

Encouraging Strong Parent-Child Relationships

For Early Childhood Professionals



Children benefit from caring, responsive, and stable relationships. A strong relationship with a parent promotes a child’s development, learning, and increased school success. Relationships with parents help children learn to develop connections with peers and other adults. Supportive relationships with parents also help children learn to manage emotions, cope, problem-solve, and resolve conflicts. Early childhood professionals can encourage strong and positive parent-child relationships through family engagement efforts that include valuing, respecting, and supporting families.

What can early childhood professionals do to promote strong parent-child relationships?

Value – Nurture relationships	
Actions	Examples
Ask about a family’s dreams, hopes, and traditions.	“I’d like to learn more about your family so I can be as supportive as possible. Can you tell me what is important to you and your family?”
Reinforce parent-child interactions.	“Miralda begins to smile as soon as she sees you walking through the door.”
Observe children’s behavior and share descriptions with parents.	“Kiet brought his friend Daryl a toy today when he saw him crying.”
Model warm, responsive relationships.	“Natalie, I saw that you were a kind friend to Joey today. You gave him a turn to use the red marker to finish his drawing.”

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

Adapted from [Understanding Family Engagement Outcomes: Research to Practice Series, Positive Parent-Child Relationships](#).

Respect – Hold families in high regard

Actions	Examples
Engage families through mutually respectful and flexible interactions. Make intentional efforts to understand and respect their culture and language.	“I notice that Simon speaks Spanish with you, but he uses English at school. Do you have a preference for which language we use when we speak with him?”
Be respectful of all family structures, including families with parents who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.	“Tanya often talks about your family and gets excited to share stories about her two dads.”
Respect diverse parenting styles and ask about parenting choices.	“Jairo seems to prefer to eat with his hands at lunch. We encourage children to eat with silverware but want to understand more about your choices at home.”

Support – Partner with families

Actions	Examples
Join with parents to help their children develop skills for school success.	“We’ve seen Li change so much here. She stays at activities for a longer period of time and remembers to take turns with friends when they are playing.”
Connect families with the learning process.	“Mohammad has been trying to hold more than one block in each hand. He is so focused, it looks like he’s working very hard to figure it out. Have you seen him practice this new skill at home?”
Encourage parents to join in program activities, and invite them to share something important to their culture.	“Grace tells us she has been practicing special dances she learned from her grandmother. Would someone from your family be willing to come and teach a dance to the children?”

Early childhood professionals and their situations are unique. How might these ideas work for you and your program?



What strategies do you already use to support strong parent-child relationships?

For more information about this resource, please contact us:

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