

The What, Why, and How of Family Engagement



Orientation

Learning extension activities will help you deepen your knowledge about family engagement. These activities can be used to support your work daily or as part of a long-term goal. The activities in this guide provide ideas for reflection and opportunities to practice skills learned in the family engagement modules.

How to Use This Guide

Activities are designed for early childhood learning and care professionals including family child care providers, teachers, administrators, coaches, home visitors, and librarians. Each activity can be used:

- **Individually** for self-study, self-reflection, and integrating family engagement practices into your work
- **With a partner** to learn about, explore, and reflect on implementing family engagement in your setting
- **With a group** as part of staff meetings, association events, or workshops to learn and reflect together about family engagement

Activities in This Guide

1. Taking a Picture of Family Engagement
2. Research to Practice
3. Encouraging Strong Parent-Child Relationships

This guide focuses on the what, why, and how of family engagement. The following activities focus on exploring what family engagement looks like in your setting, why it matters, and how you can strengthen family engagement in your setting.



1. Taking a Picture of Family Engagement

Resources You Will Need

- Module 1 Invitation to Family Engagement video.

Time: 30–45 minutes

How to Use This Learning Extension

- Individually**
Complete the steps 1–3 and journal your reflections on the questions in step 4. Identify two to three things you will continue to do or start doing to engage with families. Try out the things you identified. Then, reflect on what happens. If you are a coach or administrator supporting those working directly with families, think about what you can do to continue or start to support professionals you work with to engage with families.
- With a Partner**
Complete steps 1–3 individually. Discuss the guiding questions in step 4 with your partner or coach. As you discuss the questions, explore how family engagement looks similar or different to you and your partner.
- With a Group**
Watch the video together. Complete step 3 individually. Then, have each person share with the group what they identified family engagement looks like. Engage in a discussion using the guiding questions in step 4.

Activity Directions

STEP 1

Read and reflect on the California Family Engagement definition:

Family engagement refers to relationship-based mutual, respectful, and responsive partnerships between families, early learning and care providers, and other related professionals to promote children's development, learning, and wellness. Family engagement includes families as leaders and advocates for their child. Family engagement happens when early childhood professionals and families actively participate in an ongoing process of building and maintaining these meaningful relationships.

STEP 2

Watch the video “Invitation to Family Engagement.” Reflect on what family engagement looks like in your setting.

STEP 3

Identify what family engagement looks like in your setting. Choose an option from the list below:

- Imagine a photographer came to your setting to take pictures of family engagement. Write down what these photos would look like.
- Take your own photos of what family engagement looks like in your setting.
- Write a description of what family engagement looks like in your program or draw pictures yourself rather than using photos.

STEP 4

Respond to the following guiding questions:

- What do you see families doing that indicates they are engaged?
- What do you see the professionals doing to engage families?
- What is happening with family engagement that you might not see in your photos, descriptions, or drawings?

STEP 5

Reflect on what you did and learned as part of your ongoing professional development.

2. Research to Practice

This activity can be repeated using different briefs from this series.

Resources You Will Need

- Understanding Family Engagement Outcomes: Research to Practice Series from Module 1 Unit 1 Tell Me More, located in the Benefits of Family Engagement section.

Time: 45–60 minutes

How to Use This Learning Extension

- **Individually**
Document your work with steps 1–3 in your journal and reflect on how it went with a colleague or friend. Journal about what happens as you implement the activities you identified to start or strengthen in your work with families.
- **With a Partner**
As you complete each step, pause and discuss the step with your partner or coach. Brainstorm together what you are already doing and what you can start to do or strengthen in your setting. Be sure to reflect with your partner or coach on how it went when you tried out one of the things you identified!
- **With a Group**
To prepare for the activity:
 - Write each of the suggestions from the section titled “What Can Programs Do?” on flipcharts, one suggestion per chart. Create two columns on each chart titled “Currently Doing” and “Strengthen or Start Doing.”
 - Post the charts around the room.

Ask the group members to move around the room and fill in the two columns on the charts for each of the suggestions. Once the charts are complete, have a group discussion about what they notice on the charts. As a group, identify what to start doing or strengthening. Try it out and debrief as a group on how it went.

Activity Directions

STEP 1

Choose a Research to Practice brief from the series and read the brief. Pay attention to the last section: “What Can Programs Do?”

STEP 2

For each suggestion, think about what stands out for you and identify what you are already doing and what you might start or strengthen in your setting.

STEP 3

Choose one of the activities that you identified you can start or strengthen and try it out in your setting.

STEP 4

Reflect on what you did and learned as part of your ongoing professional development.

3. Encouraging Strong Parent-Child Relationships

Resources You Will Need

- Module 1 Companion Resource *Encouraging Strong Parent-Child Relationships*.

Time: 60 minutes

How to Use This Learning Extension

- **Individually**
Complete all the steps. Then reflect on and document your work in your journal. Continue to identify ways you can encourage strong parent-child relationships.
- **With a Partner**
Discuss and complete each step with your partner or coach. Brainstorm together how you can use the actions you choose. Continue to identify ways you can encourage strong parent-child relationships, try them out, and reflect with your partner or coach what happens and what you learn.
- **With a Group**
Work in small groups. As a facilitator, have each small group complete the steps together. For step 3, ask the small groups to practice their actions by role-playing a conversation with the family. Check in with the group as they complete the steps. Encourage group members to report back on their experiences to the large group.

Activity Directions

STEP 1

Read *Encouraging Strong Parent-Child Relationships*. Review each of the actions and examples in the chart on page 2: “What can providers do to encourage strong parent-child relationships?”

STEP 2

Choose a family for whom you would like to support their relationship with their child. Reflect on the actions listed on page 2 of *Encouraging Strong Parent-Child Relationships*. Then choose an action to try with this family.

STEP 3

Try out your action.

STEP 4

Reflect on what you did and learned as part of your ongoing professional development.