

Connect families to community-based services and resources

Community-based services provide families and children with needed resources and information. Early care and education (ECE) professionals who learn about their community's resources, and connect families with these resources, provide an important bridge to services for children and families.



Community-based services include a variety of supports and services for children and families. Services may focus on children's developmental needs, for example, early intervention services like screening children for speech and language delays, or physical delays. Other services may focus on families, like programs to support parent involvement in early literacy with their child, or services to help families find affordable housing. Community-based services include but are not limited to early intervention services, medical and dental care, early childhood mental health consultation, parent education programs, public library services, public housing assistance, and job assistance programs.

Build the community with family partnerships: Engage families



Family engagement means that families and their children's schools, learning programs, and ECE professionals are all involved in the child's learning and development. There is a partnership between the ECE professional and the family, and a connection to the community.

Respecting and valuing families is integral to their children's development. This support includes building partnerships and including families as partners in their child's learning and development. The meaningful interactions ECE professionals have with families strengthen the whole child and the family.

Partnerships with families are key to supporting the best outcomes for children and families in the areas of social-emotional, cognitive, language and literacy, and physical well-being. When families feel supported, heard, and integral to their child's "team" in an early learning setting, they are more engaged in their child's learning and development. Research shows that when families are engaged in their children's learning, it supports better overall outcomes for children's school readiness. This partnership and engagement can translate to more supportive and open discussions when resources are requested, or when connecting families with services in the community.

Research shows that when families are engaged and involved with their children's learning in and out of school, the families are in a better position to support their child's development and positive outcomes. (Understanding Family Engagement Outcomes: Research to Practice Series, Family Engagement and School Readiness 2014)

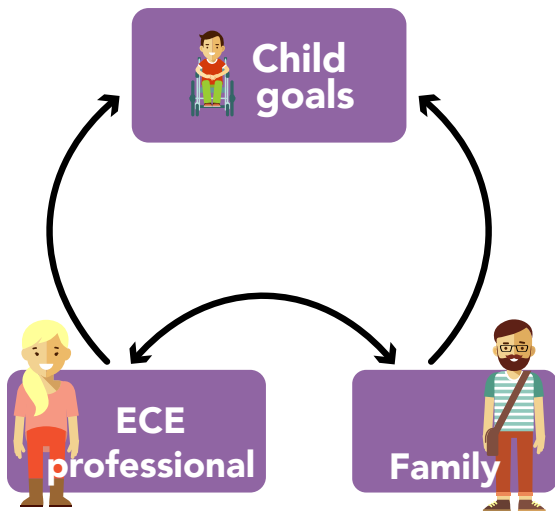
Children's interactions with the people who are in their lives affect how they learn and what they learn. Learning happens within the context of these interactions and relationships. Children's biology, and the experiences they have with others in their family, school, and community, influence their learning and development.

Explore key community resources and build relationships

Learn about your community and the resources that are available. Think about programs, services, or resources that might benefit the families in your learning program. Make a list of resources families ask about, such as social service agencies, adult education programs, community mental health clinics, early intervention services, housing authorities, and the public library. Identify a few agencies or groups in your community who connect to broader services for families. Talk with these agencies or groups about the services they provide in the community. Some examples may be a local United Way Agency, your state's early childhood education office or early intervention program, and your public school district. Offer information to parents about programs in the community, like an open house night in your public school district for incoming kindergarteners and families.



Many state and national organizations focus on resources and services, at both the state and community level. State agencies and organizations are often an entry point to access local community services.



Involve families in discussions

Hold ongoing discussions with families about their child's overall development. Provide resources to parents to help them learn about concrete ways to encourage children's growth and wellness at home and in their community. Learn about local community health clinics, early intervention organizations, and early childhood mental health centers. Provide resources for families about the clinics or centers in the area. Learn about the immediate contacts in the community to support families in crisis.

Use a strengths-based approach

Learn about the strengths that families bring to your program and engage families around the strengths and successes they have with their child. Support families and have conversations with them to identify their strengths, and to connect those strengths to the interactions they have with their child. Build upon the parent's knowledge and skills. Offer resources or opportunities for families to connect with community organizations, like parent groups, parent diversity councils, or community action groups to share their knowledge and experiences.

