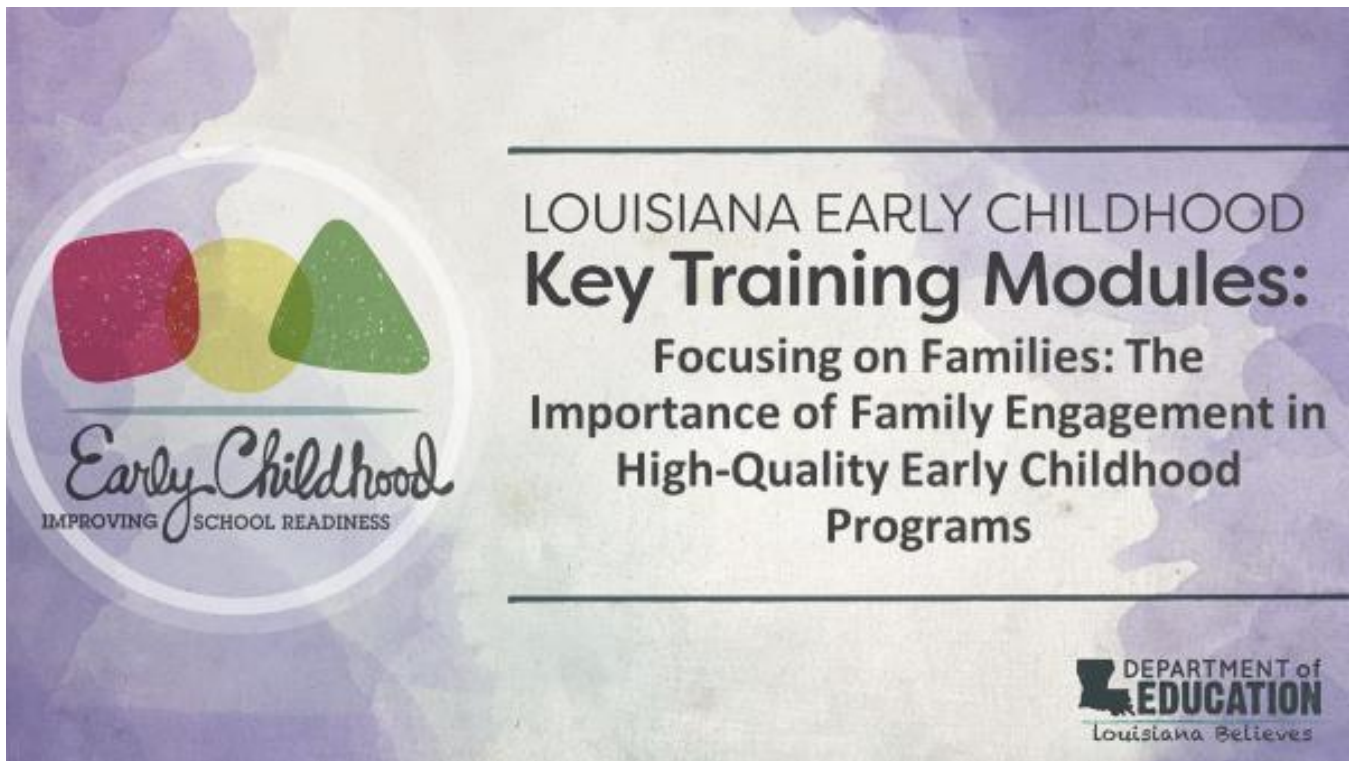# Module 3B: Outline & Manual

*Focusing on Families: The Importance of Family Engagement in High-Quality Early Childhood Programs*

# Contents

# Module Description

Strong collaborative relationships with families are essential in high-quality early childhood programs. This session will introduce the role and highlight the importance of family engagement. Content presented will focus on the characteristics of families in the 21st century and explore how to actively engage them in the development and learning of their children. Participants will learn strategies to build relationships with families, actively engage them in programmatic decisions and classroom activities, and support them in their role as their child's first and most important teacher by providing them with ways to facilitate their child's learning and development at home.

## Materials

- Chart paper and markers
- Copy paper
- Notecards
- Pencils or pens for participants
- Handouts
    - *Exploring Family Relationships*
    - *Making Families Feel Included*
    - *Parent Involvement vs. Family Engagement Sorting Activity*
    - *Family Engagement Inventory*
    - *Example Intake Interview Questions*
    - *NAEYC: Deepening Families' Understanding of Children's Learning in Centers Article*
    - *Pre- and Post-Assessment Evaluations*

# Learning Outcomes

*Candidates who actively participate in this session will be able to…*
- Explain why it is important to be accepting and supportive of all family types and individual family needs
- Define early childhood family engagement and describe its importance in high-quality early childhood programs
- Describe the role of families in their children's development and learning
- Identify the role of families in high-quality early childhood programs
- List strategies for encouraging family engagement, communicating with families, facilitating family meetings, and supporting families as they actively facilitate the development and learning of their children at home

# Training Agenda

Total Content Time: 2.0 hours
Total Session Time:  hours

| Item | Time/Duration |
|---|---|
| Registration/Sign-In | 30 minutes prior to course start (*not included in total course time*) |
| Welcome, Session & Group Introductions | 20 minutes |
| The Definition of Family | 35 minutes |
| Defining and Exploring the Essential Elements of Family Engagement | 35 minutes |
| Family Engagement Strategies | 35 minutes |
| Session Closing & Post-Assessment | 15 minutes (*not included in total course time*) |
| Individualized Q&A | 15 minutes following course completion (*not included in total course time*) |

# Training Manual



*Distribute the Pre-Assessment Evaluation as participants enter the training.*
- *Ask them to complete the Pre-Assessment Evaluation and return to you*
- *Briefly review the forms to identify the group's needs*
- *Emphasize the learning objective(s) identified by the group as needing support*
- *Modify the session to spend more time on knowledge, skills, and abilities needed by the group*
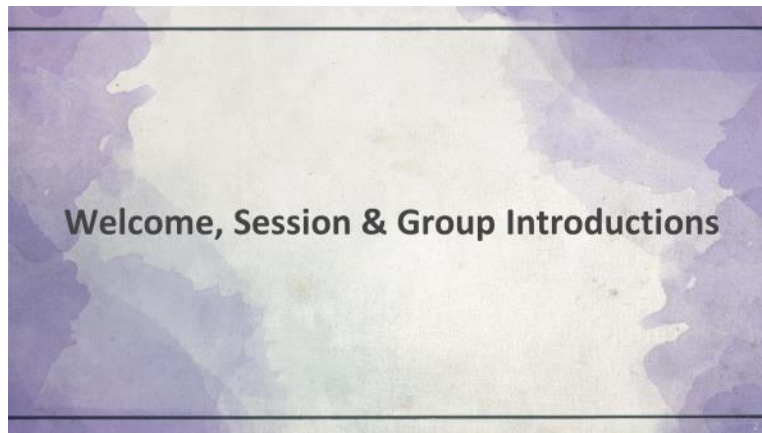


Good morning/afternoon. This is a presentation of the Louisiana Early Childhood Key Training Modules.  I am (insert name) and I will be your trainer today.

I want to welcome and thank you for taking the time to join us today. I appreciate your dedication to the young children in Louisiana. Your efforts to grow will help them grow, so thank you.

Our session today focuses on the importance of family engagement in high-quality early childhood classrooms.
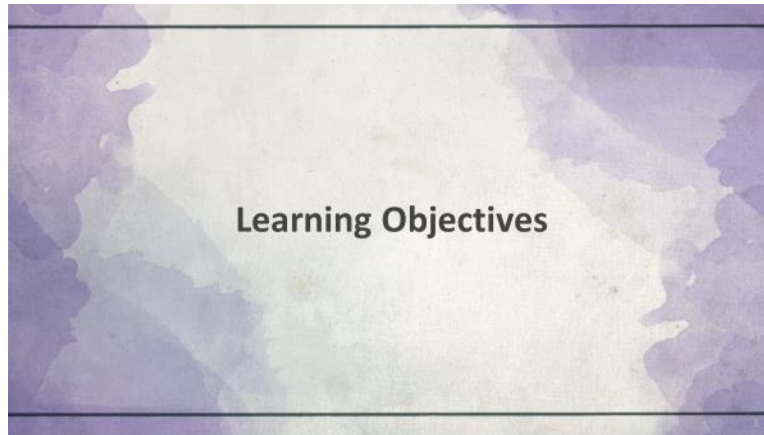
**Learning Objectives**

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

- Explain why it is important to be accepting and supportive of all family types and individual family needs
- Define early childhood family engagement and describe its importance in high-quality early childhood programs
- Describe the role of families in their children's development and learning
- Identify the role of families in high-quality early childhood programs
- List strategies for encouraging family engagement, communicating with families, facilitating family meetings, and supporting families as they actively facilitate the development and learning of their children at home

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*Read each learning objective aloud.*

- **Explain why it is important to be accepting and supportive of all family types and individual family needs**
- **Define early childhood family engagement and describe its importance in high-quality early childhood programs**
- **Describe the role of families in their children's development and learning**
- **Identify the role of families in high-quality early childhood programs**
- **List strategies for encouraging family engagement, communicating with families, facilitating family meetings, and supporting families as they actively facilitate the development and learning of their children at home**

Are there any additional points we should add to our list of objectives for today?

*Record responses on chart paper.*

Introduction Activity

- Write your definition of "family"
- Bring your notecard and form a circle around the room
- Be prepared to share your:
  - Name
  - Role
  - Definition of family

Now that I have introduced the session, let's take the time to learn a bit more about one another.

To help you become acquainted with one another and discuss families at the same time, you are going to create your definition of family and then share and discuss your definition with others in the room.

*Review the directions with participants:*
- **Write your definition of "family" on one of the notecards that are provided**
- Once you are done, **bring your notecard and form a circle around the room** and wait for instructions
- **Be prepared to share your name, role, and definition of family**

*Once participants form the circle around the room, instruct every other person to move inside the circle and face the person that was initially to their left, forming and inner and outer circle. Instruct participants to:*
- *Introduce themselves and share their role in early childhood care and education, then*
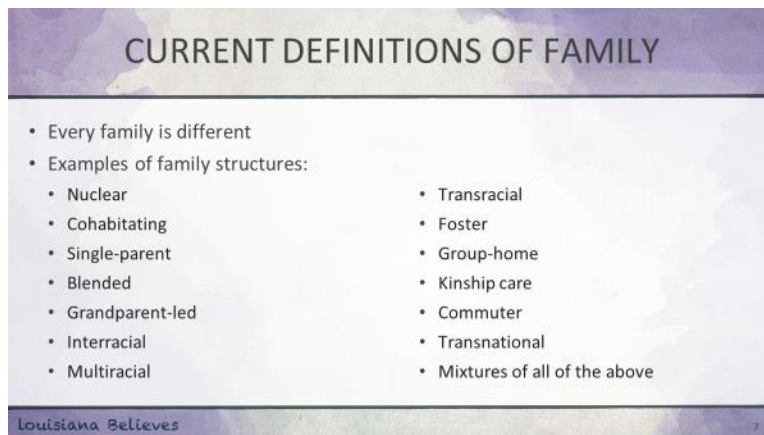- *Share their definition of family with one another and discuss.*

*After a minute, instruct the inner circle to move to the left, pairing them with a new partner and encourage them to repeat the introduction and discussion of family definitions.*

*Trainer Note: This can be repeated one or two more times based on the time remaining after the trainer and session introductions.*

Defining Family

Thank you for taking the time to share your definitions of family. It was great to hear [interject some of the definitions you heard or observations of the participants' interactions]. We will now take a closer look at the families of the 21st century to help us develop our definition of family for the purpose of our time together today.



CURRENT DEFINITIONS OF FAMILY

- Every family is different
- Examples of family structures:
  - Nuclear
  - Cohabitating
  - Single-parent
  - Blended
  - Grandparent-led
  - Interracial
  - Multiracial
  - Transracial
  - Foster
  - Group-home
  - Kinship care
  - Commuter
  - Transnational
  - Mixtures of all of the above

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One thing that we know for sure is that **every family is different**.

Not so long ago most people thought of a family with two parents and two children as the "typical family." This is defined as a nuclear family. In some cases, grandparents were also included in this definition. But the overall premise of this definition is that families are individuals who are biologically related.

Families today are much more diverse – meaning they are different from this definition in the multiple ways.

The U.S. Census Bureau defines family as "a group of two or more people related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together." What are you thought on this definition? Does it encompass all the family types today?

_Trainer Note:_ _This can be presented as a rhetorical question or opened for discussion._

The Council of Professional Recognition stated that "when a group of people share an emotional bond and common values and contribute to each other's well-being, this can be called a family." What do you think about this definition? Is it more appropriate?

| _Trainer Note:_ _This can be presented as a rhetorical question or opened for discussion._ |
| --- |

No matter how you define it, you as early childhood professionals most recognize that families come in all types. There are many types of families:

_Highlight some of the more prevalent family types on the list._

- A **nuclear** family is usually two parents and their children, by birth or adoption,
- **Cohabitating** families look like nuclear families, but parents are not married
- **Single-parent** families have only one primary caregiver, male or female, however, most single parents are mothers
  - o Over half of all children will spend some portion of their lives in this type of structure
- **Blended** families are formed via divorce and remarriage
- **Grandparent-led** families are families in which the grandparents, not the parents, are the primary caregivers
- **Interracial, multiracial,** and **transracial** families have parents that are different races.
  - o **"**For example, if a mother is French and Spanish, and the father is African American, the child would be multiracial. When parents adopt children from a different race, this is transracial."



_Distribute the Exploring Family Relationships Activity handout._

_Instruct participants to reflect on which family types are part of their programs. As a part of this reflection, they will complete part one of the handout._

_After the participants finish, point out that no matter the structure of the families within your program, or your feelings about their family structure, you must welcome, accept, and work with them to provide the best for their children._

EVERY FAMILY IS UNIQUE

- Relationships
- Communication
- Expectations
- Beliefs

We have established that there are many types of families. In addition to being unique in their structure, a family's culture also adds to their uniqueness.

The relationships within families look different based upon family culture. Some children are discouraged from looking adults in the eye as this is considered a sign of disrespect. I am sure you can think of many ways that this can affect adult-child interactions in the classroom.

Some cultures see the father as the primary decision maker, so women may refrain from engaging in discussions where choices must be made. This represents a cultural difference in communication styles.

Expectations for children's learning and behaviors also vary by culture. Some cultures are more focused on academic skills where others are concerned with elements that focus more on the development of social emotional skills.

*Encourage participants to reflect on how beliefs can differ based on culture and to think of some examples. Have a few participants share. Consider some examples from your own experiences that you can share to facilitate conversation.*

No matter the cultural beliefs or expectations of families, we must respect their culture and work to understand family's expectations for their children and their children's care and education. This respect leads to trust, a necessary component of family engagement.

We must remember that all families want the best for their children, and we can't expect them to sacrifice their cultural beliefs to be a part of our programs. We must work together to honor their wishes as long as they don't conflict with regulations. And, if conflicts occur, they must be explained to families and we must work to find a common ground.

*Ask participants to refer to their Exploring Family Relationships Activity handout, this time encouraging them to reflect on the uniqueness of each family, based upon cultural or other factors. As part of this reflection, they will complete part two of the handout.*

Just like family type, no matter the unique characteristics of the families within your program, or how they align with your beliefs or expectations, you must welcome, accept, and work with them to provide the best for their children.
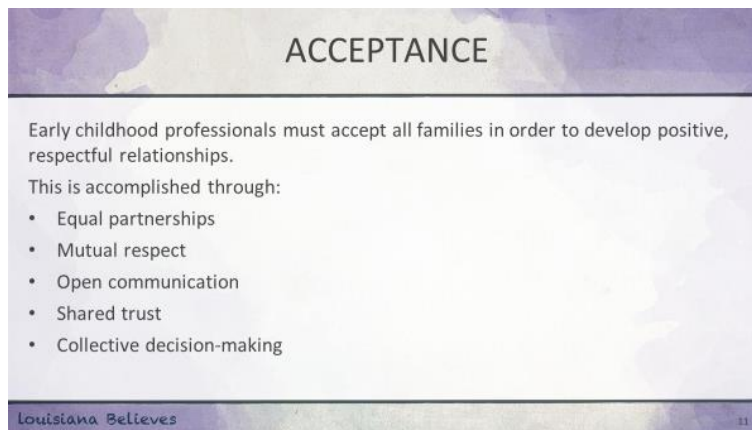


As you can tell from the concluding statements from both reflection activities, is that **acceptance** is a necessary component in making families feel welcome and working with them to provide the best for their children.

**Early childhood professionals must accept all families in order to develop positive, respectful relationships.**

*Encourage participants to share what makes them feel accepted. You can then use what participants share to explain each item below.*

Accepting all families can be done through:
- Considering one another as **equal partners** that contribute to the relationship in different ways,
- Valuing and **respecting** each other's opinions and beliefs, no matter how different,
- **Listening and talking** to each other,
- Trying to understand and **trust** the other's point of view, and

- Conferring with each other when **making decisions**.

*Interject examples for each of these bullet points or ask participants to share what they think this looks like in high-quality programs.*

*Conclude by reiterating the importance of acceptance in the development of positive, respectful relationships in establishing strong family engagement practices.*



*Ask participants to refer to their Exploring Family Relationships Activity handout, this time encouraging them to reflect on how they make families feel accepted. As part of this reflection, they will complete part three of the handout.*
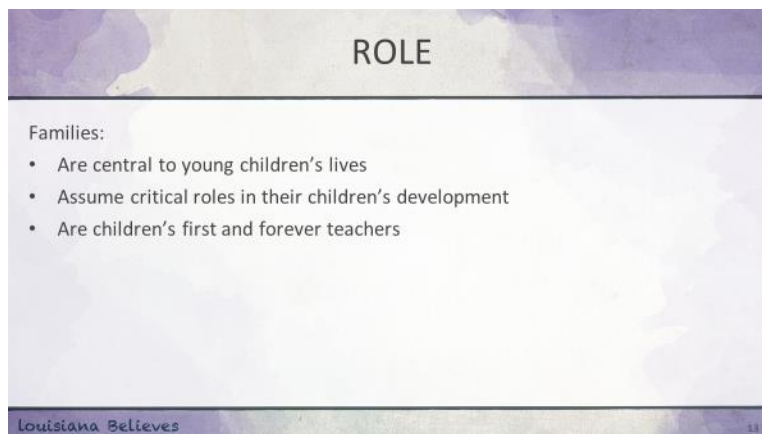


Our final step in exploring the definition of family is to consider the role families have in their child's development and learning. It is this role that is the primary consideration of family engagement.

We must recognize that families:

- **Are central to young children's lives** – they are their world. Children are only aware of the family dynamics and experiences that they have with their families. On the flip side, for families, their children are their world. We must recognize this when working with them.
- **Assume critical roles in their children's development** – families are responsible for their children's basic needs and they also provide them with their earliest and most meaningful experiences. One of their roles is finding the

best care and education possible for their children. We can expand this by increasing their role through family engagement.

- **Are children's first and forever teachers** – good, bad, or indifferent, children learn from their parents. They learn by watching them, they learn by mimicking them, and they learn about the world around them and much, much more from them.

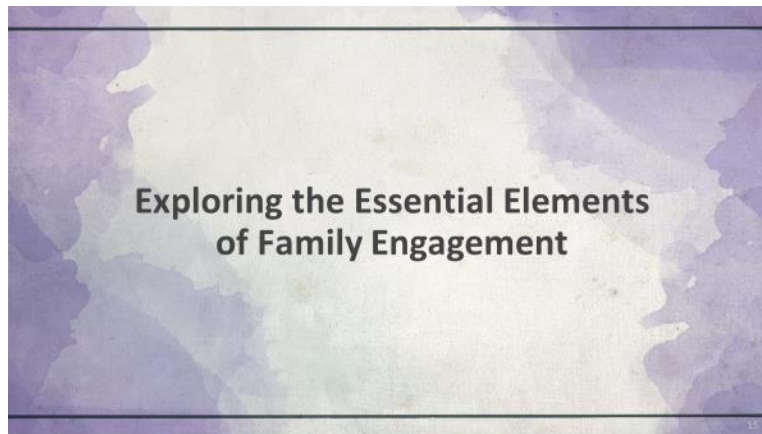In order to truly understand families, we must never forget or diminish their roles in their children's lives.



*Ask participants to refer to their Exploring Family Relationships Activity handout, this time encouraging them to reflect on how their families participate in their program. As part of this reflection, they will complete part four of the handout.*

*After participants finish part four of the handout, facilitate the Making Families Feel Included Content-Aligned Group Activity.*

Now that you have completed the reflective questions within the Exploring Family Relationships Activity handout, share and discuss in small groups your answers to each of the four prompts:

- Families that participate in my program include…
- The families I work with are unique because…
- I make families feel accepted by…
- Families participate in my program by…

Then brainstorm ways that you can make all families feel welcome and included in your programs. Be prepared to share your ideas with the whole group.

*Encourage participants to "turn and talk" and discuss what they think "family engagement" is. Walk around the room, listening to their discussions and facilitating if needed. After a few minutes, ask individual pairs to share with the larger group.*

*Trainer Note: Participants my share activities such as holiday parties, bringing in treats, participating in school fairs, and other activities. You are encouraged to accept these answers as foundational engagement activities, but you will need to lead participants to, and focus on those responses, that mirror deeper family engagement. Explain to participants that this session goes deeper into looking at family engagement through a high-quality lens and thus includes strategies that may be new to many participants.*

ELEMENTS

"How do early childhood education programs meet the challenge of engaging families in their child's early learning and development?"
- Participation
- Communication
- Engagement
- Learning
- Decision-making
- Systems

The National Association for the Education of Young Children, set out to answer the question of "**how do early childhood education programs meet the challenge of engaging families in their child's early learning and development?**"

Family engagement means just that, engaging families in their children's early learning and development within the early care and education setting or with childcare program. This is based on the premise we discussed earlier, that families play a substantial role in their children's development and learning.

NAEYC found that programs who were successful in family engagement follow six principles:
- Programs invite families to **participate** in decision making and goal setting for their child,
- Teachers and programs engage families in two-way **communication,**
- Programs and teachers **engage** families in ways that are truly reciprocal,
- Programs provide **learning** activities for the home and in the community,
- Programs invite families to participate in program-level **decisions** and wider advocacy efforts, and
- Programs implement a comprehensive program-level **system** for family engagement.

The Council for Professional Recognition provided additional information as to how early childhood professionals could put these into practice. We will explore each of their suggestions.



- Decision-making
- Advocacy
- Engagement
- Assistance

**Participation**

Why    How

*Explain to participants that after you present each of the components of family engagement, you will pause and allow time for them to discuss why each component is important and to reflect and discuss how they are doing, or could do, these things in their programs.*

*Draw their attention to the fact that the "why" is pointing to the left, and the "how" is pointing to the right – this is to represent that we have to know the "why" something is important and appropriate in order to inform "how" we are going to implement it into our programs.*

*Explain that each of these components also have key words to focus on.*

Key words for **participation** are:
- **Decision-making,**
- **Advocacy,**
- **Engagement,** and
- **Assistance.**

"Early childhood education programs encourage and validate family participation in decision making related to their children's education. Families should act as advocates for their children and early childhood education program by actively taking part in decision making opportunities."

Why is this important? How do you, or could you, do this in your program?



Key words for **communication** are:
- **Multi-faceted,**
- **Responsive,**
- **Co-initiated,** and
- **Continuous.**

"Consistent, two-way communication is facilitated through multiple forms and is responsive to the linguistic preference of the family. Communication should be both school and family initiated and should be timely and continuous, inviting conversations about both the child's educational experience as well as the larger program."

Why is this important? How do you, or could you, do this in your program?

Key words for **engagement** are:
- **Collaborate,**
- **Share,**
- **Engage,** and
- **Inform.**

"Families of early childhood education programs collaborate and exchange knowledge.  Family members share their unique knowledge and skills through volunteering and actively engaging in events and activities at schools.  Teachers seek out information about their students' lives, families, and communities and integrate this information into their curriculum and instructional practices."

Why is this important? How do you, or could you, do this in your program?



Key words for **learning** are:
- **Create,**
- **Sustain,**
- **Extend,** and
- **Enhance.**

"Early childhood education programs and families place an emphasis on creating and sustaining learning activities at home and in the community that extend the teachings of the program so as to enhance each child's early learning."

Why is this important? How do you, or could you, do this in your program?
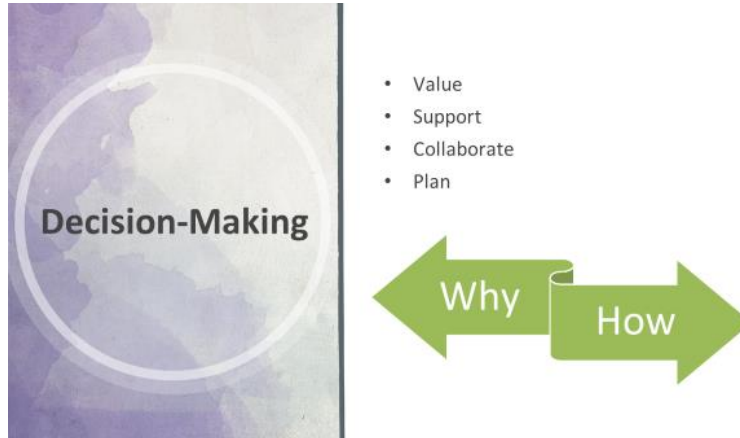


Key words for **decision-making** are:
- **Value,**
- **Support,**
- **Collaborate,** and
- **Plan.**

"Families create a home environment that values learning and supports programs. Programs and families collaborate in establishing goals for children both at home and at school."

Why is this important? How do you, or could you, do this in your program?
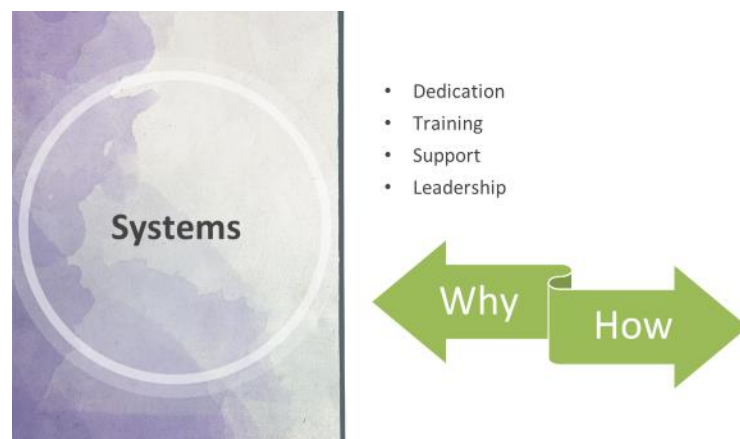


Key words for **systems** are:
- **Dedication,**
- **Training,**

- **Support,** and
- **Leadership.**

"Early childhood education programs create an ongoing and comprehensive system for promoting family engagement by ensuring that program leadership and teachers are dedicated, trained, and receive the supports they need to fully engage families."

Why is this important? How do you, or could you, do this in your program?
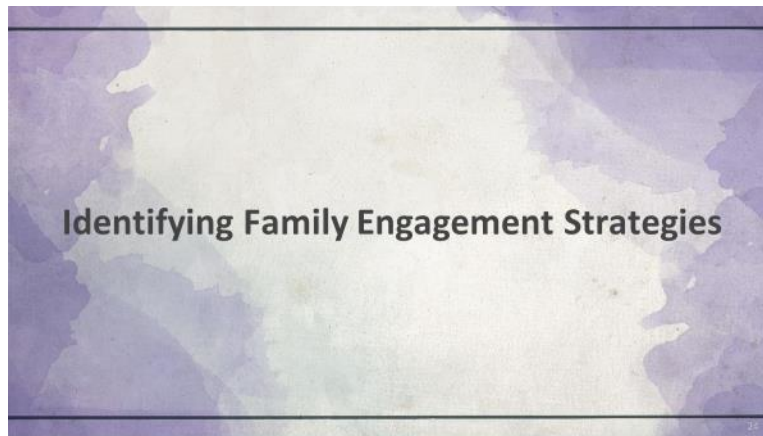


During the final section of our training today, we will take a closer look at a few of the essential elements, of family engagement mentioned in the previous section by exploring **family engagement strategies** that you can incorporate into your program.



To begin, we will look at the differentiation between parent involvement and family engagement.

*Ask participants to consider what the differences between parent involvement and family engagement may be. Or, what the difference is between being involved in something versus being engage with something.*

*Encourage the participants to share with a partner.*

INVOLVEMENT OR ENGAGEMENT
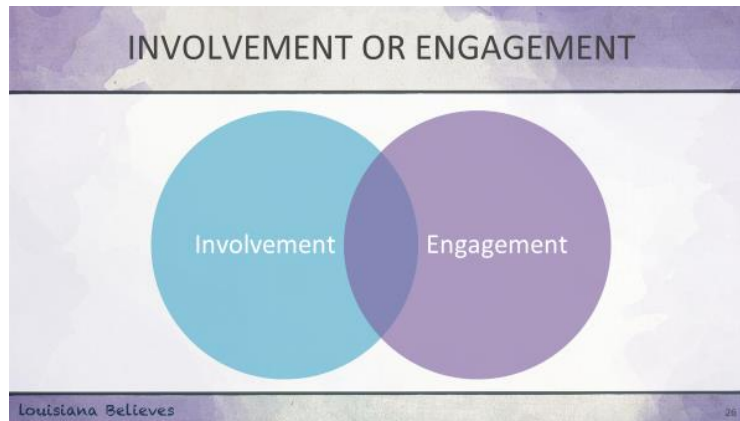
Parent **involvement** and family **engagement** are similar in that they both include interactions with families. The difference lies in the level of relationships between programs and families.

"Parent involvement occurs when parents participate in activities and take advantage of opportunities at their child's early care and learning setting."

Parent **involvement** includes activities and opportunities such as:
- Parents attending meetings and special events,
- Exchanging information between programs or teachers and parents about the children and events at home, and
- Programs or teachers providing advice or sharing resources to address parents' concerns or to assist with parenting challenges.
  - For example: teachers share potty training tips for toddlers or they ask parents what their children like to eat at home

"Early childhood professionals and programs typically initiate parent involvement. These activities are important and often beneficial to families."

"Family engagement happens when early childhood professionals and families engage in an interactive process of relationship-building."

Family **engagement** includes creating and maintaining more meaningful relationships with families. These close relationships enable programs to effectively partner with families, making them active participants in their children's learning.

This is done by:
- Creating plans with families that include ways to support children's development and learning at the center and at home,
- Revisiting these plans frequently, checking on children's progress and meeting to share new ideas, and
- Engaging families in multiple activities that involve them in making decisions about their children's development and learning at the center and at home.

"Most importantly, family engagement efforts support the parent-child relationships that are key to a child's healthy development, school readiness, and well-being now and in the future."
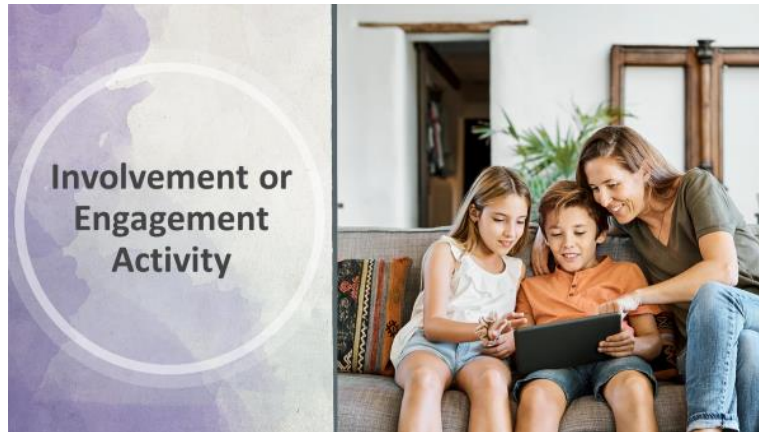
*Distribute the Parent Involvement vs. Family Engagement Sorting Activity handout.*



*Go over the activity instructions with participants. Explain that they will sort the items one the worksheet from parent involvement on the left-hand side to family engagement on the right.*

*Encourage them to keep in mind that activities should increase their ability to build relationships from lower levels of relationship building on the left to higher levels on the right.*
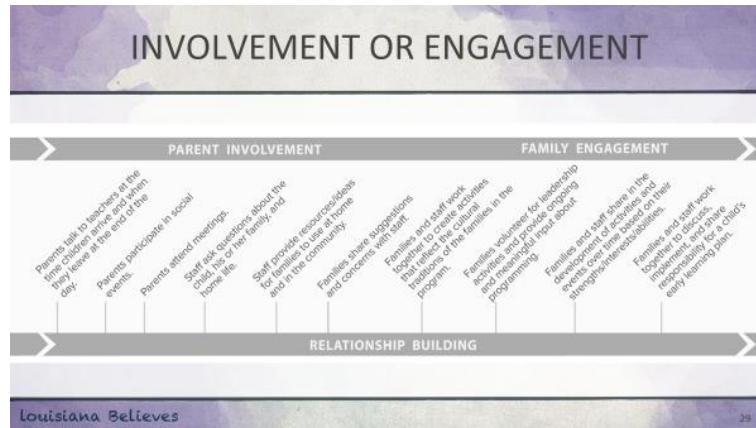
*To begin the activity, do the first one at the low-level and the last one at the high-level together and explain why each are placed there. Instruct the participants to complete the rest on their own. Facilitate and assist as needed.*

How did you do? *Review the results and discuss any participant questions and comments.*

*Point out that families have a greater role in center-based activities and practices at the higher level, or to the right.*



Now that we have had a chance to explore parent involvement and family engagement at a different level, we will explore strategies you can use in your programs to increase family engagement.

We will do this by considering the question put forth by NAEYC that we discussed earlier: "**how do early childhood education programs meet the challenge of engaging families in their child's early learning and development?**"

We will look at the following six strategies:
- **Creating positive first impressions,**
- **Learning about one another,**
- **Communicating with families,**
- **Sharing children's learning,**
- **Facilitating participation,** and
- **Supporting learning at home.**

CREATING POSITIVE FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Family engagement begins with first impressions:
• Websites
• Social media
• Email
• Phone calls
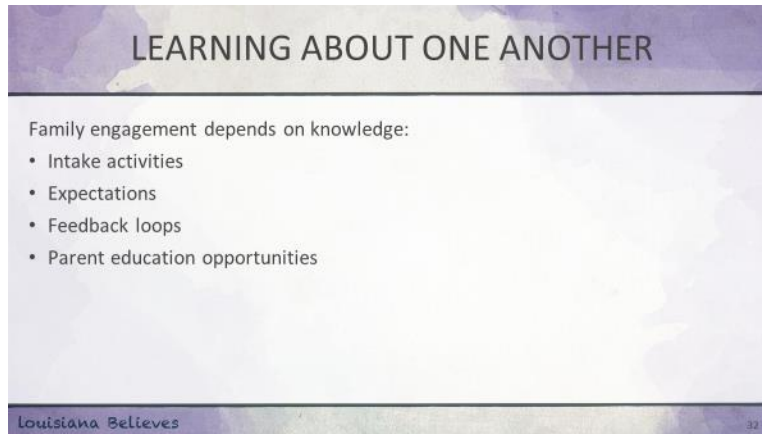• Open-door policies
• Center visits

Making a good first impression with families can have a long-lasting effect on a child. First impressions start even before a family makes their first in-person visit. First impressions can also make or break relationships with families.

There are several ways that first impressions are made, especially today when families often rely on the internet to learn about childcare programs in their area:
- **Websites** can influence many aspects of family engagement including making a first impression
  - If your program has a website it must be welcoming and informative for prospective families because it may be the first contact a family has with a program
- **Social media** also has a role in the initial impressions of your program
  - Social media often provides prospective families with a glimpse of the program and the activities within
  - It is important to share posts and pictures of children actively engaged in activities and experiences that facilitated development and learning (while following all online permissions, safety, and confidentiality guidelines)
- **Email** can be a way for prospective families to request additional information about the program
  - To make a good first impression programs should promptly respond to all emails in a professional, clear, and positive manner
- Despite all the technology available, families will often **call** to learn more about your program
  - Although things at a center can get quite busy, it is always important to have protocols in place that allow for someone to answer the phone during the day
  - It is also important to remember that prospective families can potentially hear activities going on in your center through the phone, so having a place away from the busy noises of the center is important
- Programs should implement **open-door policies**
  - Families, both prospective and current, should be able to visit the center at any time without an appointment
  - Programs should have procedures in place to facilitate impromptu visits smoothly
  - Smoothly facilitating unplanned visits can determine whether a prospective family will enroll their child in your program, or if a current family's relationship with and trust in a program will be developed and maintained
- There are many other ways that programs can encourage families to **visit the center** and see the program in action
  - This allows families to see how you are facilitating children's development and learning and experience all that their children are experiencing
  - Families can be encouraged to visit and participate in:

- Engaging children in learning activities like reading a book or helping in learning centers
- Helping with routine care such as rocking and talking with babies as they take a bottle
- Participating in special events where they can visit the center to get more information about the program like an open house for prospective families



**LEARNING ABOUT ONE ANOTHER**

Family engagement depends on knowledge:
- Intake activities
- Expectations
- Feedback loops
- Parent education opportunities

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**Family engagement depends on knowledge.**

"Once families have enrolled in your program, it is time to learn about one another and continue to build relationships. Building relationships with families in your program never ends because the children, family members, and program grow and change naturally over time. Establishing multiple touch points for families from the first day to the last day will support changing needs and expectations, ensure that your program responds to every family, and help every family stay engaged."

This can be accomplished in many ways, including:
- **Intake meetings or activities** are initial meetings between programs and families designed to gather and share information. These can be done in a variety of ways, but it is important that they occur before the child's first day. It is important that families feel comfortable to share information about their child and themselves and to ask questions about the program.
  - Meetings should include opportunities to learn about:
    - Families' and children's strengths and aspects of their lives,
    - Families' cultural preferences and expectations,
    - Families' opinions about their children's personalities,
    - Families' expectations regarding their children's daily care and education.
  - Meetings should also include opportunities to share your program's:
    - Philosophy,
    - Goals,
    - Policies, and
    - Pedagogy. (how you facilitate children's development and learning)
- Both programs and families have **expectations** that need to be shared. Exploring families' expectations and sharing programmatic expectations are both necessary steps when forming relationships with families. Doing this will help families determine the "fit" of the program or whether they feel the program will meet their needs and their children's needs.
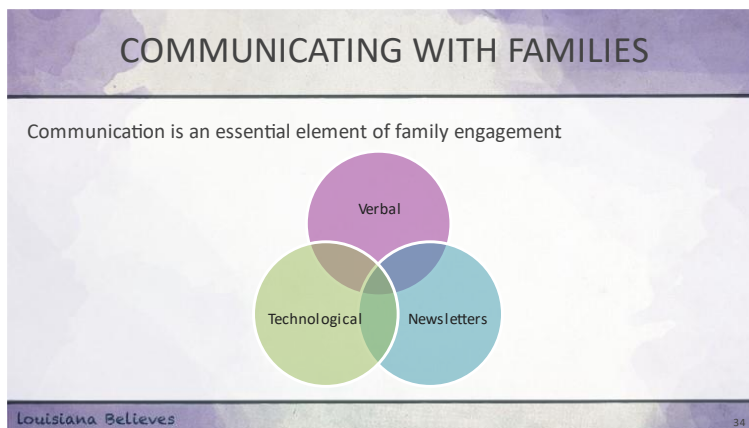
- Creating opportunities for ongoing **feedback** to occur is necessary to maintain and continue to develop program-family relationships. These opportunities also provide genuine ways for families to intentionally be involved in the program and programmatic decisions. This can be done through:
  - o Lunch and learns: These are meetings where families bring their lunch and participate in a session focused on learning about common parenting topics like potty training, guidance and positive discipline, reading at home, picky eaters, welcoming a sibling, math activities you can do at home, and others.
  - o Curriculum nights: These occur after center hours and provide families with hands-on examples of the activities and experiences that their children are participating in daily. These provide families with the opportunity to get involved in their children's learning. There are many focuses that can be used for family nights including art night, STEM night, language and literacy night, and more.
  - o Educational webinars: Finally, educational webinars provide opportunities for family engagement away from the center. Webinars can focus on any of the topics we just discussed. Webinars provide families who cannot visit the center for various reasons with the ability to learn about a variety of topics that affect their children's development and learning at the center as well as at home.

*Encourage participants to share how they gather and share information in their programs.*
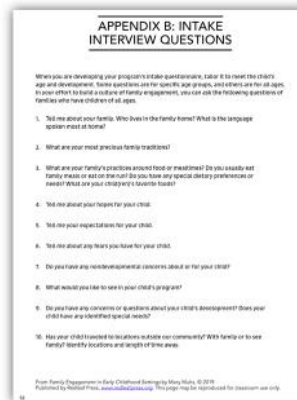


*Distribute the Example Intake Interview Questions handout.*

*Have participants share what they would add to this list, or what they think should be on the corresponding pages while keeping family engagement in mind.*

COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILIES

Communication is an essential element of family engagement

Verbal

Technological   Newsletters

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**Communication is an essential element of family engagement.** We will go over the three most common types of communication and how to utilize them to increase family engagement.

**Verbal** or face-to-face communication with families is the most utilized method of communication in many programs. Whether the purpose is communicating with families daily, sharing children's accomplishment, or talking about concerns, it is important that all communication is positive, professional, and clear if you want to develop and maintain relationships with families. Two common verbal communication methods are "three pluses and a wish" and "the sandwich."

The "three pluses and a wish" method of sharing information includes three positive observations about a child and a wish related to what the teacher would like to see a child continue working on.

*Share own of your own examples, or the following example.*

"I want to share with you how friendly Jonas was today when his friend got hurt and was sad. Jonas brought his friend an ice pack and sat with him to read a book. Afterward, they spent the afternoon creating in the sandbox together. We are still working with Jonas on being compassionate when other children want to play with him in the block area though. Today he was determined not to let others build with him, and he used his voice and hands to prevent them from playing there. We are helping him use a quieter voice and express himself more gently."

As you can see, this strategy shared several positive observations about the child's behavior, development, and learning and then tie it to something that the child needed to improve, coupling that with what the teachers are doing to assist the child in making these changes.

*Ask participants to share examples of using three pluses and a wish, or, if time allows, provide them with a scenario to try the "three pluses and a wish" communication strategy.*

The "sandwich" is another very common method of sharing information. It is when a teacher "sandwiches" a concern or constructive comment between two positive statements or observations.

*Ask participants if they are familiar with and have used the sandwich method. If so, have a participant share an example. Then, share the following example, or one of your own.*

"Tanesha spent much of the day sleeping and taking her bottles well. We are working on tummy time and lengthening it by one minute at a time. We are there with her, encouraging her to enjoy the time. She did enjoy lying on her back and watching the mobile hanging over her, reflecting the sun."

Instead of telling the family that Tanesha does not like tummy time, which may have come off as a critical complaint on the part of the teachers, they shared positive aspects of her day and reframed her dislike for tummy time. In doing this, they also included what they were doing to help her through the less than desirable activity. This lets families know what you are doing to help their children when they are not there – another key to maintaining and developing relationships.

To further increase family engagement, teachers can ask follow-up questions after using either of these communication methods. Questions like "what strategies have you found help Jonas play with others?" or "does Tanesha have a favorite toy or blanket that we can incorporate into tummy time?" This helps families feel actively involved in experiences their children are having when they are in your care instead of feeling helpless to assist in a situation that occurred when their children were in your care.

**Technological** communication is now more commonplace than ever. You may find that families prefer this method of communication because it is quick and makes them feel connected during the day when they cannot be with their children.

For example, texting, messaging apps, and even quick emails can be used to share quick messages and examples of children's development and learning throughout the day. Imagine sharing the block tower Alexis built via a texted picture, or Micah's first bite of peas in a quick email including a photo and a note from the teacher. Sharing children's activities and experiences has never been easier

*Encourage participants to share how they use technology to share children's development and learning with families.*

**Newsletters** are another way that programs can share information with families. Newsletters should be designed so they keep families informed and engaged. Some important elements to add to newsletters are those focused on the development and learning being facilitated in the program.

To do this, newsletters should include:
- Information about what children are doing and learning at the center
- Examples of children working on or meeting developmental or learning goals shown through photographs of children in action or completed projects
- Suggestions for what families can do to continue their children's development and learning at home

Other things can be added as well, such as reminders, policy updates, information on various parentings topics, and updates from each age group.

*Share the newsletter example with participants, pointing out the different elements and discussing how they facilitate communication and engagement.*

*Give participants the opportunity to state what else they would add to this newsletter or what they think should be on the corresponding pages – keeping family engagement in mind.*

*Trainer Note:*
*To view full-size newsletter, visit:*
*static1.squarespace.com/static/53e0ec38e4b043d649a72286/t/54b423bee4b034ff3080e63e/1421091774606/CCR+Spring+2014+Newsletter.pdf*

*Other newsletters similar to this can be found at: childcareresourcesinc.com/newsletter*



In addition to the communication methods we just discussed, there are additional ways to share children's learning. **Sharing children's learning helps families understand their children's growth and development**.

**Documentation** can be used to help families understand the program's curriculum and see what you are doing to encourage development and learning. When sharing children's work, it is important to add documentation to connect what families are seeing displayed to children's development and learning.

This can be done by:
- Including a statement or written paragraph explaining what the children are learning by participating in the activity.
  - I.e.: The children learned how to create an A/B pattern using counting bears in the math center this week. Patterning skills are important building blocks for future math and literacy skill development.
- Labeling children's work with objectives for learning and development written in sentences that explain what the children are doing.
  - I.e.: Katrina is using a pincer grasp to pick up the cheerios from her highchair tray.
- Taking and posting photos that show the creative process or other examples of learning in action.
  - I.e.: Brainstorming to create a list of things needed for a picnic.

*Ask participants share some other ways to share learning through documentation.*

Parent/teacher **conferences** and family **meetings** to share and discuss children's developmental progress and learning throughout the year are also important. Conferences can be held at any time, but are recommended at the following times:
- At enrollment, i.e. the intake meeting,
- Annually, if not every six months, which allows for regular communication and discussion about progress,
- When transitioning to a new classroom or to the next age group,
- Before leaving the program, and
- At families' request.

Holding **events**, like special family nights to showcase learning, are another way to share learning. This can be done by holding events that focus on areas of development and learning for all ages of children in the program. For example, programs can hold a "learning through movement" showcase event in which they display photos and videos of children working on their gross-motor skills through activities and experiences or "minds in the making" where the focus is cognitive development.

*Distribute the Deepening Families' Understanding of Learning Centers Article handout.*

*Allow about five minutes for participants to read the article, and then lead them in a discussion about their thoughts related to the family engagement event highlighted in the article.*



**Meeting families where they are is a necessity.** Family engagement looks different for different families. You may have families that come to every event and others that can only chat during drop-off and pick-up and some you hardly see at all.

It is important to remember that families have other events and work responsibilities that affect how much they can participate in program activities. For some families attending program events may be almost impossible, so it is important that programs consider how they can involve all families.

"Programs must see engagement as any and all participant and interest in supporting the program."
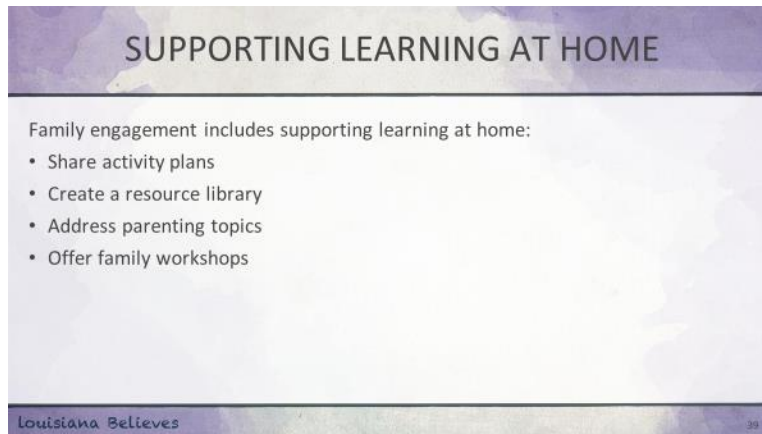
In *Family Engagement in Early Childhood Settings*, Mary Muhs lists and defines three engagement options that meet families where they are – in-person, virtual, and in-kind.

**In-person engagement** is about creating opportunities for parents or families to be physically present in the program with their child, such as curriculum nights, lunch and learns, parent group meetings, and virtual guest readers.

**Virtual engagement** is about opportunities to join conversations or events from a distance, such as virtual meetings, webinars, conferences by video chat, parent group meetings, and virtual guest readers.

**In-kind engagement** includes donations of food, materials, and toys, such as for food drives and clothing drives, or time, such as building a climber, gardening, recording books on tape, addressing envelopes, or maintaining the program website.

*If time allows, encourage participants to share which of these engagement activities are used in their programs or centers.*

SUPPORTING LEARNING AT HOME

Family engagement includes supporting learning at home:
- Share activity plans
- Create a resource library
- Address parenting topics
- Offer family workshops

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**Family engagement includes supporting learning at home.**

**Sharing plans for activities** that families can do with their children at home is one way to support learning outside of the program. It is recommended that these activities align with or are extensions of the activities you are doing in your program. These activities can be shared via newsletters, emails, or even social media posts.

Building a **resource library** for families is another way to support learning at home. Resources libraries can be digital for ease of access and to negate having to create a place in the center where space can be limited. However, if these is space, print materials can be made available to share as well. Either way it is important that the resources in your library come from reputable sources and are research-based.

**Addressing parenting topics** and **offering family workshops** are also ways to support learning at home, both of which I have highlighted on previous slides. I am referring to it here again because, unlike general engagement opportunities, when focusing on extending learning at home these need to be tailored to the families of the children in your care and aligned with what you are teaching the children and families' individual needs.



**Research-Based Resources**

- American Academy of Pediatrics (www.aap.org)
- Parents as Teachers (www.parentsasteachers.org)
- National Association for the Education of Young Children (www.naeyc.org)
- Zero to Three (www.zerotothree.org)
- Child Care Aware (www.childcareaware.org)

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*Share the research-based resources lists, and, if time allows and internet access is available, visit a few of the sites with the participants.*
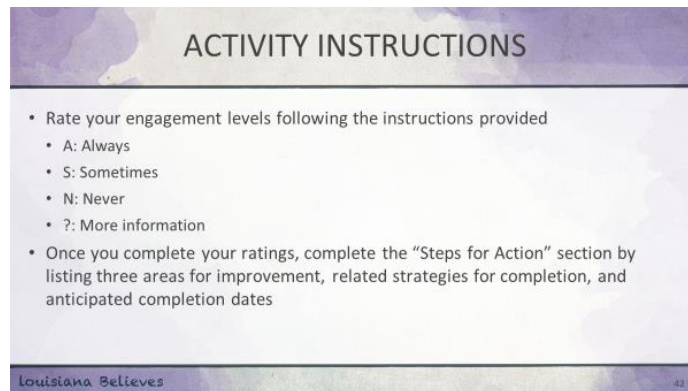
Examples of credible sources include:
- **American Academy of Pediatrics (aap.org)**

- **Parents as Teachers (parentsasteachers.org)**
- **National Association for the Education of Young Children (naeyc.org)**
- **Zero to Three (zerotothree.org),** and
- **Child Care Aware (childcareaware.org)**



*Facilitate the Family Engagement Inventory activity. During this activity, participants will complete a self-assessment and reflection of their current family engagement activities.*



*Distribute the Family Engagement Inventory handout.*

*Share the following instructions:*
- Consider what you have learned and your own practices and rate your current family engagement practices in the following manner:
  - Mark "A" for always if this is something that you or your program always does
  - Mark "S" for sometimes if this is something that you or your program sometimes does
  - Mark "N" for never is this is something that you or your program never does
  - Mark "?" if you need more information to determine if this is something your program does
- Once you have rated your engagement activities, use your ratings to complete part two of the handout. I suggest you pick the three areas that you feel need the most improvement or those that you rated never.

- Choose at least one "Area for Improvement" and develop two or three "Strategies for Completion" that you will use to ensure improvement in each area, and then set a target "Completion Date."

*Trainer Note: This is a reflective activity and participants do not have to share their responses if they do not want to. However, you can discuss example areas of improvement with aligned strategies for completion if time allows and you feel the participants will benefit from the knowledge.*



*Thank participants for reflecting on their current practices and announce that you will briefly review the session's learning objectives and then open the floor for comments and questions.*
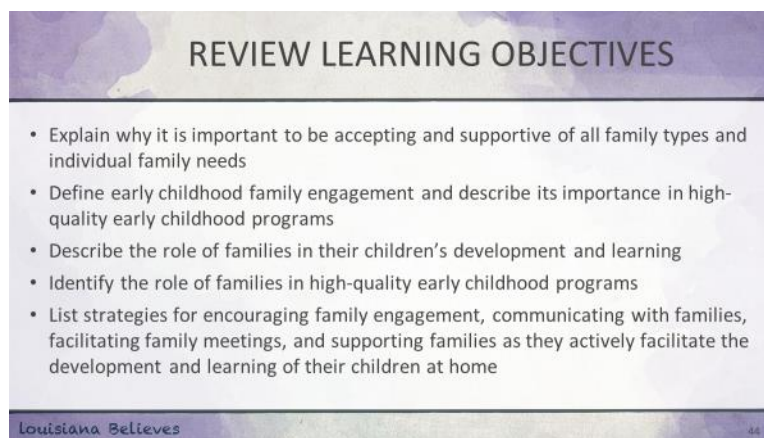


*Explain that for each statement, they will show a "thumbs up" if they think we covered the objective, a "thumbs down" if we did not cover the objective, and a "sideways thumb" if we partially covered the objective.*

*Review learning objectives:*
- **Explain why it is important to be accepting and supportive of all family types and individual family needs,**
- **Define early childhood family engagement and describe its importance in high-quality early childhood programs**
- **Describe the role of families in their children's development and learning,**
- **Identify the role of families in high-quality early childhood programs,** and

- **List strategies for encouraging family engagement, communicating with families, facilitating family meetings, and supporting families as they actively facilitate the development and learning of their children at home.**



*Open the floor for participants' comments and questions.*
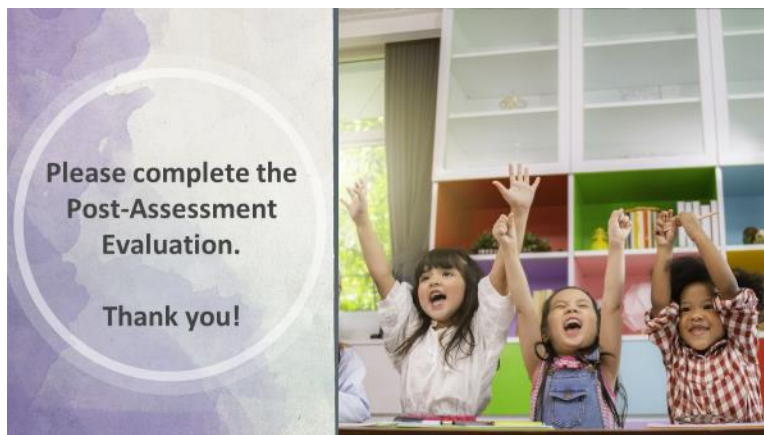


That brings us to the end of our time. Thank you so much for your attention and hard work today. Before you go, please complete the Post-Assessment Evaluation.

When you have completed the evaluation, please fold it and leave it in the center of your table before you leave. I hope this has been valuable! If you have any additional questions, I will be available to talk further.

Thank you.

*Post-Assessment Evaluation Guidance*
- *Review the forms to identify the group's responses*
- *Compare the results and identify the areas in which participants expressed greatest growth and the areas in which participants might still need support*
- *Share results with Louisiana DOE representative to inform local continuing professional development efforts*