



Systems Thinking in Early Childhood

Partnering With Families to Support Children's Development and Learning

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

LEARN FROM FAMILIES

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

- Ask families about their children's daily routines at home. What they share can give you valuable insight into their mental models about childrearing.
- Talk to families about what they would like their children to learn in your program. What does this tell you about their mental models of early childhood education?
- Consider the relationships you see between families and their children. What can you learn that helps you think below the surface?
- Seek to understand the perspectives of family members by encouraging them to elaborate as they talk about their children. Even a simple statement, such as, "Tell me more about that," can open you up to other perspectives.

SHARE WITH FAMILIES

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

- Share with families how you avoid jumping to quick conclusions when addressing challenges in your program. What kind of information do you gather that helps you understand the big picture?
- Look for opportunities to think below the surface with families. What elements in your program and at home might be influencing their child's behavior? By engaging in these conversations, you model the habits of a systems thinker.
- Make your thinking visible to others. For example, when introducing a new project or activity, explain your thinking behind this choice. What leads you to believe that the children will benefit from this experience?

COLLABORATE WITH FAMILIES

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

- Collaborate with a family to understand and address a challenging situation with their child. For example, share a behavior-over-time graph and ask the family to track these behaviors at home.
- Help them identify the trends in their child's behavior.
- Discuss any small changes they can make that will lead to long-lasting, positive effects (for example, changing a bedtime routine).

FAMILY CONNECTIONS

SYSTEMS THINKING



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Taking It Home Strategies for Reflecting and Understanding Patterns in Your Child's Behavior

TAKE TIME TO OBSERVE AND REFLECT

As family, you know your child better than anyone else. Take some time to reflect on these questions; they can provide valuable information to share with your child's teacher/provider. Build in time for conversations during the day.

- What brings joy to my child?
- What changes am I noticing in my child's development?
- How does my child like to learn?
- What concerns, if any, do I have about my child's development?

GATHER INFORMATION OVER TIME

To understand and address a concerning situation with your child, it helps to observe the behavior over time and in different situations. For example, does this behavior occur when your child is with other adults?

- Track the situation over time to identify any patterns or trends in this behavior.
- Ask your child's teacher or caregiver if this behavior occurs in the early childhood education program.
- Share your observations from home with your child's teacher/provider.

TRY TO UNDERSTAND THE CAUSES OF ANY CHALLENGES IN YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIOR

- Try to understand what might be influencing this behavior. For example, the behavior may be related to a developmental change your child is experiencing or it may be linked with your child's temperamental style.
- Think about any recent changes in your child's life that may be causing stress.

Want More?

For more information on using observation to understand patterns in your child's behavior, check out this article on the National Association for the Education of Young Children website: <http://families.naeyc.org/learning-and-development/child-development/observation-key-understanding-your-child>.

For more information on supporting your child's healthy growth and development, check out the *Positive Solutions for Families Workbook* from the Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning at http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/trainings/positive_solutions_workbook.pdf. Try Session 3—Activity #9: *Determining the Meaning of Behavior*.