

Parent Involvement and Family Engagement

For Early Childhood Professionals



Early childhood professionals have opportunities to build relationships that can positively impact children and their families for a lifetime. Strong relationships with families promote family well-being, positive parent-child relationships, and the ongoing learning and development of children and parents.

Parent Involvement and Family Engagement: Why Both Matter

Parent involvement and family engagement both include interactions with families. The difference is that with family engagement these interactions occur in the context of an ongoing and collaborative relationship. Meaningful relationships get us closer to effectively partnering with families. When we understand the differences between parent involvement and family engagement, we can make better choices about practices and activities that are based on the goals of our early childhood programs.

“Parent” and “Family”

We use the words *parent* and *family* to honor all adult caregivers who make a difference in a child’s life.

Parents refers to biological, adoptive, and step-parents as well as primary caregivers, such as grandparents, other adult family members, and foster parents.

Families can be biological or non-biological, chosen or circumstantial. They are connected through culture, language, tradition, shared experiences, emotional commitment, and mutual support.

Parent Involvement

Parent involvement occurs when parents participate in activities and take advantage of opportunities at their child’s early care and learning setting. This usually means that parents attend meetings or special events a program offers.

Parent involvement may also include an exchange of information about the child and what happens at home. Professionals may offer advice or recommend resources to address challenges. We may, for example, give written information to a parent about toilet learning for his toddler. Or, we might invite a parent to share information about what quiets her child at nap time.

Early childhood professionals and programs typically initiate parent involvement. These activities are important and often beneficial to families.

What do Parent Involvement and Family Engagement look like?

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parents talk to teachers at the time children arrive and when they leave at the end of the day.

Parents participate in social events.

Parents attend meetings.

Staff ask questions about the child, his or her family, and home life.

Staff provide resources/ideas for families to use at home and in the community.

Families share suggestions and concerns with staff.

Families and staff work together to create activities that reflect the cultural traditions of the families in the program.

Families volunteer for leadership activities and provide ongoing and meaningful input about programming.

Families and staff share in the development of activities and events over time based on their strengths/interests/abilities.

Families and staff work together to discuss, implement, and share responsibility for a child's early learning plan.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Family Engagement

Family engagement happens when early childhood professionals and families engage in an interactive process of relationship-building. The process is mutual, respectful, and responsive to a family's language and culture. Meaningful relationship-building is ongoing, and requires time and attention.

In this approach, we partner with families to share responsibility for the care and learning of children. For example, we work with a parent to plan ways to support the child—a team approach that includes everyone at home and in the program. We make a point to check in, to revisit a plan, and meet when we need new ideas.

Engagement in the early years prepares families to be engaged throughout their child's school years. Most importantly, family engagement efforts support the parent-child relationships that are key to a child's healthy development, school readiness, and well-being now, and in the future.



For more information about this resource, please contact us:

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