



Be Open to the Many Ways Families May Want to Engage in Head Start Programs Worksheet

Introduction

Our biases are shaped by many factors, including our race and culture. These biases then tend to influence what we think, what we do, and how we respond to others. In other words, our biases can shape nearly every part of our lives.

As a result, we may have expectations or assumptions about how families should be involved or engaged in Head Start programs.¹ For example, we may make assumptions about a family's resources and assume that a family will not have the time to co-plan activities. Or we may make assumptions that a parent does not have the skills or interest to take on a leadership role for a parent committee or policy council.

How families choose to engage in the program is also shaped by their biases and influenced by race and culture. Having biases is only human.

Because we all have biases, it is essential for us to remain open-minded when we engage with families. We want to check our assumptions and seek understanding before reaching any conclusions about family engagement. By being open-minded, we can build an intentional mindset that will help us keep our biases in check, including those biases influenced by unconscious racial or other stereotypes, as well as our conscious ones. This lens helps us remain open to how families want to engage.

In Head Start programs, we believe that [parent involvement and family engagement](#) are both important. Parent involvement occurs when parents or family members participate in activities or opportunities at their child's early learning setting. This involvement can include attending meetings and events or exchanging information about the child. Family engagement happens when early childhood professionals and families interact over time to build relationships. This process is mutual and respectful. The process also requires Head Start staff to be responsive to a family's language and culture. The meaningful relationships that grow out of this process can help us effectively partner with families in the care and learning of their children.

Activities

1. Activity 1. Uncovering Hidden Biases About How Families Engage
2. Activity 2. Honoring the Ways That Families Want to Engage
3. Activity 3. Using the PFCE Framework to Explore New Ways for Families to Engage

Each activity builds on the one before it, so make sure to do them in order:



If you only have 15 minutes, complete Activity 1.



If you have 30 minutes, complete Activity 1 and Activity 2.



If you have an hour, complete all three activities.

You may choose to spend more or less time on each activity depending on your needs or the needs of your group.

¹ Ramos, Manica F. "[The Strengths of Latina Mothers in Supporting Their Children's Education: A Cultural Perspective.](#)" *ChildTrends*. Accessed June 25, 2024.

Activity 1. Uncovering Hidden Biases About How Families Engage

Our biases can appear in the assumptions we make, the stereotypes we hold, or the actions (positive or negative) we take toward others. (See the Worksheet: Understand and Challenge Biases for more information.) Our biases are shaped by various factors, including the traditions and norms of our identities (e.g., race and culture), our friends and family, and even the shows we watch on TV or what we look at on social media.

We want to name these biases and their sources (where they started) to begin to tame them. By naming and understanding them, we are better able to adjust our behaviors to address our biases. In other words, we can work to uncover our biases and change our negative attitudes and beliefs.

When we make the effort to be aware of and disrupt our biases, we start behaving in ways that make people feel valued, included, and respected. What hidden biases might you have about how families want to engage?

Journaling Activity: Hidden Biases About Families, Part 1

Write down all the ways you expect families to engage in your Head Start program in the space provided.

I expect families to engage in our Head Start program in the following ways:

Journaling Activity: Hidden Biases About Families, Part 2

- Review the questions below to help you explore what shapes your expectations about families and how they want to engage.
- Select two or three of them for reflection.
- Record your reflections in the space provided.

Questions to Help You Explore What Shapes Your Expectations about Families and How They Want to Engage

How have my own childhood experiences influenced how I expect families to engage? For example, did my parent(s)/caregiver(s) attend school events or show interest in my school experience?

How have my friends influenced how I expect families to engage? For example, did I see my friends' parents/caregivers volunteering at school events?

How has my formal education influenced how I expect families to engage? For example, am I expecting families to engage based on a definition I learned in school?

How has my work experience influenced how I expect families to engage? For example, did my supervisor share expectations or guidance about how families should engage?

How has (social) media influenced how I expect families to engage? For example, has TV painted a picture of what it looks like when families are engaged in their child's education?

Activity 2. Honoring the Ways That Families Want to Engage

Working in partnership with families requires us to be interested in each family's perspective. As a result, we can ask family members how they prefer to engage.

Being open to the many ways families want to engage may require us to stretch our thinking and be creative about activities or resources that honor families' culture, language, and experiences.² Whatever our approach, we want to stay open-minded about the various ways parents may choose to engage in supporting their child's learning and development.

Journaling Activity: Addressing Ways Our Expectations Influence Families

Use the questions below as a guide to help you reflect on how you might address the ways your expectations influence families. Record your reflections in the space provided.

How can I change my attitudes and actions to be more attuned to the race, culture, and values of each family I work with?

How can I be more open-minded to the many ways families of different races and cultures choose to support their children's learning and development?

What can I do to help families feel seen, heard, and acknowledged in the ways they choose to engage with the program and support their children?

² U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. [Engaging with Families in Conversations about Sensitive Topics](#). Washington, DC, 2019.

Activity 3. Using the PFCE Framework to Explore New Ways for Families to Engage

In Head Start, we work to form positive and goal-oriented relationships with families. Through this work, families can progress from parent involvement (attending meetings or special events) to family engagement (sharing responsibility with staff for the care and learning of their child).

Consider the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework graphic shown to the right. This Framework shows how programs, parents, families, and communities can work together to promote healthy development and learning for children and well-being for families.

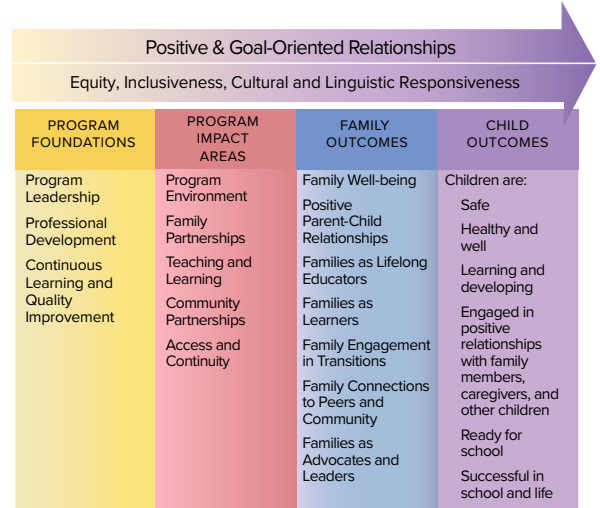
By looking at this Framework through the lens of equity, we can expand our thinking about how best to serve children and families. The Framework can give us avenues for breaking away from hidden biases and help us expand our ideas about how families should engage by being more inquisitive, collaborative, and imaginative.

Let's look at three of the Child Outcomes (the purple column) in the Framework:

1. Safe
2. Healthy and well
3. Ready for school

How can we be open to the many ways families want to engage as partners to reach these outcomes?

HEAD START PARENT, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK



Journaling Activity: Exploring How Families Want to Engage Using the PFCE Child Outcomes

- Think about two to three families you currently work with in your program. If possible, choose families from varying races, cultures, countries of origin, and strengths. This variety will expand your creativity and inclusive thinking around how families want to engage.
- Keep these families in mind as you follow the instructions to complete the table below.
- Use the example provided to guide your responses.

Exploring How Families Want to Engage Using the PFCE Child Outcomes Example

Choose a family.			
Family Name	Mendez		
What I have learned about the family.	The Mendez family is Peruvian and Venezuelan. They are primarily Spanish-speaking. Their daughter, Julia, attends the 3-year-old classroom. Her parents work long hours.		
Choose a PFCE child outcome from the list below:			
Children are:	<input type="checkbox"/> Safe	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Healthy and well	<input type="checkbox"/> Ready for school
Respond to the following questions in the space provided, keeping in mind the family and the PFCE child outcome you chose above.			
How can I learn about the family's thoughts and concerns related to this child outcome?	I can ask the family to share any thoughts and concerns they might have about Julia's health and development.		
How can I learn the family's preferred ways to communicate and collaborate on this child outcome?	I can ask the parents for their preferred communication method and do my best to honor their preferences.		
What new or creative activities or tools could I use to engage this family?	I can suggest that the program's family communication app (e.g., ClassDojo, Remind, etc.) might be a good way to stay in touch. The app would allow Julia's parents to share information in Spanish about Julia and to ask questions or share concerns with staff. Using the app would allow the Mendezes to communicate with staff when they have breaks or after work.		

Exploring How Families Want to Engage Using the PFCE Child Outcomes Worksheet

Choose a family.			
Family Name			
What I have learned about the family.			
Choose a PFCE child outcome from the list below:			
Children are:	<input type="checkbox"/> Safe	<input type="checkbox"/> Healthy and well	<input type="checkbox"/> Ready for school
Respond to the following questions in the space provided, keeping in mind the family and the PFCE child outcome you chose above.			
How can I learn about the family's thoughts and concerns related to this child outcome?			
How can I learn the family's preferred ways to communicate and collaborate on this child outcome?			
What new or creative activities or tools could I use to engage this family?			

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How can I learn the family's preferred ways to communicate and collaborate on this child outcome?			
What new or creative activities or tools could I use to engage this family?			

For more information, please contact us: PFCE@ecetta.info | 1-866-763-6481

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