

## Partnering with Parents

“The home environment should shine through the daily routines of every individual child.”

~ Chris Meyers-Zacharias, Lead Teacher/Advocate, Boise, Idaho

### Why Partner With Parents?

“Development and learning are rooted in culture and supported by the family. A child’s language, knowledge, traditions, and family expectations are the primary influences on development. Learning is enriched by stable, nurturing relationships within the family and community.”

~ Idaho Early Learning eGuidelines Guiding Principle



### Strengthening Families

Research shows that there are five protective factors that build strong families and environments. This in turn promotes healthy child development. This set of protective factors is also known as the “*Strengthening Families Approach*.”

These five factors are:

1. **Parental resilience**
2. **Social connections**
3. **Knowledge of parenting and child development**
4. **Concrete support in times of need**
5. **Social and emotional competence of children**

Child care can use the *Strengthening Families Approach* to help families recognize their strengths.

- **Parental resilience:** Offer a true “open door” policy to help parents bounce back from challenges. Connect with them on a personal level.
- **Social Connections:** Offer opportunities for parents to befriend and support each other. Create a “welcoming space” with comfortable, adult-sized furniture to sit and visit in. Have holiday parties, volunteer opportunities, Facebook pages, etc.
- **Knowledge of parenting and child development:** Help parents understand their child’s abilities and needs at each age. Explain to them how they can meet those needs. Offer educational opportunities like parenting classes, and provide lots of information on parenting and child development. Parents who understand their child’s capabilities and know appropriate discipline techniques will have much less stress in their lives. This helps them stay calm and confident as parents.

- **Concrete support in times of need:** Post resource lists in highly visible locations. Include contact information for food banks, counseling services, and other local resources. If possible, keep emergency food and clothing on-site for anyone who needs it.
- **Healthy social and emotional development of children:** Help parents develop positive, nurturing relationships with their children. Offer opportunities for families to eat, play, and have fun in a neutral setting with other families. Hold regular parent conferences to discuss the strengths and challenges of their children. These steps can help ensure that the child feels loved and cherished.

## Other Ways to Partner with Parents:

- Create arrival and departure routines for families.
- Create daily sheets for parents. Include a written record of what the child ate, how they slept, what they did, and any other details that parents may want to know about their child's day.
- Communicate daily with parents. Use a variety of methods to communicate: verbally at drop-offs and pick-ups, through newsletters, via e-mail or phone calls, with a parent journal, etc.
- Encourage parents to use their home language with their child, and encourage the child to use it in childcare. Learn words, gestures, "signs," and "games" that reflect the child's family and culture.
- Display children's family photos. Offer to let children look at or hold them if they want.
- Provide materials that reflect children's homes and families. This may include photos, books, posters, games, puzzles, food, or dolls.
- Talk about behavior and development concerns with parents. Partner with them to share concerns with medical and developmental experts. Always respect the family's privacy and confidentiality.
- Encourage family traditions, routines, and activities. Ask parents to share any rituals, traditions, and activities that can take place in the classroom.
- Recognize that some families have different expectations about how their children grow and learn.



*Here a caregiver reads a child her "family book" with pictures of her family. The child helped create the book, and she enjoys looking at the pictures and talking with her caregiver about her family.*

- Encourage children to tell family stories.
- Tell children stories about their family, community, and culture.
- Display children’s early exploratory art and share it with parents.
- Help parents get involved in your center. Hold parent meetings, fundraisers, and satisfaction surveys. Invite them to serve on work groups and on the board of directors.
- Communicate with intent. Ask parents how they prefer to get information.
- Create a media center, interactive bulletin board, and video classroom activities.
- Show an interest in parents. Share information about yourself with them.
- Let parents know, privately and publicly, that you appreciate them. Say “Thank you” in a variety of ways: personally, in newsletters, in notes, etc.



*To learn more about partnering with parents, view the Resources and References found at the end of these materials. You can also learn more by visiting Idaho AEYC’s Strengthening Families website at <http://idahoaeyc.org/sfmain.php>*