

7 Parent and Child Together Time

The challenge [of this component of your family literacy program] is to have a positive impact on the whole family by enhancing the relationships between parents and children and the literacy value of interactions.¹

Quality considerations

Parent and Child Together (PACT) time consists of regularly scheduled opportunities for parents and their children to play and work together. PACT activities assist adults in affirming, discovering, and expanding their parenting skills.

Parental development requires intensive and sustained immersion in authentic learning experiences. To produce substantial improvements in outcomes for children, parents should participate about 20 hours a month in parenting-related activities, including home visits, parent discussion groups, and parent-child literacy activities.¹

PACT activities:

- enhance parents' awareness of how children learn and specifically how their own child learns best,
- provide parents with materials and techniques to support their children's learning and development in the home,
- educate and encourage parents in their role as advocates in their child's formal educational experiences, and
- provide opportunities for parents to practice new strategies in a supportive environment where teachers model, coach, and encourage learning strategies.



¹ Guide to Quality Even Start Family Literacy Programs, prepared for Even Start Program U.S. Department of Education by the RMC Research Corporation.

FACT



One major obstacle to high-quality day care is the lack of good books in many day care and preschool settings. Literacy enrichment should be a high priority at every family literacy center. The goal is to increase exposure to print and meaningful language among very young children.

National Research Council 1998

What is Parent and Child Together Time?

Parent and Child Together time is a regular part of the daily schedule when parents and children play together in the early childhood classroom. The goals of this component are:

- to aid parents in discovering, affirming, and expanding their strengths as parents and leaders of their families;
- to enhance parents' awareness of how children learn;
- to give parents tools and techniques to support their children's learning in the home;
- to provide an opportunity for parents to practice these new techniques in a supportive environment where teachers can model learning strategies and offer suggestions; and
- to encourage parents and children to have fun together.

PACT time includes a sequence of distinct events:

1. Children plan where they will play with their parents.
2. Children communicate their plans to their parent, and parents prepare by thinking about how they can support and extend their children's play.
3. Staff members lead a literacy-focused circle time with transfer-to-home connections.
4. Parents debrief with staff in the adult education classroom or during parent group meetings.²

The following indicators demonstrate a high-quality PACT program component:

Activities are fun and encourage playful involvement of both child and parent.

Parents communicate with and listen to their child rather than instruct.

PACT time is comprised of parent-child related activities, including story-reading and story-telling, and other interactive literacy activities within the center as well as home visits.

PACT activities help parents form reasonable expectations for their child's achievement.

² The Family Literacy Answer Book. Louisville, KY: National Center for Family Literacy.

Parent-child activities encourage active manipulation of a variety of objects, engagement of children in problem-solving and thinking, and active involvement in reading stories.

Parents recognize literacy experiences that occur within routine family interactions. Teacher-parent opportunities to reflect follow at least some parent-child experiences. Opportunities are present to transfer what has been learned in parenting sessions about child development to the PACT activity.

Do parents and children really need PACT Time?

Shouldn't we be working directly with parents and children separately to strengthen their skills? One of our goals in family literacy is to strengthen parents in their role as the most important teachers of their children. Through participation in Parent and Child Together time, parents come to understand that for better or worse, they do make in the lives of their children. Regular participation and reflection on their observations and activities results in a carry over of strategies, skills, and interaction patterns to the home setting, where this new learning impacts the entire family. This kind of strengthening and empowerment is important to the future of families.

Staffing

No additional staffing is required because the parents will be with their children in the children's classroom. Parent educators and adult education teachers can be present during the PACT time to support the early childhood staff. This is a time for staff members to support and model appropriate behaviors for parents and children.

² Ibid.

FAMILY LITERACY IN ACTION

I have seen a big improvement in Ashley in all the developmental areas (after one year in the program, she is now 5 years of age). I believe the Even Start Program has given Ashley and her mother an opportunity to gain information, educational knowledge and services that have built up their self-esteem, and improved their physical, social, and cognitive abilities. This program has given Ashley a head start in life and I believe she is ready to go on to meet new classmates and new teachers.

Crowder College/McDonald School District
Even Start Local Evaluation Report, 1998

52 The Four Components of Family Literacy

Training

All staff members need to be trained in family literacy practices. PACT is the “glue” that pulls and holds the other components together. PACT is an opportunity for parents to be successful as a teacher of their child in a safe and nurturing atmosphere. LIFT–Missouri offers four regional full-day PACT workshops each year. Internet web sites for parents and parent educators provide many suggestions for parent-child activities. Many sites can be accessed through the National Center for Literacy’s links. You can enter these sites through lift-missouri.org or nifl.gov.

Conclusion

Planning and implementing a high quality, sustainable family literacy program takes time. Program design and implementation do not happen overnight. Patiently build collaborations within your community, recruit people you know and trust to join your team, expand your circle of influence. A family literacy program evolves gradually through collaborative planning and community commitment. Chapter 10, Resources, provides a guide to agencies and community resources available for your planning sessions and to use during implementation.



The environment or surroundings at home and school should be filled with many experiences in reading and writing. Access to many different kinds of reading and writing materials — library books, magazines, newspapers, others resources, and supportive adults — all make a huge difference in learning to read. Children need to see adults reading so it seems important.

America Reads: Building Literacy Through Community Partnership, 1998