with early childhood educators.

How do teachers support parent and caregiver involvement in early literacy practices with young children from diverse backgrounds and abilities?

Teachers play an important role in supporting parent and caregiver involvement in early literacy practices with young children from diverse backgrounds and abilities. Families often look to teachers as a source of information, guidance, and support about their young children's early language and literacy development. Moreover, families frequently seek out guidance and validation from teachers about how they can support their children's early literacy skills at home in their daily activities and routines.

TO PROMOTE EARLY LITERACY STRATEGIES WITH FAMILIES

• Provide parents and caregivers with specific strategies (i.e., shared book reading, engaging in conversations, oral story telling, singing songs, using humor) about how to engage with their child in early literacy activities at home. See, for example, www.reachoutandread.org.
• Model shared book reading with families and young children.
• Help families identify early literacy goals for themselves and for their children.
• Provide ongoing opportunities, feedback, and support for parents and caregivers to practice early literacy activities with their child.
• Share ideas about oral language activities that families can do with their young children in everyday routines.

TO SUPPORT THE ACTIVITIES AND CUSTOMS OF FAMILIES

• Be knowledgeable about the daily activities and cultural customs of young children and families in the classroom. Encourage families to share stories, songs, and music from their culture. See, for example, www.bornlearning.org
• Consider the goodness of fit with respect to the provision of early literacy supports to parents and caregivers of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. For example, if oral storytelling is an important part of a family’s culture, examine how early literacy supports provided to families by practitioners “fit” with this custom or tradition.

• Build upon the knowledge and experiences of families when suggesting early literacy activities for home use.

• Provide early literacy supports to parents and caregivers that promote linkages between home and classroom environments.

TO OFFER SUPPORTS TO FAMILIES OF YOUNG ENGLISH LEARNERS
• Actively include the parents and caregivers of young English learners in all aspects of the classroom and other early learning settings.

• Encourage families of young English learners to share information about how their home languages can be represented in early literacy activities in the classroom and in other early learning settings. See for example, www.colorincolorado.org.

• Be knowledgeable about first and second language acquisition, and share this information with parents and caregivers, particularly as it relates to the development of early literacy skills. See, for example, http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/poptopics/englang-learners.html.

• Provide guidance to families of young English learners who might have questions about home-language maintenance and second language acquisition, particularly as it relates to the development of early literacy skills in the classroom and in other early learning settings.

TO PROVIDE LITERACY RESOURCES TO FAMILIES
• Create a lending library for families of children’s books and other early literacy materials reflecting multicultural and linguistic diversity, and varying abilities.

• Provide information to parents and caregivers in their primary language about the public library system.

• Familiarize families with how to obtain a public library card.

• Familiarize parents and caregivers with other community-based, literacy resources including adult and family literacy and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs.

• Offer families information about resources available to support early literacy that reflect diversity. Communicate this information in a variety of ways.