Edad escolar

Compromiso familiar

Familias: una introducción

Los miembros de la familia son las personas más importantes en la vida de los niños e influyen en la forma en que los niños en edad escolar se desarrollan y aprenden. Para desarrollar alianzas efectivas con las familias y ayudar a crear un entorno que satisfaga las necesidades de cada niño en edad escolar, es importante que los cuidadores entiendan a las familias como un sistema y el impacto de la crianza de los hijos en la niñez y la adolescencia. Esta lección comparte perspectivas para comprender a las familias y proporciona una introducción a la práctica centrada en la familia.

Objetivos

- Identificar las opiniones personales y la importancia de las familias.

- Reconocer la práctica centrada en la familia como un componente clave de los programas para niños en edad escolar.

- Examinar los sistemas familiares individuales en los que los niños en edad escolar aprenden y se desarrollan.

- Reconocer la diversidad de las familias.

Aprender

Saber

¿Cuáles son sus puntos de vista sobre las familias?

Think back to when you were a school-age child. What thoughts and memories come to mind when you think of the word family? You might remember a favorite home-cooked meal, an exciting family vacation, or perhaps your childhood room. Memories of your childhood will most likely include members of your family. Family memories could also include tough memories like divorce or arguments, or sad ones like the death of a loved one. Our families, whether good or bad, can influence our lives on a daily basis.

As a school-age staff member, it is important to realize the role of family in the lives of children and youth. Every aspect of family can influence a child's learning and development, therefore it is crucial to appreciate and understand school-age children and youth's families. By reflecting on your own experiences and memories, you will gain a deeper understanding of the families in your program.

The Meaning of Family

When you think of the word "family," what does it mean to you? Who makes up your family? What kinds of things do you do together? What role do you play in your family? How do you personally define family?

Every family is different and it is important to keep an open mind about what and who makes up a family. Each person defines family in his or her own way. For some, family may represent those individuals living in the same home (under one roof). For others, family may include the child's parents and all of the important adults who help care for the child, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, neighbors, or even a best friend. Family is typically consistent in the child's life and can be one of the most important sources of information about the child.

The U.S. Census Bureau defines a family as "a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together." The National Association for the Education of Young Children suggests that "the term *family* may include those adults, besides parents, with the responsibility of being involved in educating, nurturing, and advocating for the child." Researchers studying and working with families define *family* as "two or more people who regard themselves as a family and who carry out the functions that families typically perform. These people may or may not be related by blood or marriage and may or may not usually live together" (Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, & Soodak, 2006, p. 7).

What are some things that stand out to you as you read these definitions? You may notice that the first definition is quite specific in terms of how relationships are described, whereas the other two definitions are broader. As a professional working with young children, it is important to acknowledge that your own experiences influence your views about families and working with families. You will encounter individuals who define family differently than you do and who may share values, customs, or codes of behavior that are different from yours. When you encounter differing views, it is important to keep an open mind to better understand how each person's family may have affected and shaped them into who they are today.

Like individuals, families are varied. Family structures have become more diverse through shared custody, same-sex couple families, families where members have different immigration statuses, and when a parent has children with multiple partners. While these circumstances do not always bring challenges, research suggests that children whose family structures are complex may be more likely to experience negative consequences, such as less caregiving from a parent. Today, 40 percent of children are born to unmarried parents. Like the concept of 'family,' the concept of family well-being is also challenging to define. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services states that family well-being occurs when all family members are safe, healthy, and have chances for educational advancement and economic mobility. Support services such as early care and education, housing and food assistance, and physical and mental health care positively contribute to the well-being of families and their children. When families face challenges that cause stress, including poverty and homelessness, their health and wellness can be negatively impacted. Engaging families as active participants in problem-solving

and goal-setting can help them identify and use their own strengths to address the challenges they face. When families are healthy, safe, and economically stable, their children's health and well-being can thrive. As you think about how best to engage with and support the families in your program, consider your role in strengthening families' protective factors. The good news is that many of the behaviors that correspond to positive family functioning can be "taught and strengthened with education." (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019, p. 42).

How are Families Viewed Today? Introducing Family-Centered Practice

Families are central to their children and youth's development. They are partners, active participants, and decision makers in their children's education process. As a result, *family-centered practice* is considered one of the indicators of quality in childhood education, programs, and services. At the heart of family-centered practice is the belief that families are the most important decision makers in a child's life.

Family-centered practice is the way you build partnerships with families. One of the key aspects of the family-centered practice philosophy is that families are equal partners in the care and education of their child. Staff members must understand that all family members have an important effect on each other and the child. Each family member affects the other and the ways the family functions.

When considering family-centered practice, you are viewing school-age children and youth as part of a larger system; you are viewing family members as a whole. You become aware of and sensitive to the interactions and relationships taking place within the family, as well as outside interactions and supports that affect them. In an effort to maintain relationships and to work effectively together, you learn, respect and understand characteristics of each family and their support system. You can also consider the characteristics and stressors of families which may affect their involvement. What affects one family member can affect all family members. A family is a system in which no one member can be viewed in isolation.

Family-Centered Practice

The chart below details the beliefs and actions that make up the philosophy of family-centered practice.

Beliefs	Actions
Families are the most important decision-makers in a child's life.	• *We ask and learn about families' ideas and preferences.* • *We provide choices in programming.* • *We involve families in program leadership.* • *We involve families in decision-making.*

Beliefs	Actions
Families are unique and their differences enrich our programs.	• *We honor and respect diversity.* • *We involve all the important people in a child's life.* • *We engage and involve families.* • *We develop responsive and reciprocal relationships.* • *We represent families in our programs.*
Families are resilient.	• *We learn about families' strengths, needs, and circumstances.* • *We connect families with resources.* • *We build families' strengths.*
Families are central to development and learning.	• *We share information with families.* • *We listen to families.* • *We view families as their child's first teacher.* • *We respect families' expertise about their child.*
Families are our partners.	• *We use respectful, responsive, and two-way communication.* • *We reach out to families.* • *We involve families in all aspects of our program.*

Honoring Diversity in Families

During the school-age years, children learn a great deal about their backgrounds, heritage and culture. Many of their behaviors and routines are also influenced by culture: the age at which they can stay home alone, the nature of hanging out with friends, and their interactions with adults. Culture refers to the shared experiences, traditions, and history of different groups of people. Cultural differences may include differences in views of family and community, expectations of children, roles of parents and children, and value placed on education.

Culture plays a significant role in the ways families raise their children and how you interact with their school-age children. Examine your own cultural experiences and consider how they may affect your practice with school-age children and families. Each individual brings specific values, beliefs and assumptions about child rearing and development to their work. In almost every child care routine you perform, your values about it were shaped by your childhood and training. As you work with school-age children and families, it is important to recognize your values and beliefs and the ways in which they may differ from others.

Sometimes, you might feel unsure about how to support a school-age child or how to engage families who have very different experiences and cultures, including those who speak an unfamiliar language or practice unfamiliar religious customs. You can acknowledge these differences and demonstrate an interest in the family to build a relationship and learn ways to provide support to their school-age child. For example, you can learn how and when families share meals, which is influenced by culture and affects development. When differences are viewed through the lens of culture, respectful conversations can lead to an agreement in how these practices will be supported in a school-age program.

School-age programs provide an environment in which adults and children can learn about and honor differences in values, beliefs and perceptions. School-age children are old enough to recognize differences and to have curiosity about others. Learning one's culture occurs primarily within the family, however, in school-age programs children also learn about culture and experience relationships that influence their sense of who they are and who they will become.

To help children develop this sense of who they are and who they will become, you must honor and celebrate the diversity of families. Diversity exists on a variety of dimensions:

- Composition (who is a member of the family)
- Race and ethnicity
- Language
- Socioeconomic status
- Sexual orientation
- Ability or disability
- Educational background
- Values and traditions
- Child-rearing practices
- Religious preferences
- Gender roles and responsibilities

Working with school-age children and their families will provide many opportunities to meet new people, learn about different cultures, and observe various lifestyles. Being a responsive school-age staff member means that you demonstrate sensitivity and consideration for the many backgrounds, experiences, values, and contexts in which children and families live. Awareness of diversity brings the understanding of the way we act and what we believe can be different from the way other people act or what other people believe.

School-age children offer a unique perspective on their cultural heritage because they are old enough to understand the differences between cultures. As a school-age staff member, you can use this to your advantage by allowing children and youth to teach you and their peers about their family traditions and culture. Remember

though, that being a responsive school-age staff member means being sensitive to children's preferences and needs. It is not uncommon for school-age children to want to fit in with their peers and minimize differences. School-age children might be embarrassed to share traditions or practices that make them appear different from their peers. Respect the children's preferences while continuing to encourage each child to explore and express his or her culture.

Being a responsive school-age staff member also means that you avoid making assumptions about different groups of people and the ways they may act or think. As much as it is important to acknowledge differences *between* various groups of people, it is also important to recognize *within*-group differences. While there may be commonly shared characteristics, values, and attributes among people who come from a particular geographic region or cultural heritage, there is still considerable variability within the same group in terms of values, routines, or ways of doing things.

Also remember that families will differ in the way they approach parenting. Families may find the parent-child relationship changing as their child grows into the preteen years, and this may impact parenting style. Families may use parenting styles that you may not be familiar with or you may not agree with. Unless you feel that abuse or neglect is occurring, it is important to support each family and their choices in your care. If you are working with a family that uses a parenting style you are unfamiliar with, try to learn the characteristics of the style. If a family in your program uses parenting styles that differ from the rules of the program, consult a trainer, coach, or administrator. Understanding how a child is cared for at home will help you to understand the child's personality and behavior in your program.

See

Watch the following video clip on the philosophy of family-centered practice. The video will examine each major category found of family-centered practice.

In this video, you will hear from a school-age staff member. In the clip she will discuss a specific situation and how she worked to honor a culturally diverse family.

Now reflect on the diversity of families and family-centered practices. The following video is structured in two parts. First, you will hear from families about the importance of understanding family differences. Second, you will hear from a Training and Curriculum Specialist about honoring families.

In this video, a training and curriculum specialist discusses how school-age children have unique opportunities to celebrate their culture.

Do

Creating an environment that fosters respect and appreciation for families is a vital part of your role as a school-age staff member. The following are guidelines that will help you carry out the philosophy of family-centered practice:

Recognize the family as the most important voice in a school-age child's life and that they have the largest impact and influence on that child.

Honor all families by celebrating diversity and culture. Celebrate cultures by making them a part of your activity plans and giving children opportunities to teach others and share their unique experiences.

Understand the daily triumphs and struggles that families will face.

Communicate openly and regularly with families.

Create an environment that supports family partnerships. Make all families feel welcome by creating a learning environment that is accepting of all lifestyles.

Completing this Course

For more information on what to expect in this course, the Family Engagement *Competency Reflection*, and a list of the accompanying Learn, Explore and Apply resources and activities offered throughout the lessons, visit the School-Age Family Engagement *Course Guide*.

Please note the References & Resources section at the end of each lesson outlines reference sources and resources to find additional information on the topics covered. As you complete lessons, you are not expected to review all the online references available. However, you are welcome to explore the resources further if you have interest, or at the request of your trainer, coach, or administrator.

Explore

The environment in which we grow up shapes the person we become. In the *Reflecting on Families* activity, use the guided prompts to reflect on your own family and memories you've collected throughout your life. Think about the ways those experiences have made you who you are today. When you are finished, share your responses with your trainer, coach, or administrator.

Reflecting on Families

Reflect on your family as you consider how children's behaviors are influenced by their own families

Apply

In this lesson, you viewed a chart on the beliefs and actions of Family-Centered Practice. In the *Family-Centered Practice: First Thoughts* activity, look at the beliefs and actions of family-centered practice and then record your thoughts and ideas of how to incorporate this philosophy into your school-age program. When you are finished, discuss your responses with your trainer, coach, or administrator.

Family-Centered Practice: First Thoughts

Brainstorm ways to increase family involvement in your program

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Required: Complete and review this document with your trainer, supervisor, or administrator

GLOSSARY

Culture:
A set of shared values, attitudes, or practices that characterize certain groups of individuals

Diversity:
The inclusion of different types of people in an organization

Family-Centered Practice:
A philosophy or way of thinking that supports practices in which families are considered central and the most important decision makers in a child's life. More specifically, this philosophy recognizes that the family is the constant in a child's life and that service systems and providers must support, respect, encourage, and enhance the strengths of the family

Parenting Style:
Strategies, methods, and behaviors that parents use to raise their child

Demonstrate

Q1 A family is always defined in the same way. *

O True

O False

Q2 The philosophy that families are equal partners in the care and education of their child is: *

O Education of the whole child

O Family partnerships

O Best practices

O Family-centered practice

Q3 When thinking about diversity, the first two steps are: *

O Researching information on different cultures

O Having cultural awareness celebrations

O Knowing resources to help international families

O Putting your personal feeling and opinions aside and keeping an open mind.

References & Resources

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