

Encouraging Strong Parent-Child Relationships

For Early Learning and Care Providers

Children develop within their relationships with adult caregivers. For most children, their primary and most important relationships are with their parents. When caregivers are dependable, warm, caring, and responsive, children learn how to build connections with others. Parent-child relationships help prepare children to trust and learn to connect with peers and early learning and care providers. Supportive relationships with parents help children learn to:

- Identify, express, and manage their feelings
- Regulate their behavior
- Feel positive about themselves
- Solve problems
- Work through conflicts

We use the terms “parent” and “family” to refer to both biological and adoptive parents as well as stepparents and primary caregivers, such as grandparents, other adult family members, and foster parents.

Families can be biological or nonbiological, chosen or circumstantial. They are connected through cultures, languages, traditions, shared experiences, emotional commitment, and mutual support.

(Adapted from the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems, 2018).

Providers play an important role in supporting parent-child relationships. They have daily opportunities to honor the unique relationships parents have with their children. They do this by recognizing that parents know their children best. Think of the ways you do this. Explore the chart below for additional ideas to encourage this important relationship.

What can providers do to encourage strong parent-child relationships?

Strengths-based Relationships	
Actions	Examples
Ask about a family's dreams, hopes, and traditions.	"As a way of helping us get to know you and your child, can you tell me what your hopes are for your child and your family?"
Observe how children behave with their parents and share descriptions with families.	"I noticed Juan stops crying and smiles when you read to him."
Let parents know when their child interacts warmly with others. Give parents credit for the positive things their child does.	"You mentioned you practice taking turns with Natalie at home. I noticed she gave a friend a turn to use the red marker today."

Cultural Respect	
Actions	Examples
Ask about each family's cultures and languages to show your interest and respect.	"You mentioned at home you speak Tagalog. We would like to use your home language here too. Are there some words or phrases you could share with us that we can use here?"
Be respectful of all family structures, including families with parents who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Be aware of terms the family uses to refer to members of the family.	"Tanya often talks about your family and shares such nice stories about you and your partner."
Ask about parenting practices and choices.	"Alicia and Imani like to nap together at nap time. I can tell that they really care and depend on one another. Maybe you can tell me about how they sleep at home?"

Children's Development and Relationships

Actions	Examples
Listen to what parents share about their child's development and join with them to support their child.	Parent: "Since we've been back from China, Li has been spending time coloring and talking about how she likes coloring with her friends."
Join with parents to talk about the skills their children are developing.	Provider: "I noticed that too. She stays at activities for a longer time. And she is taking more turns with friends when they play together."
Encourage parents to join in activities. Invite them to share something important to them from their cultures.	<p>"Mohammad has been trying to hold more than one block in each hand. He is so focused; he's working very hard to figure it out. I'm wondering what you have noticed?"</p> <p>"Grace tells me she has been practicing special dances she learned from her grandmother. Would someone from your family be willing to come and show the dance to the children?"</p>