

# Strategies for Building Culturally Respectful Relationships with Families

When you engage with families, you have an opportunity to learn about children from those who know them best. Talking to families can help you learn about their children's personalities, likes, and dislikes and the hopes and dreams they have for their children. It also gives you the opportunity to build relationships with families and learn about and understand their cultures. When you reflect on how families' cultures (including their values, beliefs, and customs) influence who they are and how they raise their children, you become open to showing families **cultural respect** and considering the importance of families' **cultural perspectives**.

## Cultural Respect and Cultural Perspectives

Culture shapes and influences what you and families think and do. Sometimes you will share the same cultural experiences. At other times, families' culture may be very different from yours. Taking an approach of **cultural respect** means that you acknowledge and accept a family's culture without trying to change them. Showing respect can be particularly helpful when you and families have different views or opinions about children's care and learning. These different views are your **cultural perspectives**. Showing respect doesn't mean that you agree with families' points of view; rather, it means that you acknowledge and respect families' choices even when they are different from yours.



# Use the Strategies for Building Relationships with Families to Discuss Common Topics

Families bring their own cultural perspectives to your discussions on common topics of care and learning. These conversations may differ across families, providers, and cultures. Sometimes you and families agree on these topics. Other times your opinions may differ from families' opinions. When this disagreement happens, you can use the Strategies for Building Relationships with Families to help you in your discussions. The strategies **Use a Strengths-based Approach**, **Listen Actively**, and **Take Informed Action** can help you show cultural respect in your interactions with families.

For more about using the Strategies for Building Relationships with Families, check out Module 2

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

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

When discussing common topics, you can first use the strategy **Use a Strengths-based Approach** to think about everyone's perspective and focus on recognizing the strengths a family has. Use the **Reflect and Inquire** tool to first reflect on what you know about the family's individual and cultural perspectives; your own perspectives and how your culture influences your point of view; and where you and the families' perspectives are the same and where they are different. Once you consider your perspective and the family's perspective, you can use what you learned to select a **Strengths-based Attitude**. Choose an attitude to help you focus on families' strengths first.

Use the strategy **Listen Actively** next to show cultural respect and learn from families by listening to their ideas, giving them time to share, and creating a shared understanding about their cultural perspective. Using the final strategy, **Take Informed Action**, consider what you have learned about families' perspectives to help you choose a **Relationship-based Practice** and show cultural respect when having conversations with families.

## Examples of Using Take Informed Action

Using all three strategies together works best. **Take Informed Action** builds on what you learn when you Use a Strengths-based Approach and Listen Actively, and guides what you do next. When you Take Informed Action to help you show cultural respect, you choose a Relationship-based Practice to help you decide how to respond to a family in a way that acknowledges and doesn't try to change their culture. This process is continuous—each time you interact with a family, you learn more about what matters to them and about their cultures. Then, you use what you learn to choose the next Relationship-based Practice.

Some examples of common topics of conversation you may have with families around care and learning include:

- **Learning**
- **Behavior and setting limits**
- **Crying and self-soothing**
- **Languages**
- **Social and emotional skills**
- **Toilet learning**
- **Sleeping**
- **Children's relationships with friends and other adults**
- **Children's role in the family** (e.g., times when children are expected to be silent or encouraged to talk)
- **Feeding**

Below are a few examples of how to use the Relationship-based Practices tool to guide you when you and families have a different view of sleeping, feeding, and language.

### Relationship-based Practices

- Focus on the family-child relationship.
- Observe and describe the child’s behavior to open communication with the family.
- Support parental competence (the parent’s skills) and self-confidence.
- Value a family’s passion (working with both their positive and negative feelings).

### Discussion with a Family About Sleeping

Common Topic	Scenario	Example of Relationship-based Practice to Use
Address a policy regarding sleeping at nap time.	Felix and Tomás are cousins who live together. They are also in the same class at your setting. They share a bed together at home, and their mother wants them to sleep together during nap time in your setting. The center policy states that children cannot share a mat.	Value a family’s passion (working with both their positive and negative feelings).

#### Example of What You Might Say That Shows Cultural Respect

*“You mentioned to me that you would like Felix to share a mat with his cousin Tomás during nap time because that is how they sleep together at home. I know it is important to you, Tomás, and Felix. Our policy doesn’t allow us to let children share mats, but we could put their mats right next to one another. Would that be okay? What are your thoughts about that?”*

### Discussion with a Family About Feeding

Common Topic	Scenario	Example of Relationship-based Practice to Use
Discuss feeding preferences with a family.	Kayo’s family wants you to continue to feed her until she is two years old. You noticed she is grabbing the spoon when you feed her at school. She wants to feed herself. Meal time has become challenging.	Observe and describe the child’s behavior to open communication with the family.

#### Example of What You Might Say That Shows Cultural Respect

*“Thank you for sharing with me that you want me to continue to feed Kayo until she is two years old. I’ve noticed that she is reaching for the spoon when I feed her. Do you notice this at home? I wonder what she is trying to tell me.”*

## Discussion with a Family About Language

Common Topic	Scenario	Example of Relationship-based Practice to Use
Honor the home language(s) of families with children who are dual language learners. Respect the value a family places on their home language(s).	Farid’s family recently moved to the United States. Farid’s grandfather wants to make sure that he still speaks in Farsi both in school and at home.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Support parental competence (the parent’s skills) and self-confidence.</li> <li>· Focus on the family-child relationship.</li> </ul>

### Example of What You Might Say That Shows Cultural Respect

*“Farid has been saying both English and Farsi words at school recently. I know that you speak both as well. You mentioned that you would like him to learn both languages as well. Let’s work together to support your goal. Would you be able to teach me a few words that I can say to Farid in Farsi?”*

## Summary

When you use these strategies to build relationships, you partner with families and show cultural respect. You can use these strategies to help you begin relationships with families with strengths in mind—even when you have different cultural perspectives or are experiencing challenges. Taking this approach doesn’t mean you won’t experience challenges. It means you have strategies and tools to help you work with families in a way that shows respect for their cultural perspectives.

To learn more about family engagement, check out the Family Engagement Online Toolkit: [www.qualitycountsca.net/FEtoolkit](http://www.qualitycountsca.net/FEtoolkit)

References for this resource can be found in the [Module 4 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](http://qualitycountsca.net/FEtoolkit). Copyright © 2019. Facilitated and Funded by First 5 California. [qualitycountsca.net](http://qualitycountsca.net)

