

Engaging Families in Early Learning

Children's learning happens within relationships. Relationships with important caregivers build young children's brains and advance their development. Children begin learning from the time they are in the womb and continue to learn through toddlerhood and early childhood. Early learning and care professionals can partner with families by focusing on the relationships and experiences with their children that promote children's learning and healthy development. Support for the family's relationship with their child benefits the entire family well beyond the time that we will know them in our early learning and care setting.

How can early learning and care professionals partner with families?

1. Build supportive and trusting relationships with families.

You can build relationships with families by focusing on a few key areas:

- **Assume all families have strengths.** Recognize families' strengths by highlighting what you see. You might say, "I've noticed Tanisha smiles as soon as she sees your face." Or, "I know it's hard for you when Jabari cries as you leave for work. Do you have any suggestions as to how I can help?"
- **Talk with family members about their children's learning and development.** Describe the development you see with families. For example, "Angele was stacking and knocking blocks over and over again today. I can see her working on using her fingers and getting her hands and eyes to work together."
- **Increase two-way communication.** Adjust communication to fit families' unique interests, cultures, and languages. For example, ask families to share information about their child's cultures and interests; send written communication in their home language.

Want to learn more?

- **Take Module 2 Unit 3:** Take Informed Action
- **Practice** with the online simulations Building Relationships with Families and Starting with Strengths
- **Read** Strategies for Building Relationships with Families
- **Use** the Take Informed Action Tips

- **Provide a warm and welcoming environment.** Create spaces that reflect families' cultures and values. For example, display pictures of enrolled children and their families throughout your early learning and care setting; encourage families to share their favorite books.
- **Encourage home-learning activities.** Talk with families to identify activities they can do or are already doing with their children at home to extend learning. For example, you can say, "I've noticed that Michael is really learning his numbers. Have you noticed this at home too? What activities are you doing with him?"
- **Collaborate with families.** Invite families to share their ideas and co-plan activities with you. For example, ask family members to share their special talents, such as playing an instrument or telling a story, or ask what types of activities they would like to participate in; offer opportunities for family members in your setting to connect with one another.






2. Use the Relationship-based Practices.

You can use the Relationship-based Practices to help you choose what to do and/or say in discussions with families about their children's learning and development. In this resource, we try out two Relationship-based Practices to engage with families around school readiness:

- **Observe and describe the child's behavior to open communication with the family.**
- **Focus on the family-child relationship.**

You can use the following three strategies when engaging with families:

-  Use a Strengths-based Approach
-  Listen Actively
-  Take Informed Action



You can try out these prompts and question examples in your work with families around their child's development and school readiness:

1. Self-Regulation

- I've noticed at school, when your child is upset, they ... What have you noticed? (Describe what you observed without interpretation.)
- I noticed when you bring your child in the morning and say goodbye, they ...
- At the end of the day, I see your child ... when they see you.

Social-Emotional

- Yesterday I noticed your child playing with another child. They ... (Share the observation without interpretation.)
- What does your child do to show you they are happy/sad/mad at home?
- What do you feel is important for your child to learn about getting along with other children?

Language And Literacy

- How does your child let you know when they want or need something?
- What languages does your child use at home? What languages do you want your child to use here?
- What types of stories do you and your child enjoy at home?

Cognition Including Math And Science

- I noticed when your child was trying to ... and they weren't sure what to do, they ... What have you noticed?
- I have seen your child explore math by ... In what ways do you see your child exploring numbers/math at home?
- I saw your child exploring ... Do you see them being curious about these things at home?

Physical Development

- When we play music, I noticed your child ... What happens when your child hears music with you?
- I've noticed when we are outside during the day, your child ...
- What have you seen your child trying to do at home?

To learn more about the family engagement strategies, check out the Family Engagement Online Toolkit: www.qualitycountsca.net/FEtoolkit

Adapted from:

Brazelton Touchpoints Project, Inc. (2019). Touchpoints Curriculum.

Brazelton, T. B., & Sparrow, J. D. (2006). Touchpoints-Birth to Three: Your Child's Behavioral and Emotional Development.

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References for this resource can be found in the [Module 3 Reference List](#).



Adapted from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (2018). *Strategies for Family Engagement: Attitudes and Practices*. To learn more about Family Engagement, check out the Family Engagement Online Toolkit, qualitycountsca.net/FEtoolkit. Copyright © 2019. Facilitated and Funded by First 5 California. qualitycountsca.net