



Collaborative partnerships with partners and families

Relationships with children and with families are at the heart of what we do as educators, educational leaders, and Early Childhood, Education and Care service providers. At the heart of all of the Quality Areas, Principles and Practices lies the core belief that children and families, regardless of who they are and where they live, deserve high quality education and care.

The children and families we work with, as well as the sites on which our services are located, are part of rich, networked communities of councils, family groups, cultures and places, and the connections between the children and families, and the communities in which they live, work and play are fundamental to achieving quality outcomes for children.

Achieving genuine and respectful connections with communities, and genuine and respectful partnerships with families requires active communication, consultation and collaboration.

The aim of this summary is to provide you with an opportunity to reflect on the existing ways in which you connect and collaborate with children, families and communities, and to consider new and different strategies which you can incorporate into your program and service to build on these connections. This summary will also explore what current research says about the importance of these connections.

First, let's look at what the research says

The recent key findings about partnerships with children, families and communities tell us:

- When families are involved in their child's early education and care, their child achieves more regardless of their socioeconomic level, ethnic or racial background, or the parents' educational level (McDermott, 2010).
- By the time a child is three years old, 90% of their brain is developed – therefore the quality of relationships and learning environments for babies and toddlers is critically important. (MCEECDYA, 2011) As many children spend time in the years birth to three in a shared care arrangement (between families and early childhood services), partnerships with families are essential to fostering discussion and growth around this development.
- Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory reminds us that children's development is influenced by their relationships with parents, family and friends; their experiences in settings such as childcare and school; and by the customs, laws and the cultural values of the community. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)

- When educators respect the unique strengths of each family, collaborative partnerships are strengthened and the continuity of learning between homes and educational settings is enhanced. (Arthur, L., Beecher, B., Harrisons, C., & Morandini, C., 2003).
- In genuine partnerships, families and early childhood educators:
 - Value each other's knowledge of each child
 - Value each others' contributions to and roles in each child's life
 - Trust each other
 - Communicate freely and respectfully with each other
 - Share insights and perspectives about each child
 - Engage in shared decision making' (EYLF, 2009, p. 12).

So what do these findings mean for educators?

They mean that the experiences children have while in our care are important – they impact on their brain development, and are part of the important “relationship learning” that helps brains grow. They mean that, while knowing about developmental milestones is important, educators need to be aware that each child is an individual – having a good relationship with children and families will help you be more attuned to when something might be a concern. They mean that educators should be aware that children are learning to manage their own feelings, and that this learning – which involves trial and error, and sometimes behaviours that challenge us – is hugely important to how their brains are growing, changing and forming. The findings also, perhaps most importantly, remind us that children need to experience a wide range of moments – happy and sad, easy and difficult – in order to build a strong and healthy brain. Children need to experience risk, to make decisions, to try and to fail, sometimes over and over again, in order to form vital connections in their brain, connections that will impact on them for life.

How can services support collaborative partnerships with children, families and communities?

Some suggestions for broad strategies, visions and approaches include:

- ➔ Make connections
- ➔ Build positive relationships
- ➔ Warm and honest communication
- ➔ Genuine interest
- ➔ Be empathetic and supportive
- ➔ Share information
- ➔ Provide assistance to access support

Practical suggestions for building genuine relationships, connections and partnerships with communities include:

- ➔ Make extra efforts to reach vulnerable or hard to reach families
- ➔ Provide information on local community resources including parenting support agencies, local support groups
- ➔ Use text messages to remind families of special events.
- ➔ Discreetly share information about agencies able to provide financial assistance to families experiencing hardship
- ➔ Invite a public/community health nurse to visit
- ➔ Organise events like service birthdays and invite existing and past families (where possible) as this will help strengthen the relationship with families as well as providing them with an opportunity to network, share experiences and expertise.
- ➔ Send home photos, scrapbooks or portfolios of the children engaged in experiences with captions describing what or how they are learning, link to the EYLF.

Further Resources

To access more resources around collaborative partnerships in the IPSP online library (www.ipsplibrary.net.au), search for terms such as "families", "relationships" or "partnerships".

Read more about collaborative partnerships from PSC Alliance:

<http://server05.calyx.net.au:8080/psca-ds/bitstream/handle/123456789/170/BuildingStrongPartnershipWEB.pdf?sequence=1>

If you would like further support, please email the project officer, at enquiries@gowriesa.org.au

References

- Arthur, L., Beecher, B., Harrisons, C., & Morandini, C. (2003). Sharing the Lived Experiences of Children. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 8-13.
- Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for the Council of Australian Governments 2009. *Being, Belonging and Becoming The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, Canberra.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development*. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, USA.
- Mc Dermott, M. (2010). *Partners in Learning: A Parent's Guide to Partnership in Childcare*. Barnardos' Training and Resource Service, Ireland.
- MCEECDYA - Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (2011). *Engaging Families in the Early Childhood Development Story*, Department of Education and Children's Services, South Australia