

Module Two: How Subsidy Staff Can Promote Consumer Engagement

Handout 1: Discussion

Why This Matters for Subsidy Staff

Through consumer engagement, staff can:

- Partner with families as they work toward family consumer engagement outcomes
- Build their own knowledge and capacities for providing information and support that families value
- Feel more confident in their abilities and satisfied with their work

Goal

- Subsidy staff support families in becoming engaged consumers of early childhood and school-age care and education and comprehensive services.

Learning Objective

- Subsidy staff know the four family outcomes for consumer engagement and can identify examples of how to promote these outcomes in their position and/or in their agency.

Key Competency

- Subsidy staff interact with families in ways that promote family consumer engagement outcomes.

Discussion

Consumer engagement goes beyond making information available to families. Consumer engagement relies on two-way, relationship-based 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.

Subsidy staff often have opportunities to promote consumer engagement during their everyday interactions with families. These opportunities are important because when parents and families are engaged as consumers of early childhood and school-age services, they are:

- **Decision makers** who are equipped with information and seek access to quality early childhood and school-age care and education for their children
- **Resourceful users** of early childhood, school-age, and comprehensive services that support child and family well-being throughout early childhood and beyond
- **Trusted peers** who help their friends and families understand and connect with the highest quality options available
- **Leaders** who advance program quality through leadership efforts in their child's program and their community

Examples of Consumer Engagement for Subsidy Staff and Ideas for Promoting Consumer Engagement

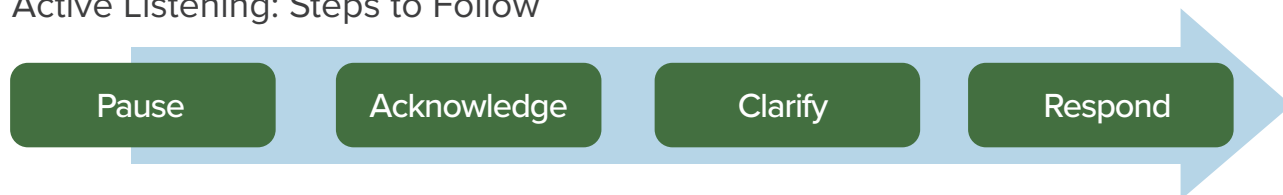
Family Outcomes Associated with Consumer Engagement	Scenarios: Opportunities to Promote Consumer Engagement	Ideas for Promoting Consumer Engagement
Decision maker	A mother expresses that she is worried about her baby's safety in child care. She says she feels uncertain about choosing a program for her baby because she's uncertain about what to look for.	Consider offering access to a computer where the mother could visit Childcare.gov. Point out the 15 "Must Haves for All Child Care Programs" and the special section on "Care of Infants." Allow the mother to download and print the list. Encourage her to take it with her when she visits programs.
Resourceful user	As you share the required information about developmental screenings, a father comments that he has concerns about his child's development.	Consider directing the father to additional resources on child development (for example, <i>Birth to Five Watch Me Thrive—Families</i> at https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ecd/child-health-development/watch-me-thrive/families) so that the father can find and use additional information on his own.
Trusted peer	A mother mentions that a friend from work is struggling to find and pay for a program for her child.	Consider giving the mother some brochures about child care subsidy and about choosing a high-quality program. Encourage her to share the materials with her friend and to talk with the friend about how child care subsidy helped her family.
Leader	A parent shares frustration about the lack of high-quality, affordable programs in their community.	Acknowledge the parent's feelings. Explain that recent changes in the Child Care and Development Block Grant and CCDF Final Rule, the federal law and regulations that pertain to child care, are working to improve the accessibility, quality, and affordability of programs. Provide information about ways the parent can become involved as an advocate—for example, how to contact his legislators or parent advocacy groups.

Active Listening

When they have opportunities to meet and work with a parent, a staff member's first reaction can encourage a parent to open up about a situation—or not. Subsidy staff can use **active listening** to build rapport with families and promote consumer engagement. Active listening has four main steps:

1. Pause and listen to parents as they share information. Focus on listening to understand. Think about and offer a response after the parent is finished speaking.
2. Acknowledge that what a parent shares is important. Use phrases that demonstrate your understanding of the problem the parent is dealing with. For example, “I understand that it’s hard to balance work and family.”
3. Clarify your understanding by restating the information shared by the parent. Use statements that seek confirmation of what they are looking for or asking. For example, “I understand that you recently started a new job, and you need help finding a child care provider and paying for the care, right?”
4. Respond positively with encouragement and relevant information and resources.

Active Listening: Steps to Follow



Source: National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement. (2018). *Implementing Child Care Resource and Referral Call Centers: A Guide for CCDF Lead Agencies and Their Partners*.

Through active listening and by being intentional about two-way interactions with parents, subsidy staff can support families in their roles as decision-makers, resourceful users of services, trusted peers who share information with family and friends, and leaders who can advocate for their children in their children's program and in their communities.

Leaders can support staff by:

- Creating a work environment that values families—families' input, family well-being, parent-child relationships, and family economic mobility
- Providing professional development in active listening and other communication skills
- Supporting the implementation of policies and procedures that encourage two-way sharing of information between families and staff
- Limiting caseloads so staff can individualize support

In situations in which the majority of the subsidy process occurs online, leaders can work with staff and families to identify ways to exchange information. Examples include a live chat feature, a “contact us” portal, or follow-up phone calls.

Thoughts From the Field

“I am so glad I have been assigned a smaller case load and that our state is making a real effort to partner with families. I get to spend time with families, actually talking about their hopes and dreams. And as we work together over time, some families become real advocates for themselves and others. I feel like the website we have gives families a chance to access resources in a different way. Things are changing for the better in our state.”—*Subsidy staff*

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.

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Handout 2: Activity

Promoting Consumer Engagement

Reflect on your experiences working with families. Think of a scenario (a real or imagined situation) for each of the possible consumer engagement outcomes listed. Brainstorm ideas for promoting consumer engagement in each scenario.

Outcomes	Scenario: Opportunity to Promote Consumer Engagement	Idea for Promoting Consumer Engagement
Decision-maker		
Resourceful user		
Trusted peer		
Leader		

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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 promoting 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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