



Birth to 5 Father Engagement Programming Guide

Professional Development Strategies That Promote Father Engagement



Early Childhood
National Centers

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NATIONAL CENTER ON
Parent, Family and Community Engagement



Professional Development Strategies That Promote Father Engagement

Explore this guide about using professional development opportunities to enhance father engagement in Head Start and Early Head Start programs. Review strategies to deepen knowledge and improve professional practices. Reflect on examples and consider useful tips for administrators, supervisors, and direct service staff.

Fathers and program staff participated in the development of this resource. It is one in a series of brief guides about how to implement the [Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement \(PFCE\) Framework](#) to support father engagement in early childhood programs.

Review information around the following topics:

- What is the Head Start PFCE Framework?
- Professional development in the PFCE Framework
- Professional development strategies to promote father engagement
 - Develop a program-wide coordinated approach to professional development
 - Support individual professional development plans using the Relationship-Based Competencies (RBCs)

In this resource, the term *father* refers to fathers and other males who play a significant role in raising a child. This person may be a biological father, adoptive father, or stepfather.

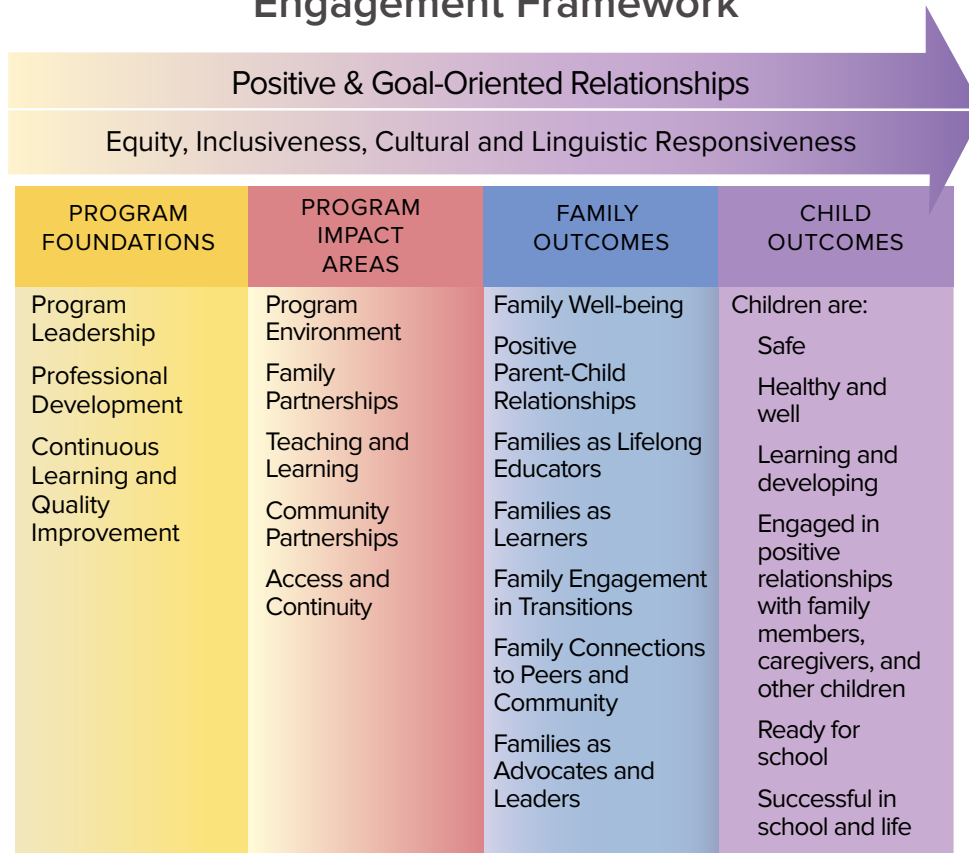
He may be a grandfather, another adult male family member, foster father, guardian, or the mother's significant other. He may be the expectant partner of a pregnant woman.

What is the Head Start PFCE Framework?

The PFCE Framework is an organizational guide for collaboration among families, Head Start and Early Head Start programs, and community service providers. It promotes positive, enduring outcomes for children and families. It describes the elements (e.g., Program Foundations, Impact Areas) in early learning programs that can work together to support progress toward these outcomes. The Framework identifies equity, inclusiveness, cultural and linguistic responsiveness, and positive, goal-oriented relationships as important drivers for these outcomes.

Head Start and Early Head Start programs need strong program foundations that work together to create lasting change for families and children. Professional Development is one of the PFCE Framework program foundations. The Framework provides guidance for connecting the professional development system with father engagement programming.

Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework



Look for these icons throughout the guide to find strategies and key points from fathers, programs, and researchers:



Key Points from the Field



Strategies

What is professional development?

It's important to immerse our staff in the world of fatherhood so they can hear firsthand and understand dads and how much they love their children.
—Head Start director



Professional development consists of opportunities for program staff to expand their knowledge, skills, and practices. Leaders and staff can develop a program-wide professional development plan based on self-assessment, community assessment, and family, father, and child outcomes data. Governance groups and community partners may help create and implement the program plan.

Staff can create an individual professional development plan using information from self-assessments, performance appraisals, and supervisor input. Using data is key to designing and implementing effective professional development that builds strong relationships with families and promotes progress toward family outcomes.

There are many ways for programs to provide professional development, including ongoing supports in the form of coaching, mentoring, and reflective supervision. Programs can also access the Office of Head Start (OHS) Training and Technical Assistance (T/TA) System.

The Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) website offers information and training materials that can be used by programs, individual staff, community partners, and the early childhood community. Many of these resources were created by the OHS National Centers to promote research-informed strategies and exemplary practices.



Discover ECLKC resources to guide [professional development](#), including:

- [PFCE Simulation Series](#): Explore and practice everyday strategies to develop positive, goal-oriented relationships with families.
- [Individualized Professional Development \(iPD\) Portfolio](#): This online platform offers self-paced modules based on staff roles and interests.

When possible, professional development incorporates research-based practices, like the RBCs. Programs must ensure all staff complete a minimum of 15 hours of professional development per year and, if feasible, attach it to academic credit ([45 CFR §1302.92](#)).

A program-wide coordinated approach to professional development supports the delivery and continuous improvement of high-quality services. Professional development does not exist in a silo. It is part of a systemic, integrated, and comprehensive approach to family—and father—engagement.

Develop a Program-wide Coordinated Approach to Professional Development

If the program provides ongoing T/TA to staff, this will help them better understand the PFCE Framework and move along the continuum of building positive and goal-oriented relationships. This, in turn, supports the staff to be an integral part of the journey toward child and family outcomes, with a common goal of school readiness. —Early Head Start director



Head Start programs can develop a program-wide coordinated approach to professional development by creating a learning organization. A learning organization creates, acquires, and transfers knowledge and modifies its practices to reflect new knowledge and ideas.

When program leaders and staff come together as a community of learners, they create a mutually supportive environment for continuous learning and program improvement. Together, they value curiosity, seek new knowledge, and turn training and information into action. Reflective practice and supervision are key components of a learning organization. In reflective practice, staff at all levels of the organization are expected to think about what they do and to be intentional in their practices. Reflective supervision is collaborative, supportive supervision that occurs on a regular basis.

A learning organization depends on data to plan and implement effective family-related professional development. Data are used to inform decisions about what kind of professional development content is needed, who should be involved, and what formats might be effective. Programs can identify areas where staff need to build their family engagement knowledge, skills, and practices by gathering and analyzing information from:

- Parent surveys
- Partnership agreements
- Program self-assessment
- Staff self-assessment
- Other sources

Observations of staff-parent interactions and conversations between staff, coaches, and supervisors also shape professional development plans. Ongoing evaluations of professional development activities allow for adjustments and changes to be made in a timely way.

To build and sustain a learning organization, leaders and staff are intentional as they make plans. They use authentic and reliable information to support individual professional development and continuous program improvement. They ensure professional development has a strengths- and relationship-based approach to PFCE.



Create Policies and Procedures to Build a Learning Organization That Promotes Father Engagement

- Connect professional development plans to PFCE program goals and continuous improvement activities for a coordinated approach.
- Promote cross-service learning among staff from different areas (e.g., education, health, recruitment, family services) to ensure consistent communication and ongoing relationship-building with fathers.
- Track the impact of professional development on father engagement activities and a father-friendly program environment. Use outcomes data to inform decisions about professional development offerings.
- Allocate budget resources, plan staff schedules, and keep manageable caseloads to provide time for professional development.
- Ensure policies support staff to meet their individualized professional development plans.
- Coordinate professional development with community partners and professional organizations with a strong father focus.
- Develop partnership agreements with higher education and professional associations that train or credential family services staff. Support their use of a relationships-based focus in their training content.
- Create career pathways for family service professionals and supervisors as they achieve their academic and professional goals.

Planning and Implementing Professional Development Activities

Consider what content is important and needs to be part of a professional development plan that focuses on father engagement. Who does the training?



- Integrate the knowledge, skills, and practices—the RBCs—into everyday interactions that support active and responsive father engagement.
- Include fathers in planning staff training, contributing content to the training, or co-facilitating discussions. Fathers help ensure professional development is authentic, focused, and relevant.
- Provide opportunities for all staff, volunteers, and parents to learn about the contributions of fathers to their child’s development and family’s well-being. Father engagement is everyone’s business.
- Gather and use data about the strengths, interests, and needs of fathers in the program to inform professional development.
- Create a learning community of parents and staff by training staff to implement parenting curricula that are responsive to fathers’ needs and interests.
- Value learning from mistakes as well as from successes.
- Encourage and model self-reflection as an opportunity to gain personal insights and improve practices with fathers and families. Apply reflective strategies in professional development throughout the program, including during staff meetings and mentoring sessions.
- Honor different ways of learning about effective fatherhood engagement. Some adult learners prefer face-to-face discussions; others may prefer online modules. Remember that one size of professional development doesn’t fit all.



[Measuring What Matters: Using Data to Support Family Progress](#) looks at how to assess services and measure progress on family and child outcomes using data.

Learn more about using family-related data in Head Start program planning in the [Overview](#)

Understanding and Implementing the RBCs

The [Relationship-based Competencies \(RBCs\)](#) define staff’s work in the area of family engagement. They are aligned with the Head Start Program Performance Standards and the 2016 Child Care and Development Fund Final Rule.

The RBCs describe the knowledge, skills, and practices related to family engagement for staff who partner with families. They reflect current research and recommended practices across many family service fields. They also connect with the elements and outcomes of the PFCE Framework. Review the 10 RBCs below.

Relationship-based Competencies	Professional Practice
1. Positive, goal-oriented relationships	Engages in mutually respectful, goal-oriented partnerships with families to promote parent-child relationships and family well-being
2. Self-aware and culturally responsive relationships	Respects and responds appropriately to the cultures, languages, values, and structures of each family served
3. Family well-being and families as learners	Supports families’ reflections on and planning for their safety, health, education, well-being, and life goals
4. Parent-child relationships and families as lifelong educators	Partners with families to build strong parent-child relationships and supports parents as the first and lifelong educators of their children
5. Family connections to peers and community	Works with families to strengthen their support networks and connections with other parents and community members who can address families’ strengths, interests, and challenges
6. Family access to community resources	Supports families’ use of community resources to make progress toward positive child and family outcomes
7. Leadership and advocacy	Works alongside parents to build on their strengths as advocates for their families and as leaders in the program and community
8. Coordinated, integrated, and comprehensive services	Works with other professionals and agencies to support coordinated, integrated, and comprehensive services for families across the organization, community, and system

Relationship-based Competencies	Professional Practice
9. Data-driven services and continuous improvement	Collects information with families and reflects with them to inform goal-setting, planning, and implementation to effect progress and outcomes for families, children, programs, and communities
10. Professional growth	Shows professionalism and participates actively in opportunities for ongoing professional development related to family engagement

All program staff need to know about and practice the RBCs because all staff support families and fathers. Many staff have direct contact during enrollment, screening procedures, teacher conferences, home visits, Policy Council meetings, and the family partnership process. Other staff may have informal opportunities to interact with fathers in positive and affirming ways. For example, the receptionist at the center greets a father by name when he brings his child; a bus driver chats with a father in his home language at drop-off. All staff-father interactions are opportunities to build relationships and apply the RBCs.

The RBC guides for staff are tailored for training and professional development in specific roles:

- Family services professionals
- Teachers and child care providers
- Home visitors

Review the RBC self-assessment tools for staff and their supervisors. Use them to monitor progress in each competency and identify areas to improve practice. Partner with staff members to make individual professional development plans. Aggregate the individual data with data from the program and community self-assessments to identify RBCs that need to be addressed in the program’s professional development system.





Strategies for Supervisors to Use the RBCs for Their Own Professional Development

- Become familiar with the RBCs for supervisors.
- Use the supervisor's self-assessment tool to identify areas of strength and areas needing improvement.
- Use this data to develop an individualized professional development plan to enhance professional practices, especially coaching, training, and reflective supervision.
- Practice self-reflection to promote personal and professional growth as a supervisor.
- Reflect on personal biases and stereotypes that affect interactions with staff and parents, especially fathers.



Strategies for Supervisors, Coaches, and Consultants to Use Reflective Supervision to Support Family Services Staff Who Work with Fathers

- Talk with family services staff about how they apply the RBCs in their work with fathers.
- Encourage family services staff to complete an individualized self-assessment of their knowledge, skills, and practices with a focus on father engagement.
- Discuss the results of the self-assessment as part of individualized supervision and incorporate the results into individualized professional development plans.
- Use everyday encounters between family services staff and parents as opportunities to model responsive and culturally appropriate interactions.
- Offer professional development opportunities, such as training or coaching, to help deepen staff understanding of the RBCs and support their professional practices with fathers.
- Identify resources, including conference sessions and online seminars, for further learning and skill-building around applying the RBCs to their work with fathers.
- Create a safe, trusting learning environment where staff can explore their biases and attitudes about working with fathers.



Strategies to Integrate the RBCs into Individual Professional Development Plans for Family Services Staff

- Become familiar with the RBCs and self-assessment tools.
- Start with a strengths-based approach. All staff have interests and capacities to use the RBCs effectively with fathers.
- Use everyday encounters with fathers as learning opportunities to practice the RBCs. Examples include family partnership planning, facilitating parent meetings, and discussing a child's progress.
- Work through the assessment tools comparing staff's interactions with mothers and fathers. Consider the differences in strengths and areas for improvement across the competencies.
- Use data from the self-assessment tool, performance evaluations, and discussions with supervisors, peers, and others to get a wholistic view of staff skills.
- Consider whether communication with nonresident fathers and co-parents is a critical issue to address in professional development.
- Join peer learning networks or communities of practice in the program.
- Use the [ECLKC](#) and social networks like [MyPeers](#) and [Twitter](#) to share information and ask questions about father engagement.
- Participate in reflective practices and reflective supervision with a coach, supervisor, or peer. Value these opportunities to promote personal and professional development.
- Use self-reflection to identify how implicit bias, prejudices, or stereotypes impact relationships with mothers and fathers.
- Appreciate the time, patience, and support needed to understand and develop a solid grounding in the RBCs.



Professional Development in Action

Read what an Early Head Start teacher has to say about the impact of professional development on her relationships with fathers.

“To me, fathers were always looked at as secondary caregivers. In my eyes, they were good enough to drop off and pick up their children and attend a parent-teacher conference or two; but for serious matters, I thought it was best to speak with the children’s mothers, grandmothers, or aunts.”

It was not until these issues were addressed and discussed during weekly staff development that my outlook on fatherhood began to change. The staff development was focused on the meaning of fatherhood and the important roles that fathers play in the lives of their young children.

I had to pay attention to the positive interactions that the fathers had with their children, but even more so to my own interactions with the fathers when they came into the center. I became more self-aware and realized that I was rarely welcoming or engaging with the fathers. I gave them the sense that they didn’t truly belong in the center.

The training and meaningful discussion with my colleagues changed how I saw fathers. It gave me a safe environment to tap into deep emotions that caused me to disregard fathers. With the support of my coach, I thought long and hard about my own negative past experiences. As I continued to reflect, I developed new strategies to effectively serve both mothers and fathers.”



Reflection

Consider these questions:

Is professional development available to all staff, including supervisors and leaders? Volunteers? Consultants? Fathers?

What content is included in the professional development? Does it address expectations and biases in staff-father interactions? Does it incorporate research-based practices?

How does professional development impact partnerships and goal-setting with fathers?

How does professional development improve outcomes for children, fathers, and families?

Does professional development emphasize the role of self-reflection and reflective supervision in personal and professional growth?

Resources

- [Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework](#)
- [Individualized Professional Development \(iPD\) Portfolio](#)
- [Family Engagement in Early Care and Education Learning Series](#)
- [Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement](#)
- [Credentialing and Degree Programs Databases for Head Start Staff Who Work with Families](#)
- [Measuring What Matters: Using Data to Support Family Progress](#)
- [Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Simulation: Boosting School Readiness Through Effective Family Engagement Series](#)
- [Parenting Curriculum Review Databases](#)



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