Family Engagement

What is family engagement?

Family Engagement is the process of building positive, interactive, and reciprocal relationships with families. Meaningful relationship-building is ongoing and requires time and attention.

Family engagement is mutually respectful and responsive to families' languages and cultures. When you create an environment that encourages engagement, families become active participants, share valuable information, and work alongside educators to support their child's participation and learning. Effective family engagement provides greater understanding of each family's beliefs, values, and hopes for their young child and family.

Family Engagement starts with welcoming environments that reflect each family's unique structure and cultural background. Authentic relationships with families are built based on daily communication that is respectful, compassionate, and includes frequent celebrations of the child.

> "Families know their children in ways that no one else can..."
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> – MAKOVICHUK, HEWES, LIRETTE & THOMAS, 2014, PG.51

Why is family engagement important?

- **Lifelong Learning:** Families are their children's first teachers, advocates, and caregivers. When families, and the programs where children learn, work together, and support each other in their respective roles, children experience better outcomes.

- **Well-being:** Family involvement in their child's learning and care promotes a sense of belonging and connection to their caregivers and the learning environment. This results in children feeling more secure to build relationships with peers and engage in new learning opportunities and it supports children in developing positive attitudes towards learning and their childcare environment. Parental involvement has a positive effect on a child's learning, self-esteem, motivation, and positive behaviour.

- **Open Communication:** Family engagement opens communication channels between the families and the program. Families need to feel welcome in the program and have multiple ways to confidently give feedback.

Family Engagement

How do I nurture family engagement in my Early Learning and Childcare Program?

• Build trusting, responsive relationships with families by creating an environment that fosters two-way and open communication using a variety of communication strategies that are personalized to each family's preferences (i.e., face to face, text, email, etc.)

• Provide opportunities for families to share information about themselves and their child. Find out what their hopes and dreams are for their child and how you can support their vision.

• Be an active and engaged listener when families are sharing information and asking questions.

• Include family photos and materials that represent their homelife routines, culture, and traditions.

• Find out what language(s) the family speaks at home, and when possible, provide information in home language(s).

• Provide open-ended opportunities for family involvement (i.e., sharing of traditions, interests, and skills, as well as opportunities for families to spend time interacting with their children in the program).

• Create opportunities to learn more about the family routines, interests, and how they support their child's learning at home. Share what is going well in your program.

• Provide families with ongoing feedback about your program (i.e., visual supports, social and emotional skills, behaviour expectations, routines, and learning activities).

• Provide a short biography about yourself and your interests and encourage families to do the same.

• Share learning stories or photos through an app or display in the room for parents to enjoy and provide comments and feedback.

• Make the most of drop-off and pick-up activities by actively engaging with families and expressing interest in their daily activities or any special trips/outings.

• Plan activities that connect families with each other and promote well-being and relationship building.

• Provide a summary of the main points in conversations with parents to ensure a shared understanding of any follow-up required.

• Communicate strengths first when sharing information about a child.

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References

Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center & National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations. (2021). *Early care and education environment indicators of high-quality inclusion and observation*. https://challengingbehavior.cbcs.usf.edu/docs/ECEE_Indicators_Observation-Tool.pdf

Denise, R. Child Watch. *Family Engagement: A Partnership between Childcare Centres and Families*. November 2, 2018. https://childwatch.com/blog/2018/11/02/family-engagement-a-partnership-between-childcare-centers-and-families/

Virtual Lab School. Family Childcare Program Management. *Working Collaboratively with Others. 2021*. https://www.virtuallabschool.org/fcc/program-management/lesson-2

Helpful Resources for Educators

Engaging Families
Tips to encourage and maintain parental engagement, and how to have hard conversations:
http://www.rtinetwork.org/essential/family/engagingfamilies

Hi Mama: Importance of Family Engagement
Details on why parent engagement is important and tips for educators:
https://www.himama.com/blog/why-parent-involvement-is-important-in-preschool/