

# Module One: Building a Shared Understanding of Consumer Education and Consumer Engagement

## Handout 1: Discussion

### Why This Matters for Subsidy Staff

Understanding consumer education and consumer engagement can help subsidy staff better plan and implement strategies for working more effectively with families. Staff can equip families with high-quality consumer education. Staff also can support families in their roles as consumers. Finally, staff can build their own knowledge and capacities for providing the information and support that families value.

### Goals

- Subsidy staff help families build on their knowledge of child development, early childhood and school-age care and education options, and comprehensive services.
- Subsidy staff support families in becoming engaged consumers of early childhood and school-age care and education and comprehensive services.

### Learning Objectives

- Subsidy staff know what consumer education is and are able to identify examples of how they might provide consumer education to families.
- Subsidy staff know what consumer engagement is and are able to identify examples of how they might promote consumer engagement with families.

### Key Competencies

- Subsidy staff provide families with high-quality consumer education that is tailored to match families' interests and preferences.
- Subsidy staff engage families in two-way interactions that expand on the knowledge that both staff and families have about the best options for families and their children.

### Discussion

**Consumer** comes from language in the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) of 2014 and the 2016 Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Final Rule. While the term has more recently been used in reference to consumer education websites, in the broadest sense, the term refers to families that are seeking information about early childhood or school-age care and education programs for their children. Professionals at all levels can have important roles in promoting children's health, development, and learning by engaging parents and families as consumers.

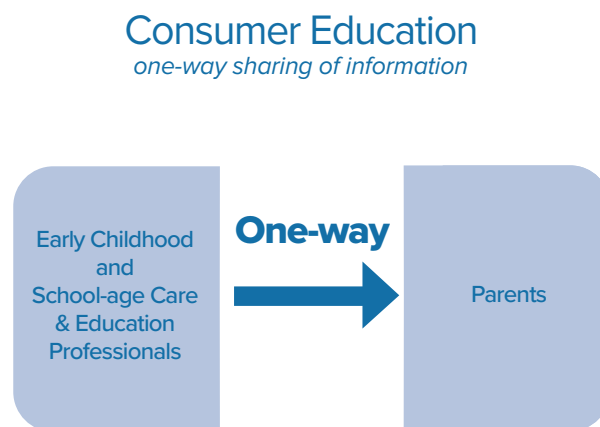
**Consumer education** refers to providing information to help parents build on their knowledge and understanding of:

- Quality and options in early childhood and school-age care and education programs
- Child development, developmental screenings, services for children with disabilities, and prevention of suspensions and expulsions
- CCDF subsidies and other financial assistance that families can use to help pay for early childhood and school-age care and education
- Policies, procedures, and regulations (e.g., licensing, monitoring, and background checks) and comprehensive services (e.g., health, human, and economic support) to support family well-being

Effective consumer education information is:

- Designed to help parents make informed decisions about early childhood and school-age care and education, and about comprehensive supports for family well-being
- Tailored to match parents' interests and preferences
- Culturally and linguistically responsive
- Based on data and research representative of the children and families you are working with
- Reflective of exemplary practices that support child development and learning

Consumer education tends to focus on the one-way communication of information to parents. At the same time, early childhood and school-age professionals recognize education as a shared experience that involves both giving and receiving information.



Source: National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement. (2018). *Consumer Engagement: Orientation for Early Childhood and School-age Care & Education Professionals*.

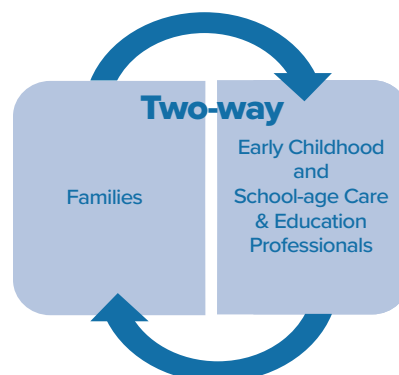
The following examples show how **consumer education** can happen in many ways and at many levels—the family, program, and local agency level; and the State, Territory, or Tribal agency level:

<b>Family</b>	While enrolling for a child care subsidy, a father learns about licensed program requirements for health, safety, and learning by talking with subsidy staff.
<b>Program level</b>	A family child care provider shares information with enrolled families about developmental screenings and the local agencies that offer them.
<b>Local agency level</b>	When families apply for financial assistance, local agency subsidy staff provide information about different types of programs, their regulations, and the state’s quality rating and improvement system (QRIS).
<b>State, Territory or Tribal agency level</b>	A state agency responsible for consumer education sends an email to families participating in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The email provides information about child care subsidy and tips for choosing a high-quality program.

**Consumer engagement** goes beyond making information available to families. Consumer engagement relies on two-way interactions between families and early childhood and school-age professionals. Parents and professionals share information with one another and work together to build each other’s knowledge and capacities.

As they expand their knowledge and leadership capacities, families can become more effective in finding and applying research-based information that, for example, informs their choice about a program for their child, supports their efforts to monitor their child’s experiences in a program, or contributes to their ability to use their voices to advocate for higher quality and equitable access to services. As early childhood and school-age professionals expand their knowledge and capacities, they can become more effective in inviting and responding to families’ interests and values and supporting and partnering with families and other stakeholders.

### Consumer Engagement *two-way sharing of information*



Source: National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement. (2018). *Consumer Engagement: Orientation for Early Childhood and School-age Care & Education Professionals*.

The following examples suggest how **consumer engagement** can happen in many ways and at many levels—family, program, local agency (community partner) level; and State, Territory, or Tribal agency level:

<b>Family</b>	After learning more about health and safety requirements for licensed programs, a mother chooses a licensed program for her child. She also shares information about licensed programs with friends who are looking for someone to help care for their children.
<b>Program</b>	Families and professionals come together to campaign for increased funding to support high-quality early care and education in their community.
<b>Local agency</b>	A local agency responsible for assisting families with child care subsidy conducts a consumer satisfaction survey with families receiving subsidy. The data from the survey are used to implement recommended changes in the environment and service delivery systems.
<b>State, Territory, or Tribal agency</b>	A State, Territory, or Tribal agency responsible for a consumer education website convenes a parent focus group (representative of the races, ethnicities, cultures, and languages of the families they work with) and asks parents to provide feedback about the agency's consumer education website. When changes to the website are complete, the agency reconnects with the parents to see if the changes improved the website's usefulness.

Learn more about strategies to promote consumer engagement in Module Two.

Both consumer education and consumer engagement align with the purposes of the Child Care Development Block Grant (federal law) and the Child Care and Development Fund (Federal and State, Territory, Tribal partnership program that administers funding and support from the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Child Care).

Both consumer education and consumer engagement:

- Promote parental choice
- Help parents make informed decisions about early childhood and school-age care and education services
- Improve the overall quality of early childhood and school-age care and education services by implementing health, safety, licensing, training, and oversight standards and by building families' knowledge about these standards
- Increase participation in high-quality early childhood and school-age care and education programs for children from families with low-incomes
- Promote the coordination of high-quality early childhood and school-age care and education services to maximize parents' options and build upward family economic mobility

Consumer education can happen without consumer engagement. It is not possible, however, to have consumer engagement without consumer education and informed consumers.

By being prepared to share information that interests parents, and by being intentional about two-way interactions with parents, subsidy staff can help families build on their knowledge and become engaged consumers—and drive quality improvement in programs.

Leaders can support staff by:

- Creating an organizational culture and climate that values families, parental choice, parent-child relationships, and economic mobility for families
- Emphasizing parents' roles as their children's first and most important teachers
- Ensuring that staff have current, relevant information about child development and comprehensive services to share with families
- Creating policies and procedures that encourage two-way sharing of information between families and staff

## Thoughts From the Field

“Our new consumer education website seems to be catching on. Our technology folks tell us that we have high levels of traffic, and the parent feedback shows us that the content is useful. The best evidence for me, however, is when a parent called the other day to say she is moving.

She asked if she could transfer her subsidy certificate to a program in her new neighborhood. I offered to send her a list of potential providers, and she said: ‘I only want a list of the licensed providers, because I want to be sure that the health and safety conditions to keep my child safe are in place.’ I was able to tell her about other licensing features that might be helpful to her, such as ratios. She asked where she could go to get more information, and I gave her the link.” —*Subsidy staff*

Resource: **Consumer Engagement: Orientation for Early Childhood and School-age Care & Education Professionals** <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/resource/consumer-engagement-orientation-early-childhood-and-school-age-care-education-professionals>

Use this space to note ideas or questions.

Plan to save copies of these handouts. You will have an opportunity to use them to create a summary reflection after completing all of the modules in this series.

# Module One: Building a Shared Understanding of Consumer Education and Consumer Engagement

## Handout 2: Activity

1. Think about the examples of consumer education described in **Handout 1**. What are some other examples of how you might provide consumer education, both in your individual role and as an agency?

**Hint:** Think about opportunities you might have to talk with families in person, the physical spaces in which you might meet with families (e.g., offices and events), phone conversations with families, and your online activities (e.g., your agency's website and social media posts).

### I can provide consumer education . . .

In face-to-face talks with families by:

In the physical spaces where I meet with families by:

On my agency's website and through social media by:

In other ways by:

2. Think about the examples of consumer engagement described in **Handout 1**. What are some other examples of how you might promote consumer engagement?

**Hint:** Think about opportunities you might have to talk with families in person, the physical spaces where you might meet with families (e.g., offices and events), phone conversations with families, and your online activities (e.g., your agency's website and social media posts).

### I can provide consumer engagement . . .

In face-to-face talks with families by:

In the physical spaces where I meet with families by:

On my agency's website and through social media by:

In other ways by:

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# Module One: Building a Shared Understanding of Consumer Education and Consumer Engagement

## Handout 3: Reflective Practice Exercise

Learning a new approach, skill, or activity is a process. Reflective practice is a way of thinking about your actions—what you do and how and why you do it. The purpose of this kind of examination is to continuously learn by enhancing your skills and practices. Answer the questions below to guide your reflections on consumer education and consumer engagement.

### Reflective Practice

Question	Your Reflections
What did I hope to learn?	
What did I learn?	
What action will I take because of what I have learned?	

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For more information about this resource, please contact us:  
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