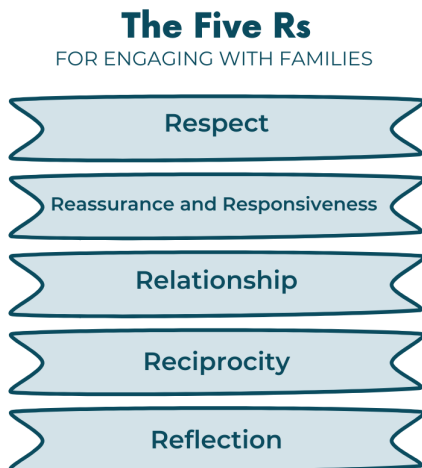


Tip Sheets

Engaging with Families

Children benefit when teachers and families engage with each other in positive, trusting, and productive ways. 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 grow as quickly as the children in your classroom.



Respect

We respect families by walking alongside them through the ups and downs in life. Respect does not have to mean we agree with every decision made by families. It means we understand their perspective, stay professional, and continue to be partners in educating their children. It is important to respect families' values, culture, and decisions. Below are some strategies for building respect:

Active Listening

Gain a better understanding of perspectives by listening to families' thoughts and feelings.

Communicate

Find ways to provide communication with families. This may be as simple as a warm greeting at drop-off and pick-up or using technology like apps and secure websites to communicate with families throughout. Having staff bios posted on a website or bulletin board is also a great way to introduce staff to parents.

Family of the Week

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 can show their hobbies, interests, beliefs, and culture in person, photos, video, or other creative way.

Reassurance and Responsiveness

Families trust early childhood educators to provide safe, engaging educational activities to prepare children for kindergarten. Make family members feel at ease by knowing and communicating about the unique needs of their children. 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 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 parents ways to engage with children about what they are learning.

Respond

It is important to respond to family members' requests by phone calls, emails, and other messages within 24 hours or less.

Relationship

Children benefit when teachers and families partner together. Strong relationships encourage families to share their expertise and tips about their children that will help teachers. Below are some strategies to help in building relationships:

Say "Hello"

This simple gesture 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. Opportunities to watch children sing songs, dance, or do other activities can increase family engagement. Invite families to do special projects, attend field trips, read stories, or be "mystery guests" and have clues for the children to guess who will be visiting.

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, both benefit from the relationship by sharing special insights with each other and working 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 share 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.

Culture, Language, and Literacy

Teachers engage better when they understand the culture, language, and literacy of the families. Translations, interpreters, and accommodations can be used when needed to be sure that all families are receiving the same information in their preferred language and media.

Reflect

Taking a few minutes each day or week to reflect on your interactions with children and families allows for discovering new insights or ways to build engaging relationships with families. One way to do this is by asking reflective questions of yourself, families, and colleagues about engagement such as, *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 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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