



Recognize Families as Partners and Honor Their Contributions Worksheet

Introduction

Honoring families and communities is part of the mission of Head Start programs. Programs fulfill this mission by keeping their families and communities at the center of all decisions that involve them.

[Family members have expertise](#) about their child(ren) and family. When we actively engage families as partners, we honor their knowledge, strengths, values, customs, beliefs, experiences, and dreams.

As we work together with families, we are doing things with them rather than for them. To ensure this kind of collaboration, we work to understand families' interests and needs. Then we can combine that knowledge with our own knowledge of the community to support those interests and needs.

When we seek out and honor families' voices and contributions, we can build positive relationships. Through these relationships we are better equipped to provide services and resources that are culturally and linguistically responsive and that reflect a family's and community's values.

Program staff can connect with families at numerous points, from their first interactions with families to their work with families in setting goals to the ongoing family engagement services they provide. At any one of these points, early childhood professionals can create opportunities for families to [share their voices](#) and contribute to the program.

A program's efforts to honor families' strengths and share power are valuable for all families. These efforts may be even more important in communities that have experienced racism or other forms of discrimination. Experiences of this kind often have caused families' voices to be silenced or ignored.

To actively practice equity when partnering with families, staff can make intentional efforts to honor and value the voices and perspectives of historically and currently underrepresented or excluded communities. The families in these communities may be Black, Latino, American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN), other families of color, families experiencing poverty, fathers and male caregivers, parents and family members whose home language is not English, LGBTQIA2S+ parents and families, families new to the United States and migrants, families of children with disabilities, and parents with disabilities and learning differences.

Head Start program activities include the [family partnership process](#), parent committees and Policy Council, and the program self-assessment. Through these activities, programs are uniquely positioned to honor families' strengths, value their contributions, and share power.

Activities

This worksheet features three activities to complete:

1. Reflecting on Effective Partnerships
2. Identifying Barriers to Family Engagement and Partnerships
3. Recognizing Families as Partners and Honoring Their Contributions

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.

Activity 1. Reflecting on Effective Partnerships

Think about the families you currently work with. Select two with whom you have a [strong and effective partnership](#). Reflect on these families and write your responses to the following questions about your partnership with them in the space provided.

What do strong and effective family partnerships look and feel like for you and for the families?

How do you know that these partnerships are strong and effective?

What are the benefits to families of creating strong and effective partnerships with staff in Head Start programs?

What are the benefits to your program of creating strong and effective family partnerships?

Activity 2. Identifying Barriers to Family Engagement and Partnerships

Each family we work with is unique. Each family may face different barriers to engaging in our early childhood programs. For example, one family may feel a lack of trust due to past experiences with other service agencies. Another family may experience a language barrier if program staff don't speak their language or if the program doesn't provide translation services. Sometimes there is a mismatch in beliefs about the roles of parents and teachers, or family members may feel unwelcome or disrespected by staff.

Early childhood programs and staff may have biased attitudes, behaviors, policies, and practices that unfairly disadvantage families from historically and currently underrepresented groups. These biases can affect families' interest in engaging in the program. They also can prevent families from developing authentic partnerships with staff. We can work to recognize, understand, and address how racism and other forms of discrimination can create barriers to engagement.

Watch the video [Hodan: What Was a Barrier That You Had to Overcome?](#)

While families may face many kinds of barriers to family engagement, some families experience barriers related to racism and other forms of discrimination. In this video, a parent discusses the barriers she had to overcome to effectively engage in her child's school. These involved her self-confidence, education level, and fear of bias because of her head covering.

Now consider the following reflection questions and respond in the space provided.

How might racism and other forms of discrimination (past or present) contribute to the barriers the parent in this video is experiencing?

What are some barriers that families in your program experience related to racism or discrimination?

How could these barriers affect a family's interest in engaging in your program and partnering with program staff?

For additional information about racism, explore the Systemic Racism [video series](#) from Race Forward. As you explore this series, consider how your program, families, and community may be impacted by the issues discussed.

Activity 3. Recognizing Families as Partners and Honoring Their Contributions

We need to know that many families experience inequities, especially families who are currently and historically underrepresented. These experiences may influence their ability to trust and form relationships with staff.

As we build relationships with families, we can ask questions to learn more about their past experiences. The more we learn, the better we can honor and respect each family.

Staff may not know all the details of families' past experiences with discrimination. Staff can, however, reassure families that their contributions are sought and valued.

We confirm our commitment to families when we share power in decision-making with them and use their ideas and suggestions to improve program services. Through these kinds of actions, we can begin to lay the groundwork for trusting relationships.

Consider the families you work with. What are you currently doing or saying to show them the value and importance of their contributions? What do you share with families to emphasize how their role as partners in decision-making helps improve program services and outcomes?

The strategies in the table below are actions you can take immediately to invite and honor families' perspectives and contributions.

- Read the strategies described in the first column.
- Then, read the middle column to consider how each strategy advances equity.
- Finally, reflect on your own practice and write down in the last column a specific action you can take to implement the strategy.
- Use the blank rows at the bottom of the table to list additional strategies that you identify on your own or with colleagues.

Strategies to Honor Families as Partners	How This Strategy Advances Equity	Actions to Implement This Strategy
<p>Practice a strengths-based approach with families, recognizing and bolstering the strengths that families have and asking them to identify where they could use support.</p>	<p>When we practice strengths-based approaches, we can build relationships with and be responsive to a currently or historically underrepresented family.</p>	
<p>Reflect on all the ways that you and your program can (1) share decision-making with family members and (2) incorporate their voices to improve program services (e.g., in the care of their child, through communication with parents, with programming ideas, etc.).</p>	<p>When we challenge traditional approaches and change the way we see and include currently and historically underrepresented family members, we invite the cultures and experiences of these families to shape our program’s decisions and priorities.</p>	
<p>Share with parents and family members the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How your program makes decisions. ● How your program shares information about program decisions with families. ● How your program lets families know the influence their feedback has had on program decisions and priorities. 	<p>By sharing with families the changes the program has made in response to family contributions, we build trust and positive relationships with families. This information-sharing is especially important for families whose voices have been currently or historically underrepresented.</p>	
<p>Think about a family with which you do not have a strong relationship or effective partnership. Perhaps this family has a background different from yours. Consider whether any of your thoughts, feelings, attitudes, or biases may be contributing to this less-than-effective partnership.</p>	<p>By recognizing our own biases or judgments toward a family, we are better able to disrupt these biases and take action to create a more effective partnership with the family.</p> <p>This recognition is especially important for engaging families who have experienced bias or discrimination.</p>	

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

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