



Supporting Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness  
for Early Childhood Professionals



## Supporting Professionals Who Support Families: The Parallel Process

Working with families is a rewarding and challenging experience. Early childhood and school-age child care professionals benefit from support to stay motivated, avoid job-related stress, and be at their best for families. Professionals may benefit from support from peers, supervisors, technical assistance specialists, and others to remain effective in supporting families experiencing homelessness.

It can be helpful for all early childhood and school-age child care professionals to remember the following:

- It is typical to feel deeply for children and families and need support to manage the emotions that surface when a child or family is in crisis or experiencing chronic stress.
- Professionals, who listen to parents, share the major challenges they endure, knowing that swift and easy solutions are rare.
- Practicing self-care such as rest, healthy eating, meditation or mindfulness, and exercise is an important part of being effective in your work.
- Staff may need to talk confidentially with peers, supervisors, or others to express their feelings and concerns. It is important to have a safe and non-judgmental space to reflect and share feelings about families, both positive and negative. Honest and careful reflection provides an opportunity for staff to plan how best to approach families from a genuine and strengths-based perspective.
- Professionals may have had similar experiences to those being shared by families and this may trigger uncomfortable emotions and the need for specific kinds of support.

### The Parallel Process

Programs can provide support to professionals in ways that mirror the supports that professionals provide to parents. This process, referred to as the parallel process, occurs when similar practices are reflected in different parts of an organization, community, or system, and in the services provided to families.

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- Participating in formal or informal professional development through staff meetings, in-service training, and contacts with specialists in areas such as mental health, child development, substance abuse, domestic violence, working with children with disabilities or learning challenges, trauma, and homelessness can increase understanding of these challenging issues and awareness of information and resources that are available.

Early childhood and school-age professionals benefit when leadership and supervisors:

- Create opportunities for regular reflective practice and supervision
- Organize times for individuals to share experiences in a safe and non-judgmental environment with supervisors or peers
- Provide reassurance that honesty and self-awareness are important to successful work
- Organize occasions for ongoing professional growth
- Model self-care behaviors that encourage self-care

These efforts can inspire individual professionals to model similar behaviors and create opportunities for families to grow. Professionals who feel well supported can better support families and children. And, families who feel well supported can better support their children.

## References

Moore, T. (2006, August). Parallel processes: Common features of effective parenting, human services, management and government. In Invited address to 7th National Conference of Early Childhood Intervention Australia, Adelaide.

For more information about this resource,  
please contact us: [PFCE@ecetta.info](mailto:PFCE@ecetta.info) | 1-866-763-6481



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