



Program Description

Over the last several years, Kaleidoscope Play & Learn has been demonstrated as an effective strategy for reaching and engaging parents and caregivers. The Kaleidoscope Play & Learn model is particularly suited because research, as well as our experience, has shown that these caregivers prefer this type of support and learning to formal training.

Kaleidoscope Play & Learn groups are facilitated play groups for young children and their family, caregivers and parents. Groups are run by community organizations, in a variety of neighborhood locations, including libraries, community centers, and apartment rec rooms and schools. Kaleidoscope Play & Learn groups meet weekly for 1 ½ -2 hours. All groups have a trained facilitator, who sets up a variety of activities and provides information and guidance to participants.

While Kaleidoscope Play & Learn groups are seen by participants as a fun way to get together with other children and caregivers, the intent of Kaleidoscope Play & Learn is to get information and support to family and caregivers to help them support early learning and healthy development of the children in their care. Children are only at Kaleidoscope Play & Learn groups for a couple of hours a week, where they play and learn new skills (particularly interacting with other children). However, the real impact of Kaleidoscope Play & Learn is in what the caregivers take away from the group and do at home with the children in their care. Through participating in Play & Learn, caregivers discover that children learn through play and daily activities; they increase understanding about how to support children's early learning at home, and they gain confidence in their ability to prepare children for success in school and life.

Kaleidoscope Play & Learn is a model that was developed by Child Care Resources in Seattle, Washington. The model was developed using information gathered through five years' of outcomes evaluation as well as practice in the field – learning through trial and error the different ways to run Play & Learn in a variety of settings and communities. Organizations using the Kaleidoscope Play & Learn model follow the Kaleidoscope Play & Learn Guidelines, standards based on what was learned through evaluation and practices as well as on widely recognized and accepted theories and best practices in the fields of child development; early learning; parent education; family, friend and neighbor care; community development; and cultural competency.

A facilitator, trained in the model, leads each Kaleidoscope Play & Learn group. The facilitator sets up activities, helps caregivers get to know each other, and connects caregivers with family support resources and other early learning opportunities in the community.

At each Kaleidoscope Play & Learn group there is:

- Time for children and caregivers to participate together in open-ended, child-directed play at different play centers as well as in a planned, coordinated group activity
- Intentional caregiver learning, which is done through facilitator modeling, coaching and guidance, brief lessons, or written materials
- Time and opportunities for caregivers to interact and connect with each other
- Opportunities for children to interact with each other
- Opportunities for caregivers to develop leadership and to participate in the planning and running of the Kaleidoscope Play & Learn group

A typical Kaleidoscope Play & Learn session usually begins with time for the children and caregivers to enjoy informal play activities (such as blocks, dolls, books, art, etc.) set up by the facilitator. At each station, a brief explanation is posted for the caregivers about the benefit of the activity. The facilitators model for the caregivers how to interact with the children using the materials provided. The facilitators introduce new experiences to children by playing with the materials themselves, and describing what they are doing and why, so the adults will better understand the value of the activity. For example, at an art station, the facilitator might get on the floor and ask all of the adults and children to join her for finger painting. The facilitator would begin to paint, while demonstrating and talking to the children and adults about how painting helps children explore lines, colors, shapes and textures; helps them express their thoughts and feelings; and helps develop their creative imagination.

Often, there is a brief circle time for children and a discussion time for the caregivers, who are encouraged to share questions and concerns and serve as resources for one another. As interests are expressed or opportunities arise, the facilitator brings in additional resource people and materials to address specific concerns (i.e., child abuse & neglect, school enrollment, oral health) or plan field trips to connect with resource people and organizations.

[Kaleidoscope Play & Learn Video](#)

Background on How Kaleidoscope Play & Learn Supports Family, Friend and Neighbor Caregivers

Brain development research proves that the most crucial time for learning is from birth to five, making quality childcare and early learning experiences foundational for the future success of every child. Without it, children start behind and stay behind. Our community's interest in helping all children get a good start in school and life has raised awareness of

how important it is to provide information and resources to all people who care for children so that they can support early learning of the children in their care. If we are to reach all children, we must also reach and support their family, friend and neighbor caregivers.

Families choose family, friend and neighbor care for a variety of reasons: quality of care, convenience and flexibility of hours, family tradition. Many families choose this form of childcare because they want their children in the care of someone they know and trust – and who share their values, culture and language.

Caregivers, like other significant adults in children’s lives, want the best for the children in their care. They want their children to be prepared for school and to be healthy and happy. Caregivers and parents are eager to have opportunities to have their children play with other children. When asked, parents also indicate that they appreciate a chance to be with other adults caring for children and to learn more about how they can help the children grow, develop and learn.

Kaleidoscope Play & Learn is a strategy we use to support parents, caregivers and the children in their care, getting them the child development information and social connections they want for themselves and their children.

Intended Results and Outcomes

Our vision is that, as a result of participating Kaleidoscope Play & Learn groups, parents and caregivers' capacity and knowledge about healthy child development improves, and more young children will enter school ready to succeed.

Evaluation

Kaleidoscope Play & Learn is a model that works. As a result of participating in Kaleidoscope Play & Learn groups, caregivers experienced these outcomes¹:

- 73 % increased knowledge “a lot more” in one evaluation area (eg, what to expect of children at different ages, how children learn through play, the importance of the caregiver’s role in helping the child be prepared for school, etc.)
- 84% reported changing what they do “a lot more” with the children in their care in one evaluation area (eg, talking and doing activities, reading or looking at books, helping the child talk about and understand his/her feelings).
- 55% reported decreased isolation “a lot more” through talking or sharing ideas about caregiving with another adult

¹ Summary of End of Year Play & Learn Participant Results, January-December 2009. Report prepared by Organizational Research Services for Child Care Resources.

Evaluation also indicates that the more times a family attends Play & Learn, the more positive the outcomes.

The evaluation also indicates that participation appears to be very beneficial for those from diverse linguistic and cultural groups as well as for family, friend and neighbor caregivers. This finding validates our approach in targeting immigrant families – who typically have a higher utilization rate of family, friend and neighbor care than other communities.

Community Partnerships

We are Affiliates of Kaleidoscope Play & Learn coordinated by Child Care Resources in Seattle, Washington. As Affiliates, we have agreed to abide by field-tested and evaluated Guidelines and to participate in quality assurance activities to ensure fidelity to the Kaleidoscope Play & Learn model as well as to ensure we are meeting the needs of our participants.

Contact

For more information or to find a playgroup near you contact Teresa Slater at Southern Oregon Early Learning Services Hub teresa_slater@soesd.k12.or.us or find us on Facebook.