



Family and Community Partnerships



FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

The Family and Community Partnerships domain addresses practices that support children's well-being in the program, at home, and in the community. Programs that build strong community connections, respect families as their children's first teacher, and honor each family's values give children a more complete learning experience. By listening to families' needs and preferences, and by working with community resources, programs support children and families both within the program and outside in the community. In addition, early care and education programs often serve as a trusted resource for families by sharing guidance on children's development, nutrition, and overall well-being, helping parents feel supported in caring for their child.

Family engagement is a two-way process. Families, teachers, and program staff work together to build positive, goal-focused relationships. These relationships grow when both sides share responsibility and respect each other's strengths. Research shows that strong family-teacher relationships are linked to children being more engaged with teachers and peers in the classroom (Lewis et al., 2023). When these relationships are developed and fostered, a child's overall learning and wellbeing is enhanced (Iruka et al. 2015).

At the program level, family partnerships mean that parents are active in their children's learning and in the program itself. Families and staff work together toward goals that parents set for themselves and their children. Early care and education programs that partner with families and community services help improve family well-being, strengthen parent-child relationships, and support children's learning and growth. Programs that include family engagement as part of their quality standards, such as offering parenting support or family services, are more effective in promoting fair and positive outcomes for children (Sabol et al., 2018). By working with families and community partners in ways that respect each family's priorities and strengths, early care and education programs create environments where children can thrive.

Note: As with all Step Up To Quality Standards, the information presented in this document does not replace licensing requirements or operating standards that may apply to a program.

KEY TERMS

- **Educational Training:** A program event for families to teach them about children's learning, development, health, or safety.
- **Community Resource:** Any organization or service available to support families and/or children.

FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS/COMMUNITY RESOURCES

At all levels, the standards in the area of Family Partnerships and Community Resources encourage early care and education programs to utilize tools that will identify family needs and provide them with resources within the community to meet those needs. Documentation of the tools and their outcomes are used to support the children and families served.

	Standard	Verification Visit	Tips	FAQs
Bronze	Family Partnerships/ Community Resources: Program completes a tool that identifies the needs of each whole family within 30 days of enrollment and then annually.	DCY specialists will look for a completed tool that identifies family needs in at least three areas, including: • Developmental or educational needs; • Health needs; and • Resource needs (such as food, utility assistance). DCY specialists will look for documentation of resources provided to the family.	Resources must be provided to all families at the Bronze level and can be customized to their needs or provided for all three required areas. This could be a generic list of available resources or pamphlets of community resources. Programs may use the DCY sample family assessment or another tool. Programs may create their own form and process. If you create your own form, please ensure that it asks the families about their needs in the three required areas. You may interview the family and document the questions and their answers rather than having the family complete a form. Document in writing what resources were provided to the family with the referral name and contact information of the person, organization, or entity.	What if an enrolled family declines to participate in the needs assessment? Every attempt should be made to work with the family to complete the family needs assessment. If the family declines to participate, written documentation signed by the family should be on file. How often is the family needs assessment completed? A family needs assessment must be completed within 30 days of enrollment and then annually. Although not required, best practice is to update the assessment if an additional child in the family is enrolled in the program. What kind of resources should be provided to families? Any resources that are available in the community to assist families. A comprehensive list of community resources available in all 88 counties is available on the www.helpmegrow.org website. Select the <i>Community Resource Directories</i>.



	Standard	Verification Visit	Tips	FAQs
Silver	Family Partnerships/ Community Resources: Program completes referrals for families that have identified needs within 30 days of receiving the completed family needs assessment.	DCY specialists will look for documentation of the program's referral process and all completed referrals.	The referral process should describe how needs are discussed with families, how referrals are offered, how resources are identified, whether parents are given information or the referral is made for them, a parent's right to decline a referral, referral dates, and to whom referrals were made.	
Gold	Family Partnerships / Community Resources: Program offers two annual educational trainings, workshops, or events for families. Follow-up with families on referrals provided, within 30 days from the date of referral, to determine if needs are being met for services.	DCY specialists will look for all of the following: • Documentation of two annual educational opportunities; • Documentation of the program's referral follow up process; and • Evidence that follow up was completed with families for whom a referral was made to determine if needs were met. DCY specialists may also ask questions regarding the referral process and request documentation of the program's referral process.	Please be sure that all documentation is dated and includes complete information. Keep documentation of who attended the event and any other evidence such as photos or written feedback from families. Creating a tracking sheet of reminders for all referrals can help you remember to follow up within 30 days. Best practice is to have a process to support families when their needs have not been met (e.g., make a new referral, identify a different resource, etc.)	Do all events have to be for all families, or may programs offer separate events for families with children in specific age groups? Yes. Programs may offer different events at different times for specific age groups, as long as all families are offered two events within the year.

CITATIONS

Sabol, T. J., Sommer, T. E., Sanchez, A., & Kinghorn, A. (2018). A new approach to defining and measuring family engagement in early childhood education programs. *AERA Open*, 4(3), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858418785904>

Lewis, H.R.; Lipscomb, S.T.; Hatfield, B.E.; Weber, R.; Green, B.; Patterson, L. Family–Teacher Relationships and Child Engagement in Early Care and Education. *Societies* 2023, 13, 67. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc13030067>

Iruka, I.U., T. Durden, & P. Kennel. 2015. “Changing Faces: Parenting, Culture, and Child Learning and Development.” *ZERO TO THREE* 35 (4): 0–18.]