

# Module Six: How Subsidy Staff Can Promote Family Engagement

## Handout 1: Discussion

### Why This Matters for Subsidy Staff

By understanding and being able to describe what family engagement looks like in early childhood and school-age care and education programs, subsidy staff can share information with families and answer families' questions. Staff also can support families in identifying and advocating for effective family engagement practices in programs. Promoting family engagement can help 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 support families in choosing and advocating for early childhood and school-age care and education programs that value and promote family engagement.

### Learning Objectives

- Subsidy staff know the eight key indicators of family engagement.
- Subsidy staff are able to give examples of how they can support families to identify effective family engagement practices in early childhood and school-age care and education programs.

### Key Competency

- Subsidy staff support families in identifying effective family engagement practices in early childhood and school-age care and education programs.

## Discussion

### 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 that requires 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 parent leaders and programs to promote family well-being, positive parent-child relationships, and ongoing learning and development for professionals and families. For example, subsidy staff can talk with families and professionals (providers) about family engagement and promote positive goal-oriented relationships between providers and families as a shared responsibility grounded in mutually respectful relationships.

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. For example, subsidy staff consider the family's perspectives and reflect on the following kinds of questions:

- What do I know is important to the family now?
- What are the family's expectations for their child?
- What are the family's expectations for their child's program?

Subsidy staff consider their own perspectives, and reflect on the following questions:

- What is most important to me about this opportunity to interact with a family?
- What are my expectations for the child and family?
- What personal and professional experiences have shaped my perspectives?
- What values and beliefs inform my perspectives?

Staff reflect on both perspectives:

- How are my perspectives the same as those of the family?
- How are they different?
- How might any similarity or difference affect my work with the family?

These reflections are incorporated into the design and delivery of services to families and into collaborative partnerships with other organizations and agencies.

Learn more about culturally and linguistically responsive practices in Module 7.

## What Family Engagement Looks Like in Early Childhood and School-age Care and Education Programs

Subsidy staff can help families identify and advocate for programs that value and promote family engagement. The table below lists eight key indicators of family engagement and explains and provides examples of what each indicator looks like in early childhood and school-age care and education programs. As you consider the practical examples, note how they are similar to but different from the examples of consumer engagement discussed in Module 2. (See Handout 1 from Module 2.)

## Indicators and Examples of Family Engagement

Family Engagement Indicators	What it Looks Like in Programs	Practical Examples
1. Professionals are knowledgeable about child and family development and family engagement practices.	Professionals ground their practice in knowledge about child and family development and family engagement. They use that knowledge to build stronger partnerships with families and improve child outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professionals engage families in conversations or conferences about children's learning and developmental progress, and programs have protocols about conference timelines and formats.</li> <li>Professionals partner with families to share responsibility for the care and learning of children. For example, professionals and parents work together as a team to plan ways to support a child. They make a point to regularly check in, revisit the plan, and meet when new ideas are needed.</li> </ul>
2. Professionals learn about the cultures of the families they work with, the contexts in which they live, and their goals and aspirations for their children and themselves.	Professionals gain specific insights about families and as a result can be culturally and linguistically responsive. Providers and programs serve as a resource and refer families to community resources where appropriate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Families and professionals work together to create activities that reflect the cultural traditions of the families in the program.</li> <li>Program staff help families identify resources that may be available in their family, social network, neighborhood, or community. Program staff have relationships with these community organizations and resources and can make connections for families (for example, by ensuring warm hand-offs and follow-up).</li> </ul>
3. Programs/professionals foster positive, two-way communications.	Professionals create an open and safe environment where families are encouraged to share their ideas, thoughts, and perspectives. Professionals learn about families' preferences and concerns and show that they value parents' expertise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conferences with families are held at least twice a year as well as when requested by family members or prompted by special circumstances or concerns by the program staff.</li> <li>Communications with family members are documented and enable professionals to assess the need for follow-up.</li> </ul>
4. Program environments encourage family engagement. (See Module 7 to learn about what welcoming environments look like for subsidy agencies.)	The program's physical space and emotional and psychological atmosphere help parents and other family members feel welcomed and respected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family members are encouraged to visit when they inquire about enrolling a child and are given information about the program in their home language.</li> <li>Spaces that allow families to engage in caretaking responsibilities, like feeding and changing, are available and accessible.</li> </ul>

## Indicators and Examples of Family Engagement, cont.

5. Programs/professionals provide peer-to-peer social networking opportunities for families.	As part of a social network of peers, families can share ideas and aspirations, and problem-solve together.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent gatherings (for example, café-style conversations) focus on topics of interest and importance to parents and other adult caregivers.</li> <li>• Programs distribute information and personally connect families to community-based social networking and/or support groups for particular issues (e.g., divorce, bereavement, caregiving for a family member with special needs, adoption, and other topics) and remove barriers to participation by providing transportation or childcare.</li> </ul>
6. Programs/professionals foster respect, flexibility, and openness to change.	Professionals demonstrate respect, flexibly, openness, and cultural sensitivity. These attitudes and actions set the tone for constructive interactions with families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The program's mission statement and policies emphasize respect for all staff, families, and children.</li> <li>• Program leadership includes a family advisory board or a family council that has a role in decision-making and that joins regular meetings with representatives of the program's staff.</li> </ul>
7. Programs/professionals promote parents' sense of competence.	Professionals design and implement practices and activities that honor parents' knowledge about their children and help to strengthen their sense of competence. These activities reinforce family members' ability to support their children's healthy development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professionals notice and describe to parents positive parenting interactions, especially those that support children's security, confidence, exploration, interests, and learning.</li> <li>• Programs offer or share information about opportunities for program staff and parents to learn together about parenting and child development. Parents are invited to suggest topics to be addressed.</li> </ul>
8. Professionals advocate for families, support families to advocate for themselves, and connect families to information, resources, and supports for family well-being.	Professionals focus on families' strengths and recognize families' concerns and priorities. Professionals acknowledge families' own advocacy and help to improve parents' confidence and well-being.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programs/professionals create and send messages (in the languages of the families in the program) about services and supports relevant to families' strengths and needs.</li> <li>• Programs/professionals focus on informing families about their eligibility for public benefits.</li> </ul>

Adapted from: National Center on Parent, Family and Community Engagement. (2018). *Key Indicators of High-Quality Family Engagement for Quality Rating and Improvement Systems*.

In addition to referencing the indicators and examples above to actively and intentionally engage families, subsidy staff can encourage families to look for programs that demonstrate the following exemplary practices for parent/provider relationships:

- Show respect for families and their caregiving practices
- Be committed and caring
- Demonstrate openness to change
- Take the time and energy to understand each family's community and cultural context
- Communicate clearly, consistently, and frequently
- Partner with families rather than telling them what to do
- Focus on the whole family
- Help the family identify and connect with additional comprehensive resources to support family well-being

Adapted from: Family and Provider/Teacher Relationship Quality (FPTRQ) Project 2010–2015. See references section for additional citations.

Subsidy staff can work together with families to identify family engagement practices in early childhood and school-age care and education programs by using the key indicators and examples of family engagement.

Leaders can support staff by:

- Creating an organizational culture and climate that values families and supports Family Engagement Outcomes
- Ensuring staff are knowledgeable about family engagement indicators
- Ensuring staff have opportunities to practice applying and reflecting on their knowledge of family engagement
- Enacting policies and procedures that include promoting family engagement as a specific theme

## Thoughts From the Field

“I had the opportunity to meet with a family seeking child care where the mom and dad were both present. We talked about some of the things they hoped for in a child care provider. Their youngest child is very “shy” and they are worried he will not adjust well to child care. They are looking for a provider that will be sensitive to their child and help him adjust.

The mother is also interested in volunteering part time in a child care facility. She works at a restaurant now and wants to get her CDA, but she needs an opportunity to volunteer. She asked if we had a provider that we could recommend that would help her with their goals for their child and themselves. I was so glad I could provide them with information to help them find a program that would be likely to partner with them in these ways.”

—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.

# Module Six: How Subsidy Staff Can Promote Family Engagement

## Handout 2: Activity

Review the Discussion Notes on **Module 6: Handout 1**. Reflect on your daily interactions and experiences working with families—for example, how you share consumer education information with families, how you respond to questions and concerns from families, and what you currently say or do to promote family engagement.

As a group, think of a scenario (a real or imagined situation) about how you might share (or enhance how you share) family engagement information with parents.

Scenario:	
During typical interactions with families, when could you share family engagement information? (Interactions may occur face-to-face, on the phone, or online.)	
What information could you share (e.g., what specifically could you say or share)?	
How would you share the information (e.g., verbally, in print, via email, or through chat)?	

**Tip:** Use the family engagement indicators in **Module 6: Handout 1** as a guide. Use this space to note ideas or questions.

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# Module Six: How Subsidy Staff Can Promote Family 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 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?	

Use this space to note ideas or questions.

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For more information about this resource, please contact us:  
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