

Table 1: Ideas for Overcoming Obstacles to Parent Attendance and Participation

Obstacles	Ideas for Overcoming Them
Lack of transportation	Arrange car pools and walk pools; provide bus or information about public transportation; arrange for other transportation; hold small-group meetings at a local community center or church.
Lack of babysitters	Provide a nursery or arrange to pool children where a sitter is available; hire older students to baby-sit.
Inconvenient meeting time	Send home a brief questionnaire asking parents to specify convenient meetings times; make a meeting potluck to accommodate working parents' needs.
Feelings of personal inadequacy	Arrange informal social events at which parents and staff can become better acquainted. Do not discount anything parents say. Acknowledge parental shyness by saying, "We are all initially hesitant to say anything out loud because we think that what we say might not be of interest to the group. But that's why we're here to share ideas."
Feeling unwelcome	Brief the staff on ways to put parents at ease. For example, you could comment on something positive the child has said or done. Or, you could compliment the parents on something they have said or on their appearance. Serve refreshments.
Having overwhelming personal problems	Arrange personal calls or home visits to permit parents to speak openly about their problems. If appropriate, try to help parents resolve their problems.
No opportunity to participate in meetings	Ask questions; encourage parents to express their viewpoints; remind staff that they are there in a consulting capacity.
Meetings seem to accomplish nothing	Research the topic before meeting. Close on a positive note. If the issue cannot be resolved, research the topic further and present findings at next meeting or by memo; involve other members in getting more information. Write a "job description" for the group, clearly stating the purpose, authority, responsibilities, and communications.
Inexperienced chairpersons	Conduct training; coach chairpersons; take chairs to observe well-run meetings.