

Module Four: Relationship-based Practices

Handout 1: Discussion

Why This Matters for Subsidy Staff

By using Relationship-based Practices to guide what they say and do in all circumstances with families, subsidy staff can focus on parents' competence, perspectives, and experiences. This kind of focus makes it easier for subsidy staff to actively listen to parents, acknowledge parents' feelings, and find common ground through a shared concern for the child and family's well-being.

Goals

- Subsidy staff support child and family well-being by engaging with parents, focusing on parents' competence, and valuing families' perspectives and experiences.

Learning Objective

- Subsidy staff learn about Relationship-based Practices and how to use and apply them in their interactions with families.

Key Competency

- Subsidy staff use Relationship-based Practices to guide what they say and do with families in all circumstances.

Discussion

When we engage with a family, we form a relationship on behalf of their child. **Relationship-based Practices promote engagement with all families in all circumstances. These practices are designed to guide what we say and do with families.** Subsidy staff can use the following practices to build strong relationships with families:

- **Focus on the family-child relationship.** Families need to know that their relationship with their child is valued and supported by staff. When we share observations of positive parent-child interactions, we provide reassurances that the relationship between them and their child is more important than any other. For example, professionals who interact with families seeking child care subsidies can reflect on the parent's interest in seeking the best possible child care circumstances for their child, or remark on how resourceful they are in seeking resources to help their family.
- **Observe and describe the child's behavior in order to open up communication with the family.** Ask parents to share their observations of their child's behavior or interests. The child is the common focus for families and professionals. When we ask parents for these kinds of observations, we create opportunities for discussion.

When discussing potential child care options, subsidy staff might ask parents to describe the interests and behaviors of their child in an effort to find a match with the child care

site or provider's strengths. For example, a father might observe that his son likes to run and play a lot. In response, the subsidy staff might talk with the father about looking for child care settings with larger outdoor areas designed for safe play.

- **Reflect on the family's individual and cultural perspectives.** Families begin to share their children and themselves the moment they first contact us. We can work toward strong partnerships by showing genuine interest. This practice is particularly useful when cultural differences emerge. Asking open-ended questions—such as “Tell me about your family” or “I’d like to learn about your hopes and dreams for your family”—can help open the door for families to share information.
- **Reflect on your personal and cultural perspectives.** Our perspectives shape conversations with families. It's important to consider our own views when working with families. For example, we can reflect on our interactions so that we can intentionally choose what we say and do when interacting with families.
- **Support parental competence** (the parent's skills and self-confidence). Families benefit when we acknowledge their successes, growth, and efforts. For example, subsidy workers can acknowledge the effort it took to come to their office and seek information on child care subsidies. Or subsidy staff can acknowledge and remark on the parent's use of internet resources prior to arriving for their appointment.
- **Value a family's passion** (working with both positive and negative feelings). “Passion” refers to any powerful, compelling feeling or emotion. Raising children and working with families always involves emotions. We can expect parents to have strong feelings about what is happening in their families.

Parents' passion (their strong feelings and priorities) may or may not align with our own priorities. Parents may be extremely happy, excited, or desperate about accessing subsidy and enrolling their child in a high-quality program. Or they may be (or seem) more passionate about some other aspect of their family's life.

When we value parents' passion, we can:

- Actively listen and learn about parents' priorities and concerns
- Acknowledge parents' feelings
- Find common ground through a shared concern for the child and family's well-being

Source: National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement. (2018). *Strategies for Family Engagement: Attitudes and Practices*.

Applying Relationship-based Practices makes it possible for subsidy staff to focus on parents' competence, perspectives, and experiences. In general, this kind of focus makes it easier for subsidy staff to actively listen to parents, acknowledge parents' feelings, and find common ground through a shared concern for the child and family's well-being.

Leaders can support staff by:

- Ensuring that staff understand and have opportunities to practice applying and reflecting on Relationship-based Practices (e.g., providing reflective supervision, protecting time for staff to share ideas that enhance their practices)
- Enacting policies and procedures that promote the application of Relationship-based Practices

- Enacting policies that support staff to work with the same family over time, when possible
- Seeking feedback from families about their experiences with the agency and staff (e.g., asking about the extent to which families feel listened to and their perspectives acknowledged, seeking to learn if the responses given by staff reflect concern for the families' well-being)

Professional Development Resource

Are you interested in exploring Relationship-based Practices more deeply? Explore **Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement: A Guide for Early Childhood Professionals Who Work with Families** to learn about specific knowledge, skills, and individual practices that early childhood professionals (including subsidy staff) need in order to engage effectively with families in positive, goal-oriented relationships.

Subsidy staff can use the Relationship-Based Competencies (RBCs) to:

- Strengthen their interactions with families
- Support families in taking positive steps toward their own goals
- Identify personal and professional strengths and challenges for supporting family engagement
- Choose professional development opportunities in their program and community to enhance their Relationship-based Practices

Find this resource at <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/no-search/rbc-sfe-guide-pro-work-with-families.pdf>

Why This Matters for Subsidy Staff

“Sometimes parents get angry and frustrated with the system and me because I cannot help them with CCDF funding. I try to remember it is because they care about their children and want the best for them. When this happens, I take the time to talk with parents about their other concerns, such as housing or food, and provide information on those topics. I hope this helps them leave with a sense that I am here to be of assistance rather than a barrier.” —*Subsidy staff*

“When I meet with families for the first time, I hope they feel comfortable telling me about their circumstances and their child. It helps me to relate to the family, and I have a better sense of what they are looking for. For example, if a mother tells me her baby is “fussy” and she is worried about leaving her in child care, I suggest that she might talk to her provider about her child’s uniqueness. I might say to the same mother, ‘You know your baby’s personality so well. That will really be helpful to the early care professional the very first day.’—*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

1. Review the Relationship-based Practices in **Module 4: Handout 1**.

Identify two or three Relationship-based Practices that seem to align with your daily interactions with families.

Hint: Think about opportunities you may have to interact with families. Which Relationship-based Practices could be applied to those interactions?

2. Which Relationship-based Practices do you recognize in your interactions with families?

3. Which Relationship-based Practices do you not recognize but could work on?

4. What is one strategy you could use to enhance your use of one of the Practices?

Example: To enhance my use of “Reflect on the family’s individual and cultural perspectives,” as I prepare for an appointment with a family, I will take a moment to think about the family’s perspective and the questions I could ask to help me better understand what’s important to them.

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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 Relationship-based Practices.

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?	

Use this space to note ideas or questions.

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For more information about this resource, please contact us:
PFCE@ecetta.info | 1-866-763-6481