

Family Engagement and School Readiness: Building on Family Strengths to Promote Success

For Early Childhood Professionals



Children’s learning happens in the context of relationships. Early interactions with important adults build babies’ brains and influence development. School readiness is the process of early learning and development, from infancy to school age, when children gain the skills and attitudes they need to succeed in school. Supporting families in their relationships with their children promotes learning, healthy development, and later success in school and in life.

How can early childhood professionals engage families to support school readiness?

Build supportive, trusting, and ongoing relationships with families

Look for strengths in families, such as the warm and responsive relationship they have with their child. Share your observations with the family. For example, “I’ve noticed she smiles as soon as she sees your face.” Or, “I know it’s hard for you when he cries as you leave for work. How can I help?”

Engage family members in discussions about their children’s learning and development. For example, “She was stacking and knocking blocks over again and again today. She seems to be exploring how one action affects another.”

Provide a warm, welcoming environment. Work with families to create spaces that reflect the cultures and values of their community.

Encourage families to join in and contribute to classroom experiences. For example, ask family members to share their special talents, like playing an instrument or telling a story.

Tailor communication to fit families’ unique interests, cultures, and languages. Provide written information in the languages of families in your program.

Invite families to plan parent nights, offer input about curriculum planning, and join or lead professional development learning opportunities.

Adapted from [Understanding Family Engagement Outcomes: Research to Practice Series, Family Engagement and School Readiness](#).

This document was developed with funds from Grant #90HC0014 for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, and Office of Child Care, by the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. This resource may be duplicated for noncommercial uses without permission.

Invite families to explore all areas of school readiness with their children

Domain of Learning and Development	Ideas for families to promote school readiness:
Social and Emotional	<p>Recognize and respond to children’s needs by modeling kindness, sharing, and working together.</p> <p>Engage in warm and sensitive interactions to promote self-regulation (the ability to manage one’s emotions).</p>
Language and Literacy	<p>Talk, read, sing, and tell stories.</p> <p>Speak and read to children in their home language(s).</p>
Cognition	<p>Play peek-a-boo or hide and seek.</p> <p>Join in problem-solving tasks, such as placing puzzle pieces or counting objects.</p> <p>Ask a child to tell a story and provide props for imaginary play.</p>
Perceptual, Motor, and Physical	<p>Encourage movement—dancing, running, skipping, drawing, and painting.</p> <p>Play outdoor games that involve movement and following directions.</p>
Approaches to Learning	<p>Encourage creativity and curiosity.</p> <p>Play with children so they engage longer, with more focus and more complexity.</p>

Each of these areas represents a domain of learning and development. We recognize that children’s learning experiences are integrated and can support more than one domain at a time. As skills develop in one area, they lead to growth in other domains. To learn more about fostering skills and behaviors essential to school readiness, go to the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework at <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/head-start-early-learning-outcomes-framework>



Early childhood professionals and their situations are unique. How might these ideas work for you and your program?

What strategies do you already use to promote school readiness?

For more information about this resource, please contact us:

PFCE@ecetta.info | 1-866-763-6481

