

Module Five: Building a Shared Understanding of Family Engagement

Handout 1: Discussion

Why This Matters for Subsidy Staff

By understanding family engagement, subsidy staff can help parents recognize how family engagement contributes to their family's and children's well-being. Promoting family engagement can help subsidy staff know they are making a difference for families beyond helping them access child care subsidy—a difference that promotes positive outcomes for both consumer engagement and family engagement.

Goal

- Subsidy staff understand family engagement and promote it during interactions with families.

Learning Objectives

- Subsidy staff build on their understanding of what family engagement is and how it relates to but differs from consumer engagement.
- Subsidy staff are able to identify examples of how they might promote family engagement through their consumer education and engagement efforts.

Key Competency

- Subsidy staff include family engagement as a topic in their consumer education and engagement efforts.

Discussion

During interactions with families, subsidy staff have unique opportunities to promote family engagement. As you explore this module, consider what you may already be saying or doing that promotes family engagement. The definitions, examples, and scenarios in this module are intended to help you enhance your current efforts.

What Is Family Engagement?

Family engagement is an interactive process through which early childhood and school-age care and education professionals, family members, and their children build positive and goal-oriented relationships. Building and maintaining these relationships is a shared responsibility of families and professionals. These relationships require mutual respect for the roles and strengths each has to offer. **Family engagement means doing with—not doing to or for—families.**

At the program level, family engagement involves parents' engagement with their children and with providers as they work together toward the goals that families choose for themselves and their children.

At the systems levels, professionals (including subsidy staff) partner with parents and programs to promote family well-being, positive parent-child relationships, and ongoing learning and development for both professionals and families. For example, subsidy staff can promote family engagement by talking about it with families and professionals. In these conversations, subsidy staff can promote positive goal-oriented relationships between providers and families as a shared responsibility that is grounded in mutual respect.

At both the program and systems levels, professionals work together with families, other professionals, and community partners in ways that promote equity, inclusiveness, and cultural and linguistic responsiveness.

The following examples show how family engagement can be promoted in multiple ways and at multiple levels: family, program, and local agency (community partner) levels and State, Territory, or Tribal levels.

Examples of How Family Engagement Can Be Promoted

Family	Families contribute to their own engagement and their children's learning by working with early childhood and school-age care and education professionals to create activities that reflect the cultural traditions of the families in the program.
Program	Early childhood and school-age professionals who provide care and teach in program classrooms encourage family engagement when they collaborate with parents to set goals for their child's development and continue to work together to track and support the child's progress over time.
Local agency	Child care subsidy staff encourage family engagement during the subsidy application process by talking with families about the benefits of family engagement and providing tips for choosing a program that will welcome their partnership.
State, Territory or Tribal agency	A State, Territory, or Tribe promotes family engagement by addressing family engagement in core knowledge and competencies and related professional development opportunities for early childhood professionals.

Why Is Family Engagement Important?

For Children

Parents and professionals want what is best for children, both in and outside of early childhood settings. Ongoing, intentional, and meaningful engagement with families leads to relationships that support children's healthy development and school readiness.

For Families

Family engagement can help parents and family members feel affirmed and know that their expertise is recognized. Family engagement can spark their interest in collaborating with professionals and programs. Effective family engagement supports family well-being and promotes safety, trust, caring, encouragement, and hope for children, parents, and professionals.

For Early Childhood and School-age Care and Education Professionals

Respectful, trusting partnerships with families can help professionals feel more satisfied with their work, and more confident and open-minded in their interactions with families. These partnerships can also make it easier for professionals to have conversations involving uncomfortable or challenging issues, such as concerns about development or behavior.

Family Engagement relates to but differs from consumer engagement. Understanding both can help subsidy staff build and promote both.

Consumer engagement is about partnering with parents to improve and support parental choice. Family engagement is about partnering with families in support of positive child and family outcomes. One way to think about the differences is to examine the intended outcomes for each. Consider how they support and differ from one another.

Comparing Outcomes for Consumer Engagement and Family Engagement

Consumer Engagement Outcomes
Families are decision makers who are equipped with information and seek access to quality early childhood and school-age care and education for their children.
Families are resourceful users of information and services—early childhood, school-age, and comprehensive—that support child and family well-being throughout early childhood and beyond.
Family members are trusted peers who help their friends and other families understand and connect with the highest quality options available.
Families are leaders who advance program quality through leadership efforts in their child’s program and their community.
Source: National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement. (2018). <i>Consumer Engagement: An Orientation for Early Childhood and School-age Care and Education Professionals</i> .

Comparing Outcomes for Consumer Engagement and Family Engagement, cont.

Family Engagement Outcomes

Family Well-being: Families are safe, are healthy, have opportunities for educational advancement and economic mobility, and have access to physical and mental health services, housing and food assistance, and other family support services.

Positive Parent-Child Relationships: Beginning with their transition to parenthood, parents and families develop with their child warm relationships that nurture their child's health, development, and learning.

Families as Lifelong Educators: Parents and families observe, guide, promote, and participate in the everyday learning of their children at home, at school, and in their communities.

Families as Learners: Parents and families learn about their child's personality, development, and learning preferences. They also advance their own learning interests through education, training, and other experiences that support their parenting, careers, and life goals.

Family Engagement in Transitions: Parents and families encourage and advocate for their child's learning and development as they transition to new learning environments within and between early childhood services, early elementary grades, and beyond.

Family Connections to Peers and Community: Parents and families form connections with peers, mentors, and other community members in formal or informal social networks. These social networks are supportive and educational, they honor and are inclusive of families' home language and culture, and they enhance families' social well-being and community life.

Families as Advocates: Parents and families advocate for their children and play leadership roles in early childhood programs and systems. Parents and families participate in decision-making, policy development, and community and state organizing activities to improve children's health, development, and learning experiences.

Source: National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement (2019). *Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems*.

Subsidy staff may be able to directly engage families as consumers (consumer engagement) to improve and support parental choice. And while subsidy staff may be unable to engage families in the deeper, ongoing interactive process of family engagement (due to the limited nature of their interactions with families), they can promote family engagement by working with families to identify effective family engagement practices in early childhood and school age programs. All early care and school-age care and education professionals have a role in engaging families.

When they understand family engagement, subsidy staff can complement their consumer engagement efforts by working with families to identify effective family engagement practices in programs.

Leaders can support staff by:

- Ensuring that staff understand what family engagement is and how it relates to but differs from consumer engagement
- Providing ways for staff to build their knowledge about family engagement over time (e.g., providing access to additional NCPFCE resources on the Child Care Training and Technical Assistance website, partnering with high-quality early childhood program leaders who can talk with staff about their family engagement practices)
- Enacting policies and procedures for consumer education and engagement that include family engagement as an explicit theme

Thoughts From the Field

“I had a family come in a few months ago that was so ready to act. They came in to apply for a subsidy, but mostly they wanted to talk about how to choose a child care provider who would support their interest in helping their child remain bilingual. They were passionate about maintaining their first language and were worried that they would not be able to find a child care setting where both English and their home language were spoken.

I told them a little about the brain research that demonstrates the benefits of children being bilingual, and the father got really excited and wanted more information. After I gave him a resource, we looked on the web site and found three providers in their neighborhood who advertised a bilingual curriculum. The parents were going to visit each site and then decide. I was so glad that they could find what they were looking for and that I had a chance to share some information that further validated their feelings.”

—*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

Building on the examples of family engagement described in **Module Five: Handout 1**, think of other examples of how you might promote family engagement 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, events), during phone calls, and your online activities, (e.g., your agency’s website and social media posts).

I can promote family engagement . . .
In face-to-face talks with families by:
In the physical spaces in which I meet with families by:
During phone calls with families by:
On my agency’s website and through social media by:
In other ways by:

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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 family engagement.

Reflective Practice

Question	Your Reflections
What did I hope to learn?	
What did I learn?	
What will I do with what I learned?	

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For more information about this resource, please contact us:
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