

Module Seven: Creating Welcoming Environments That Are Inclusive and Culturally and Linguistically Responsive

Handout 1: Discussion

Why This Matters for Subsidy Staff

When subsidy staff create welcoming environments that are inclusive and culturally and linguistically responsive, families feel more comfortable and valued. When families feel valued they are more likely to engage (as consumers) with staff. Consumer engagement supports child and family well-being and helps staff build their capacities for working with families.

Goal

- Subsidy staff create welcoming environments that are inclusive and culturally and linguistically responsive.

Learning Objective

- Subsidy staff understand the factors that can create a welcoming environment in their work setting.

Key Competency

- Subsidy staff reflect on the factors that support a welcoming environment for all families. They examine their work environment and, when possible, enhance the environment to support all of the families with whom they interact.

Discussion

When families contact a child care subsidy agency and interact with subsidy staff, they bring distinct family cultures that give meaning and direction to their lives. These cultures are complex and influenced by many factors: family traditions, countries of origin, geographic regions, ethnic identities, cultural groups, community norms, sexual orientations, gender identities, educational and other experiences, personal choices, and home languages.

The cultural beliefs of individual family members and of the entire family inform the decisions family members make about the child and the family. Cultures shape our views on such key issues as family roles and goals, caregiving practices, learning, education, school readiness, child behaviors, and the nature of childhood itself. Families' cultures also shape their perceptions of child care subsidies—how they access services, interact with subsidy staff, and engage as consumers.

Creating welcoming environments that are inclusive and culturally and linguistically responsive can positively impact consumer engagement efforts. These kinds of environments:

- Help families feel comfortable and safe
- Foster open communication
- Help to build trusting relationships
- Are sensitive to the cultural preferences of families
- Build bridges between cultures
- Treat all families fairly and are accessible to parents of all means and abilities
- Acknowledge staff and parents as partners who can work together to support child and family well-being and improve the quality of early childhood and school-age services and programs

Creating environments that are culturally and linguistically responsive involves engaging with families to understand their cultural perspectives and learning about their beliefs, values, and priorities. To effectively engage with families, we need to know what is important to them and try to understand how those things shape what they want for their children.

Subsidy staff can apply the Strengths-based Attitudes and Relationship-based Practices discussed in **Modules 3 and 4** to help build rapport with families and focus on families' perspectives. Subsidy staff can also take time to consider how the perspectives we bring from our lives influence our views of the families we work with. It's easier to see opportunities for connections with families when we know ourselves.

See additional strategies for and examples of creating welcoming environments on the next page.

Additional Strategies for and Examples of Creating Welcoming Environments

Strategies	Examples
Create physical spaces that are welcoming and comfortable for people of all sizes and abilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Post welcoming signs in the lobby or reception area that make it clear to families where they should go once they arrive. • Provide a variety of comfortable seating arrangements—for example, chairs with and without arms to accommodate people of all sizes and preferences for closeness or boundaries. • Arrange furniture to make space for equipment, such as a wheelchair or a stroller. • Keep the area clean. Minimize clutter. • Use signs to indicate restroom locations and diaper-changing and breastfeeding areas. • Offer drinking water. • Offer a space for eating, where appropriate.
Ensure that spaces are safe and welcoming for children.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide toys and books for a variety of ages. Keep them clean and in good condition. • Provide child-friendly resources and information. • Provide child-size furniture. Keep it clean and in good repair. • Ensure that hazards are out of reach of children. Cover outlets. Avoid loose, accessible electrical and window-blind cords.
Create emotional climates that foster a sense of belonging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that designated (reception) staff can see families as they enter and that they courteously greet families upon arrival. • If families have to wait, let them know for how long. • Choose and display images that reflect a variety of races, ethnicities, abilities, ages, family compositions, and adult occupations.
Recruit and welcome all eligible families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine biases and assumptions about families and communities in order to avoid acting on them. • Ensure that policies, outreach efforts, materials, and environments are inclusive. Tailor your efforts to effectively reach or serve specific groups that are underrepresented or marginalized. Consider race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, language, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, and composition of families.
Expect that families in the program may speak many different languages, and encourage families to speak in their own words and in their own languages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak each family's languages, or use highly skilled professional interpreters to ensure clear, accurate, supportive communication. • Post signs that list the languages spoken. • Provide written materials (print and online) in languages spoken by most families. • Choose images for your print and online communications that reflect the cultures of the families you are trying to reach; convey your messages in the languages of those families. • Perform a rigorous review of all translated materials. Consider such aspects as spelling, grammar, punctuation, plain language, clarity, and cultural context.

Additional Strategies for and Examples of Creating Welcoming Environments, cont.

Strategies	Examples
Be respectful of families' time, ideas, and ways. Understand that families have many ways of expressing themselves. They also have many ways of experiencing their <ul style="list-style-type: none"> community life, ethnicity, and heritage. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be prepared when families arrive for appointments. Minimize wait times. Communicate about expected wait times. Apologize for delays. Use Strengths-based Attitudes and Relationship-based Practices (See Modules 3 and 4.)
Encourage two-way communication.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use active-listening techniques. (See Module 2.) Use Strengths-based Attitudes and Relationship-based Practices (See Modules 3 and 4.) Create opportunities for families to provide input—for example, through surveys and focus groups.
Provide access to technology.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer families free WiFi connection for retrieving online documents or for providing entertainment if they have to wait. Provide a computer, fax machine, and copier that families can use to retrieve or duplicate documents. Allow families to submit screenshots of documents via secure email (following your organization's protocols).
Foster opportunities for families to get to know and collaborate with each other.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage conversations among families by clustering reception area furniture rather than arranging chairs in rows. Create a parent advisory committee. Share information with all parents about how the committee works, what its benefits are, and how to join. Host social and/or educational events for families (e.g., parent cafés, playgroups, and fairs).

By reflecting on factors that can contribute to and enhance a welcoming environment in their agency's work setting, subsidy staff can work with leadership to create an environment that helps families feel more comfortable and valued and that supports the agency's consumer engagement efforts.

Leaders can support staff by:

- Creating an organizational culture and climate that welcomes all families and that promotes and respects all family structures, cultures, languages, perspectives, and values
- Working with families and staff to regularly collect and respond to feedback about their experiences in the agency's work environment
- Acknowledging what's working well, and prioritizing any identified enhancements
- Allocating resources and funding to maintain or enhance the agency's work environment
- Creating a family advisory board that reflects the families the agency works with and in the community (Consider diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, ability, age, family composition, and adult occupation.)

Thoughts From the Field

“Being able to effectively serve refugee families that are new to our community is a challenge for me and my agency. We do our best to be prepared, but we can never be sure that we’ll have staff who are fluent or materials on hand in the language spoken by any specific family.

We have a section on our website for families whose first language is not English. And though, it’s not an ideal solution, we encourage families to bring with them to their appointment a friend who does speak English to help with translation.

The best feeling is when we can help link a family to a provider who speaks the family’s home language or who will be sensitive to and supportive of the family’s cultures and language. I feel like the system is really working when this happens.”—*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

Note: This activity has two parts, a Reflection and a Vignette.

Part 1: Reflection

Instructions: Close your eyes and imagine you are a parent or family member entering the waiting room of your agency. Take a few moments to imagine this scene.

What do you see?

What do you hear?

What do you smell?

How do you feel?

Would the sights, sounds, and smells be welcoming to all families and family members who enter the waiting room? Why?

If you could create a “perfect” welcoming setting, what would it look, feel, sound, and smell like?

Part 2: Vignette

Instructions: Review the vignette (below) about a child and mother's experiences in a waiting room. As you read, consider these questions:

- What does this agency do to create a welcoming environment for children who are learning more than one language and their families?
- What evidence do you see of this program's efforts to provide responsive services to families of children who are learning more than one language?

Vignette:

A mother sits on a chair in the waiting area with her son on her lap. They look around. There are books and some blocks and Legos on a table with three small chairs. Two of the books are in Spanish and several of the books have pictures only, inviting story telling.

There is also a bulletin board across from the mother and son that is decorated with a big green and blue map. "Look," she says, "A map of the world . . . and lots of pictures of children. Maybe these are some of the children who will be at the child care center." The children in the photographs are doing different things: looking at books, playing in an area with lots of blocks, eating together, and walking outside.

As they continue to wait, the boy's mother looks at him and says, "What a big world! Do you remember how to find the country where we used to live on the map?" He looks at her. She stands up and moves closer to the map. "See this big blue ocean?" she says, pointing to a spot on the map, "There is where we used to live, right next to it." She sweeps her finger across the map and points to a yellow pin. "And here is where we live now," she says. "Sometimes it seems far . . . but sometimes it feels so close. We bring pieces of our home with us wherever we go."

"Oh, look!" she says to her son, "There are a few words in our language here, too! I wonder who wrote them? Now I see lots of different languages here on the board. Can you help me find ours?"

They go over to the table with books and toys. She sits beside him in one of the smaller chairs and begins to build with Legos. Just then, the office door opens and a smiling woman comes out. She greets them, saying "Hello!" and then bends down toward the boy, smiling. She comments on the structure he is building by saying, "Wow, so tall!" and gestures with her hands to describe her words.

Use this space to write down your answers to the questions about the vignette and to note ideas and questions.

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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 creating welcoming environments that are inclusive and culturally and linguistically responsive.

Reflective Practice

Question	Your Reflections
What did I hope to learn?	
What did I learn?	
What action will I take because of my learning?	

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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