



Supporting Family Systems

Partnering with Families to Support Families and Improve Family Engagement

Use the habits of a systems thinker to share and reflect with families and understand their perspectives.

LEARN WITH FAMILIES

Families know their children better than anyone else and have valuable information to share with you.

- Be curious about each family. How do you learn about them? What kinds of questions do you ask?
- Ask families to share their lives through photos. Who is in the child's household? How involved is the extended family in the day-to-day interactions of the family?
- Consider how family members influence one another. What are some feedback loops you observed in families?
- Think below the surface. What are some features unique to this family you need to consider? For example, how would knowledge of the family's boundaries influence your interactions?

SHARE WITH FAMILIES

Sharing information with families helps them become actively involved in their child's development and learning.

- Practice communication through inquiry. Before stating your opinion or point of view, ask the family to share their ideas or concerns. Instead of directing the conversation, offer space for their perspective.
- How can you positively influence how families see their role in your program? For example, ask families about their experience in the program; invite them to share their ideas.

COLLABORATE WITH FAMILIES

Remember, families are your partners in supporting children's development and learning.

- Strengthening relationships with families does not necessarily require a lot of time and effort. Think of one small action that you could take to involve a family in your program.
- Involve families in your program. What opportunities are most likely to increase their involvement? For example, are there cultural activities that families would like to share with your program?
- Offer support when there is a challenging situation or change happening in the family. Reflect on how family members are affected by change or stress. Develop a list of services or resources that may support the family during times of transition.

For more information and tips on communicating and building relationships with families, check out this resource from Head Start's Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) titled, [Boosting School Readiness through Effective Family Engagement](http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/pfce_simulation/index.html).

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Taking It Home **Becoming a More Involved Partner in Your Child's Early Education Experience**

As a family, you play an important role in your child's early education. You can support your child's development and learning through active participation in the early childhood program. Building meaningful relationships with your child's teacher/provider and other families in the program provides a model for how your child can develop positive relationships with others.

Involvement in your child's early education program doesn't require a large investment of your time or resources.

Here are some ideas to consider in becoming a more involved partner in your child's education:

What can you share about the way your family members interact with each other?

- Talk openly about educational goals you have for your child and what the family is doing to support those goals.
- Discuss changes in your family and how they may affect your child.
- Share how extended family members are involved in your child's life.

What can you share about what influences your family interactions?

- Share how family members' behaviors influence other members of the family.
- Communicate about some family rules (spoken or implied) that guide your family's interactions.
- Tell the teacher/provider what you like to do together as a family.

How can you build relationships with your child's teacher/provider and program?

- Look for opportunities to become more involved in your child's early learning program.
- Build relationships with families both inside and outside of the program. Look for opportunities to get together on weekends.
- Ask questions about program practices and how they support your child's development and learning.

For more information on building effective partnerships, check out this resource on talking with teachers when you have a concern at <http://families.naeyc.org/learning-and-development/child-development/tips-talking-teacher>.