



CENTER FOR INCLUSIVE CHILD CARE

Tip Sheets

Engaging with Families

During the early childhood years when teachers and families engage with each other in positive, trusting, and productive ways, the children benefit. In the beginning it might feel difficult to establish an engaging relationship, but by following the Five Rs—respect, responsiveness and reassurance, relationship, reciprocity, and reflection—family engagement will begin to grow as quickly as the children in your classroom.

Respect

As early childhood educators, we respect families by walking alongside them through the ups and downs in life. Respect does not have to mean that we agree with every decision made by families. Instead, it means we are able to view things from their perspective, stay professional and continue to be partners with them while educating their children. While working with families, it is important to respect their values, culture, and decisions.

Below are some strategies to help in building respect:

Active Listening

By listening to the thoughts and feelings of families you will gain a better understanding of their perspectives.

Communicate

Find ways to provide communication with families. This may be as simple as a warm greeting at drop off and pick up times. You might also want to use technology by using communication apps and secure websites to communicate with the families throughout the day to share photos and videos of their children. Having staff bios posted on a website or bulletin board are great ways to introduce staff to parents.

Family of the Week

In addition to the teacher-family relationship, one can encourage families to begin to engage with one another. By celebrating a family of the week, families will have the opportunity to demonstrate what makes their family unique and learn about the other families that are in the program. Families would be able to show their hobbies, interests, beliefs, and culture in person, through a poster, photos, video, or other creative way.

Reassurance and Responsiveness

Families trust early childhood educators each day to provide safe, engaging educational activities to help get children ready for kindergarten. Early childhood educators may make family members feel at ease by providing reassurance and responsiveness to them by knowing, responding, and communicating about the unique needs of the children and families served.

Below are some strategies to help in building reassurance and responsiveness:

Photos and Videos

Many families enjoy seeing their children in the learning environment. Sharing photos and videos throughout the day and week helps the parents get a glimpse of the learning and fun that is taking place. By doing this, parents will be reassured that their children are safe, happy, and are learning.

Classroom Concepts

Teachers can provide key concepts and talking points about items that the children are learning about during the week. This gives the parents ways to engage with the children about new things they are learning.

Respond

To demonstrate that teachers are responsive, it is important to respond to family members' requests by phone calls, emails, and other messages within 24 hours or less.

Relationship

When teachers and families partner together the children benefit. Families engaged with teachers are able to share their expertise and tips about the child that help them.

Below are some strategies to help in building relationships:

Say "Hello"

The simple gesture of saying "hello" is a great way to invite a conversation which may lead to a relationship.

Invite Families

Provide opportunities for family members to join in the children's classroom. Having opportunities for families to watch children sing songs, dance, or do other activities can increase family engagement. Other ideas are inviting families to do special projects or attend field trips with the classroom, having guest speakers, have families read stories, or invite family members to be "mystery guests" and have clues for the children to guess who will be coming.

Be Available

Provide opportunities for families to engage, ask questions, make suggestions, raise concerns, and make comments. You may have a family bulletin board, suggestion box, a classroom webpage, newsletter, and provide an email address.

Reciprocity

When teachers and families work together, they are able to both benefit from the relationship. They are able to share special insights with each other and work together for the best interest of the children.

Below are some strategies to help in building reciprocity:

Involve Family In Decisions

Teachers can visit with families to collaborate and talk about expectations and goals for their children.

Keeping families involved with upcoming changes in policies or procedures while asking for feedback ensures that there are no surprises and keeps the families involved.

Culture, Language, and Literacy

When teachers understand the culture, language, and literacy of their families they are able to engage better. When needed, translations, interpreters, and accommodations may be used to be sure that all families are receiving the same information in their preferred language and media.

Reflect

Though teachers are busy, when they take a few minutes each day or week to reflect on their interactions with children and families there are benefits. One might discover new insights or ways to build engaging relationships with families.

Below is a strategy to help in learning how to reflect:

Ask Reflective Questions

Ask yourself, families, and colleagues reflective questions about engagement. For example, "How well do we know each other?" "How would you like to be engaged in the classroom more?", "Are there things we can do differently to deepen our relationship?", and other similar reflective questions.

Information Adapted from:

Five Rs for Promoting Positive Family Engagement
<https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/winter2022/fiver-rs-family>

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