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Choosing to Participate

by Kathy Lynn

As a parent, I have made many friends out of the parents of my children's playmates. I have traded toilet training tales, birthday party fiasco stories, and first day of school anecdotes with those friends. Over the years, the stories changed as our children grew. The stories may be different, but the friends stayed the same. And many of those friends were made while my children were in preschool - parent participation preschool, to be exact.

Many parents often find the concept of parent participation to be overwhelming and somewhat confusing, and therefore don't even consider the option. But there are benefits to this kind of preschool, and they extend to parents as well.

What is a Parent Participation Preschool?

Parent Participation Preschools are, simply, schools run by the parents. There is an Association of 37 schools in the Lower Mainland and another 10 throughout the province. The Association has been in existence since 1946.

In these schools, parents have the opportunity to participate in the administration of the school, to be with their child once or twice a month, and to attend monthly meetings that offer Parent Education. There is also a business meeting: since the preschools are parent-run, each parent has a job responsibility. Meetings cover everything from the preschool program to fundraising, field trips, and social events. The preschools are parent-run, but they are not parent-taught: the children are engaged in a quality program with a qualified E.C.E. teacher.

As a busy parent, you might say, "What could justify dedicating all that time to the program?". Well, there are several advantages, such as:

- you have a direct say in the running and philosophy of the preschool;
- you can watch your child with others of the same age and see how he fits in with his age group;
- it's less expensive (because parents share the tasks of running the preschool, administrative costs are far lower);
- you'll meet other parents, which reduces the isolation and loneliness often experienced by parents of preschoolers;
- you'll work with parents who share your basic philosophy of involvement with your child;
- you'll make lifetime friendships;
- the teacher is readily available for advice and information about your child.

Yes, there are demands made on your time, but it is just these demands that make the experience so worthwhile. You will meet other parents who share many of your values about the importance of quality parenting, learn more about child-raising, and work with like-minded and usually nice people toward joint goals. And, like me, you could make friends for life.

For more information Contact Sunshine Hills Preschool at 604-596-2515