

Building a Community Through Breakfast Club

Lynn A. Manfredi/Petitt

In my family child care program, we start the day with a healthy breakfast. When I asked parents if they would like to join us while we eat, Breakfast Club was born. My relationships with families and their relationships with each other have blossomed. It is family engagement at its best!

Breakfast Club is a simple concept. I keep some adult-size chairs near the children's table, and parents are warmly encouraged—but never obligated—to join their children during the half hour when breakfast is served. We enjoy different sets of grown-ups every day (including an au pair, family friends, and grandparents). My husband works with me, and we sit with the children to model good eating habits, demonstrate how our daily table rules work, and talk with the children. Sometimes families demonstrate home rules, too.

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This gives adults an opportunity to share tips with one another and helps children learn that rules can be different in different places.

Adults can eat, too. Help-yourself coffee or tea is available, and often contributed to our program by families. Adults may finish any leftover food

after children leave the table. When we have extra food or a special treat, we invite adults to enjoy a bite along with us. Otherwise, those who want a full breakfast pay \$5—less than a coffee shop latte and bagel. Since this is in my written policies, expectations are clear and generally respected. The major investment is time, less than 30 minutes



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR



SUPPORTING DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS

This warm tradition can be a wonderful opportunity for families from different languages and cultures to get to know each other. Make an extra effort to invite people who are not sure if they are welcome because of their language differences. Diverse groups may take a little more support from staff to get conversations going, so ask questions you know will interest all the families. Get things started by introducing a few simple greetings or phrases in everyone's language. Ask families to share foods or recipes from home to help all families feel more comfortable.

a day. Families appreciate having coffee available and save time and money by not making it at home or buying it.

The children begin each day surrounded by people who care about them. In this comfortable, family-like setting, good-byes are less stressful. Unlike typically quick, clingy drop-offs, children walk away first. They might also climb into parents' laps to enjoy extra hugs. Adults can indulge their children because no one is in a hurry. As the children move on to chosen play activities, adults often continue chatting comfortably.

Information is exchanged and relationships build. During conversations we talk about a range of topics—from the changing weather to the latest sports thrill. We puzzle together over children's behavior or the healthiest ways to discuss the death of a pet. Sometimes parents set up play dates with an ease that only authentic relationships bring. Politics was the buzz last fall, and then holiday plans took the stage. We speak carefully when children are listening, of course, but there's always time for grown-up concerns.

Everyone's day starts in friendly, relaxed ways. Research shows that the brain opens to its highest level of thinking when people feel supported and valued in a safe, predictable environment. When the children and I begin morning meeting, adults leave ready for work because they feel acknowledged and appreciated by their fellow adults. That's a surprise bonus of Breakfast Club—it helps everyone thrive. **TYC**

NEXT

