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# Involving Single and Working Parents

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An increasing number of children live in single parent and step families. Many also live in foster families, and other non-traditional family forms. And in many two-parent families both parents work full days, so children come home to an empty house. Involving single and working parents presents many challenges to schools.

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## Communication

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Communication with single-parent and other non-traditional families will be more effective if schools

- Avoid making the assumption that students live with both biological parents.
- Avoid the traditional "Dear Parents" greeting in letters and other messages, and instead use "Dear Parent," "Dear Family," "Friends," or some other form of greeting.
- Develop a system of keeping non-custodial parents informed of their children's school progress.
- Demonstrate sensitivity to the rights of non-custodial parents. Inform parents that schools may not withhold information from non-custodial parents who have the legal right to see their children's records.
- Develop a simple unobtrusive system to keep track of family changes, such as these examples:
  - ✓ At the beginning of the year ask for the names and addresses of individuals to be informed about each child and involved in school activities.
  - ✓ At mid-year send a form to each child's parents or guardians to verify that the information is still accurate. Invite the parents or guardians to indicate any changes.

- Place flyers about school events on bulletin boards of major companies in the community which are family-friendly to learning.

These approaches use different and more sensitive ways of communicating with non-traditional families, and do not require much more material resources.

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## Involvement

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The following practices can make the involvement of single and working parents in school life more feasible:

- Hold parent-teacher conferences and other school events in the evenings.
  - Welcome other children at such events, and provide organized activities or child care services.
  - Provide teachers and counselors with in-service training that sensitizes them to special problems faced by children of single and working parents and the parents themselves.
  - Gather information on whether joint or separate parent conferences need to be scheduled with parents.
  - Sponsor evening and weekend learning activities at which parents can participate and learn with their children.
  - Work with local businesses to arrange released time from work so that parents can attend conferences, volunteer or in other ways spend time at their child's school when it is in session.
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