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Engaging with families in
Family Day Care

Why is family engagement important?

Why is it important that we engage families in Family Day Care? And what does “engagement” actually mean?

To engage means to participate or become involved in something. We need families to participate and become involved in our Family Day Care.

Why?

1. Because families are children’s first and most influential teachers.
2. Because children learn more when families and educators work together to support their learning.
3. Because the importance of the role of the family is embedded in the curriculums we must follow – the Early Years Learning Framework and My Time, Our Place.
4. Because it is required in the National Quality Standard:

Standard 6.1 – Supportive relationships with families

“Respectful relationships with families are developed and maintained and families are supported in their parenting role.”



A woman wearing a white hat is blowing bubbles with a green wand. Several children, also wearing hats, are watching and holding their own bubble wands. The scene is outdoors, likely on a wooden deck or patio, with a house in the background. The air is filled with many colorful bubbles.

Children thrive when families and educators work together in partnership to support young children's learning.

Early Years Learning Framework

What do the learning frameworks and the National Quality Standard say?

The *Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)*, *My Time, Our Place (MTOPI)* and the National Quality Standard lay the foundations and expectations for us around engaging with families.

The Early Years Learning Framework

The introduction to the EYLF says that:

“The Framework has been designed for use by early childhood educators working in partnership with families, children’s first and most influential educators.”

and

“Learning in relation to the outcomes is influenced by:

- ▶ each child’s current capabilities, dispositions and learning preferences
- ▶ educators’ practices and the early childhood environment

▶ engagement with each child’s family and community

- ▶ the integration of learning across the outcomes.”

The most important area is the partnerships section of the EYLF, which tells us that:

“Learning outcomes are most likely to be achieved when early childhood educators work in partnership with families. Educators recognise that families are children’s first and most influential teachers. They create a welcoming environment where all children and families are respected and actively encouraged to collaborate with educators about curriculum decisions in order to ensure that learning experiences are meaningful. Partnerships are based on the foundations of understanding each other’s expectations and attitudes, and build on the strength of each other’s knowledge.

In genuine partnerships, families and early childhood educators:

- ▶ value each other's knowledge of each child
- ▶ value each other's 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.”

What does this actually mean?

1. Educators need to work in partnership with families and recognise that families also educate children.

2. Children will learn more when:

- educators work with families to ensure learning experiences are meaningful
- educators and families share and value what they both know about a child.





Standard 6.1 of the NQS

Standard 6.1 of the *National Quality Standard* requires that educators develop supportive relationships with families.

Element 6.1.1 – Families are supported from enrolment to be involved in the service and contribute to service decisions.

Element 6.1.2 – The expertise, culture, values and beliefs of families are respected and families share in decision-making about their child’s learning and wellbeing.

Element 6.1.3 – Current information is available to families about the service and relevant community services and resources to support parenting and family wellbeing.

What does this actually mean?

1. Families should be involved with our Family Day Care.

2. We need to respect each family’s beliefs and culture.

3. We need to support families in their role as parents and carers.





**Families are children's
first and most
influential educators.**

Early Years Learning
Framework

Why is family engagement important for children?

Children learn first from their families, and families are the most important influence on how and what children learn. When educators work with families, and when both share an understanding of what a child needs to learn and how they learn things, the child learns more.

When families and educators work together, a child's learning is:

- ▶ supported; and
- ▶ extended.

Unless an educator understands a child's family situation and background, and the family's beliefs, they cannot build on the knowledge that the child already has – to extend their skills and beliefs.

When a family feels supported in sharing their knowledge of their child with their educator, especially their knowledge of their learning and development, the educator can use this knowledge to uniquely help a child learn.

Family engagement is also important to foster a child's sense of belonging. Where there is a strong connection between the

child's home, the educator's home and the Family Day Care service, a child can feel like they belong at Family Day Care and at home, naturally. They do not have to develop a separate 'self' that belongs at their educator's home from the one they have at their own home.

Families can help reinforce the learning that has happened at Family Day Care – learning that is cemented in this way makes it easier for children to understand and remember new skills and knowledge. Learning that builds on what a child already has learnt from their family supports children to feel secure in what they are learning and its importance to them.

Family engagement with a child's learning helps a child to develop positive attitudes towards learning – their family wants them to learn and their educator does too!

Families don't have all the parenting skills they need – especially when they first become parents or carers of a child. Educators can help children by supporting parents and carers in their role – and helping them learn more about how to be great parents and carers.

Why is family engagement important for families?

Why is it important for a family to engage with their child's Family Day Care?

Family Day Care is one of the first places outside of the family environment that a family and their child engages with. How they are received by that Family Day Care is important because it can help a family feel that:

- ▶ they belong to an extended community who share in the delight of providing a safe and welcoming environment to nurture their child
- ▶ other people can share the love they have for their child
- ▶ their role as a child's family is viewed as an important one
- ▶ they have already taught their child a lot – and the educator can help reinforce that learning
- ▶ it's okay to ask questions or express concerns.

Family Day Care helps connect families who may feel isolated at times. Families can form relationships with other families and the children in your care.

The more a family knows about the Family Day Care Service they are using and the educator who cares for their children, the more they feel they can trust the service and the educator. They then convey this feeling to the child so that the child understands that their family trusts you to keep them safe and help them learn.

It is never easy for a family to leave a young child for the first time. Or to leave a child with someone new to them. By developing real engagement with families, we can make that separation easier for them.



Partnerships [like those with families] are based on the foundations of understanding each other's expectations and attitudes, and build on the strength of each other's knowledge.

Early Years Learning Framework



Why is family engagement important for educators?

Family engagement in Family Day Care is important for educators because:

- ▶ by fostering strong relationships with the families in your care, children are more likely to feel safe and secure and thus be more able to achieve the outcomes of the learning framework
- ▶ by engaging families, you can learn quickly what a child likes, what they are interested in and what their current knowledge is
- ▶ families know more about their child than anyone else. You can only learn that knowledge if the family is engaged with you
- ▶ by understanding a child's family's cultures, beliefs and social situation, you can help reinforce their sense of belonging
- ▶ when a family is engaged, they are more likely to reinforce the skills and knowledge you are teaching
- ▶ encouraging family engagement enables open communication between educator and family, where ideas can be shared and extended upon in both the child's home and Family Day Care environment
- ▶ it is a requirement of the National Quality Framework
- ▶ engagement will help you develop relationships with families that are warm and trusting – an engaged family is less likely to have a negative experience
- ▶ you can use the feedback from families to improve as an educator
- ▶ you can tap into the knowledge and skills of family members as part of your program. Do you have a family member that is a great gardener or a great cook or who has specialist knowledge or skills from their work? Use them in your program!

What would your Family Day Care look like if you have positive family engagement?

Family Day Care educators who are truly engaged with families and whose families are truly engaged with them, would:

- ▶ treat families as the experts they are with their own child or children
- ▶ respect the varied ways families raise children
- ▶ know each family's learning goals for their child
- ▶ have lots of different ways of finding out about a family and child when they first enrol
- ▶ have things in your home that link to the cultures, languages, communities and family life of the children you care for (for example, pictures, cultural artefacts, pictures of their family or home)
- ▶ have warm and friendly interactions at pick-up and drop-off time – as an educator, you would share information about a child's learning at your service and seek information about a child's learning at home
- ▶ have different methods of communicating with families in place – and understand which method each family prefers
- ▶ help support families in their role as parents and carers – reinforcing the positive things a family does and the importance of their role to the child
- ▶ help families get to know other families in your service (could you host a weekend morning tea or BBQ for all the families in your service?)
- ▶ make time to have longer in-depth conversations with families (pick-up and drop-off times can be rushed)
- ▶ show families how they can be involved in your service.



Positive family engagement is evident when the educator feels like an extended part of a family network and is respected for their specialist skills and knowledge.



How do we engage families in Family Day Care?

ACECQA¹ states that “to establish relationships with the families at your service, you need to find genuine ways to listen to and communicate with families.

In genuine partnerships, families and educators:

- ▶ value each other’s knowledge of each child
- ▶ value each other’s roles in each child’s life
- ▶ trust each other
- ▶ communicate freely and respectfully with each other
- ▶ share insights and perspectives about each child and engage in shared decision-making.”

ACECQA also states that “your service can create partnerships with families by:

- ▶ involving families in decision-making
- ▶ inviting families to participate in events at the service

1. [Quality Area 6: Building Partnerships With Families, ACECQA.](#)

- ▶ building a sense of community by helping families feel comfortable talking with educators
- ▶ increasing family–educator collaboration in the planning of quality outcomes for children.”

Some of the most important times to engage families are:

- ▶ when they are new to our Family Day Care
- ▶ when they are enrolling a sibling into our Family Day Care
- ▶ when the family is going through a transition or a difficult time
- ▶ when a new baby has been welcomed into the family
- ▶ when a child is unwell – so that the family continue to feel connected
- ▶ before their child goes to school
- ▶ at the start and end of each school year (for school-aged children).

What is the role of the Family Day Care service?

Engaging families with your Family Day Care isn't just an educator's role. Your Family Day Care service also has an important role in this because they:

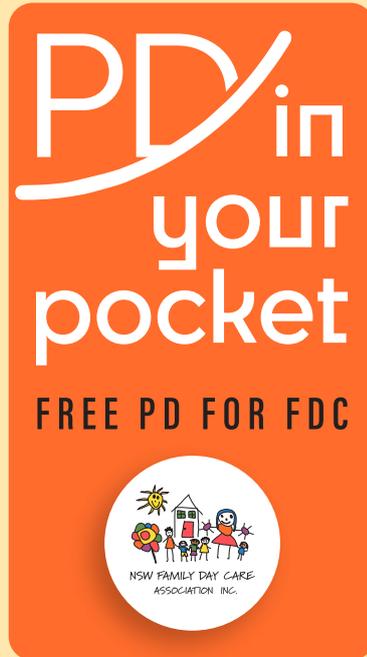
- ▶ are the ones that first meet each family and explain how Family Day Care works
- ▶ introduce the family to you as an educator
- ▶ are the ones who will mostly deal with administration issues like fees and allowable absences and other Child Care Subsidy issues
- ▶ are monitoring and supporting you as an educator – they are the ones who guarantee to the family that you are capable of providing quality education and care to their child
- ▶ set the policies that you operate under – they have to consult families about policy changes
- ▶ often have their own ways of communicating with families, such as service newsletters

- ▶ help connect all the educators and all the families using the service together. A Family Day Care service is made up of:
 - the children that the educators care for
 - the educators that provide care
 - the staff of the service (co-ordinators, managers, administration staff)
 - the families that have chosen this particular Family Day Care service to provide education and care to their child.

Are there ways you can support your service to further engage with the families of the children you care for? Does your service support you to engage easily with families? How does the process of enrolment help (or hinder you) to truly engage with families? Does it feel like you and the service work together as a team to engage families?



This booklet is part of the PD In Your Pocket professional development program.



This topic – **Engaging with families in Family Day** – has an accompanying webinar and video, both of which can be viewed as videos or listened to as podcasts.

There is also a Facebook Group where you can discuss the topic with other Family Day Care educators in NSW.

For more information about PD In Your Pocket, go to:

www.nswfdc.org.au/pdinyourpocket



NSW FAMILY DAY CARE
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“Families,
children’s
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