



## How to Promote Your Business During a Recession

By Tom Copeland of Resources for Caring

With the downturn in the economy, parents may be laid off work and often stay home to care for their children, thus reducing the demand for child care services. Some of these parents will start offering child care in their own homes to earn more income for their families. The supply of child care increases while the demand for care decreases, making it difficult for providers to fill their spaces.

I've been hearing from providers across the country who are losing parents from their programs. Economists expect that unemployment will continue to rise in 2009. If so, providers may continue to experience difficulties in maintaining their enrollment.

### How Providers Can Succeed in These Tough Times

Providers need to know how to answer two questions:

1. Why should I enroll my child in your program?
2. What does your program offer that other programs don't?

Your answer will largely determine how successful you'll be. You may believe that you run a wonderful program, but unless parents agree, you won't succeed. It's important to learn how to communicate the benefits of your program to parents.

### Quality vs. Cost

When parents are shopping for child care, they are looking for programs of the highest quality for the money they can afford to spend. If they are looking at two programs and can't see a difference in the quality of those programs, they will choose the one that is cheaper. As our economy weakens, there will be an increasing number of providers who will lower their prices to attract such parents.

I believe this is a mistake.

Instead, providers should put their energy into improving their communication skills and showing the benefits of their program to parents. Competing on the basis of price alone is a losing strategy. Competing on the basis of quality has a much greater chance of succeeding.

### Features and Benefits

Parents want to know how your child care program will benefit their child. All providers can offer a basic description of their program to parents: "I serve preschoolers Monday through Friday and participate on the Food Program." What is often missing is a follow-up statement about how your program will help children learn: "I offer planned learning activities with weekly themes tailored to your child's needs."

All parents value education for their children, so use learning-related words to help them understand what your program offers: "I teach your children;" "This is what your children learned yesterday, are learning today, and will learn tomorrow;" "I charge a tuition;" "Your children will graduate from my program."

### "Preschool Programs"

More and more parents understand the importance of early childhood education. Child care programs that promote themselves as "preschools" usually offer a structured time for planned learning activities. Even the word "preschool" itself evokes a learning environment.

However, all family child care providers who care for children of preschool age are offering, by definition, a "preschool program." Consider describing your program as a "preschool program" and point out to parents what activities you offer (whether highly structured or informal) and how these activities help children learn. Do not let a parent think that they must take their child to a "preschool program" in order to ensure that their child is learning.

This article can be found, in its entirety, on the web at:

<http://www.resourcesforchildcaring.org/index.cfm?page=promotebusduringrecession>

For more information, see the Family Child Care Marketing Guide (\$17.95, [www.redleafpress.org](http://www.redleafpress.org) or 1-800-423-8309).

