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Description automatically generated with medium confidenceBuilding Connections With Families

**Tip Sheet**

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**What to do:** Review these ideas for helping families share quality time with their children at home. Highlight the ones you want to try. Put a star by the one you’ll try first.

**Why it matters:** Some families might think they don’t have enough education, time, or money to help their child do well in school. They might be surprised and happy to hear that simple things like playing games, talking, and having a relaxed meal together can make a positive difference. You can provide ideas and encouragement.

# Suggest Home-Based Family and Student Shared Activities

Send suggestions home with students, then set aside a few minutes during snack time for students to share stories about doing these activities with their family members:

* Work jigsaw puzzles together.
* Have a competition where everyone uses the same set of ingredients to prepare different tasty treats that everyone will share.
* Draw family portraits individually or join in to draw one large portrait.
* Eat dinner together as a family and talk about your day.
* Have a talent show or karaoke night.
* Learn a new dance or choreograph a family dance routine.
* Have a family karaoke night.
* Take turns writing parts of a silly story.
* Memorize the 50 states and their capitals and quiz each other.
* Create artwork together. This could be large sheets of paper taped to a wall and the large group works on different sections of a mural that represents the program.
* Play balloon volleyball, basketball, or learn a variety of strength and mindfulness exercises.
* Play Simon Says, Hot Potato, or another childhood favorite game.
* Read a book together and act out parts.
* Learn a new skill together.
* Start a garden in your backyard.
* Watch or attend a sporting event together.

**Tip:** To engage families in your program, spend some time getting to know them as individuals, understanding their cultures, and identifying possible ways they can contribute (e.g., by helping your team plan or chaperone a trip, by hosting an event, or by acting as a guest speaker to share their skills and knowledge).

# Connect With Families Remotely

**Good news cards**: Send home postcards or short, handwritten notes about something you really appreciate about a child or something you noticed them doing well this week.

**Provide at-home projects:** Create a project kit related to a theme you are covering in your program. Include all needed materials and encourage children to share the project with an adult. Don’t require that the project be brought back, this is just a way to share some of what you do in afterschool. Include information about the academic skills youth are practicing when they do the project.

**School mascot:** Send a stuffed animal or small toy to “visit” a different family each week. Ask each family to take a picture of the toy in their home and send the picture to display at your site.

**Staff introductions:** Send home photos and short biographies to introduce staff members.

**Breakfast on the go:** Hand out granola bars or muffins and coffee in paper cups with lids one morning to families as they drop off youth.

# Provide Ideas That Support Learning

**Family book reviews:** Send home a book that youth really enjoy. On the inside cover, tape a business envelope and fill it with blank cards. Ask youth to share the book and write down what the family thinks about the book and put the card in the envelope. The next family will get to read what others think and add their own comments.

**A Day in the Life:** Give students “reporting assignments” to document a day in the life of various family members. Ask students to take pictures of their families enjoying meals, sharing customs, or doing a favorite activity. Display the photos at your site.

**Family stories:** Ask adults to record stories about their families in their home language. Youth can interpret the stories for classmates.

**Parent newsletter:** Send regular newsletters home to highlight program accomplishments.

**Family collage:** Make a collage or sculpture with items that families contribute. Consider themes like “food we eat” or “what we see from our window.”

**Scavenger hunt**: Suggest creating a scavenger hunt with everyday items. Families can pick a place like the backyard, the neighborhood, or a local park. While walking around, look for items and create a list. For each item, think of two to three clues. Then, give the child the clues and walk together. For example, you may ask your child to find different objects based on color or shape or items based on their use, such as safety items around town. Consider giving your child a camera or a checklist to keep track of their finds. After your hunt, discuss with your child what the items had in common and the great critical thinking they did to figure out all the clues. Even better: Let your child make a scavenger hunt for *you*!

**Learning to go:** Send home packets with learning activities parents can do with children to support cognitive development. In the summer, consider outdoor games, slicing summer pies and watermelon, and helping with summer chores such as planting flowers or vegetables. In other seasons, consider counting costs at the grocery store, working puzzles, playing board games, baking, and reading together.

**Story starters:** After students return from an exciting field trip, ask them to write a story for their families. Include three to five discussion questions or prompts that relate directly to the trip, like “Tell me more about…” and “Can you explain…?” Families can use these prompts on the car ride home or during dinner, then help to reinforce learning all evening.

**Question of the day:** At the end of activities, have students work together to write questions they can ask their family members to help them find out more about a topic. For example, if they’re learning about weather, they might ask a parent this: “Tell me about the worst storm you ever experienced.” Or, “Which type of cloud is your favorite, and why?” These questions provide opportunities for reciprocal teaching, which gives students chances to share what they learned and embed it in memory.

**Little big chefs**: Cooking together is a great way to explore math and science as a family. Look up recipes and find one you’ll both enjoy making. Shop for ingredients together and then spend time in the kitchen preparing the food. Build in opportunities to practice reading and math by having your child read the recipe aloud to you or practice measuring with measuring spoons and cups. This is a great way to show their learning in action in real life! Enjoy your hard work by eating in a special place, such as outside or on a blanket in another room. Younger children will be excited to complete a grown-up task and older children will appreciate some ownership over the process. What better way to understand the importance of budgeting, purchasing, and measuring than through food? When done, ask your child to write about the experience.

**One good deed:** As a family, start the tradition of regularly doing good deeds. Not only will you and your child build wonderful memories together, but each good deed will also be a positive learning experience. Set a family volunteer goal where you and your child commit to volunteering once a month or perform a weekly, or even daily, good deed. Have your child journal or scrapbook to remember these activities. Here are some great volunteer ideas for children:

* Donate food at a food pantry.
* Run an errand for an elderly person.
* Write a letter to deployed service people or to children in hospitals.
* Clean up around your neighborhood.
* Donate money from a lemonade stand or a bake sale.
* Read to younger children at libraries, daycares, or churches.

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