

DAP: Engaging in Reciprocal Partnerships with Families and Fostering Community Connections

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Developmentally appropriate practice requires deep knowledge about each child, including the context within which each child is living. Educators acquire much of this knowledge through respectful, reciprocal relationships with children’s families. Across all ages, families’ expertise about their own children is sought out and valued.

Educators who engage in developmentally appropriate practice take responsibility for forming and maintaining strong relationships with families and communities. They recognize that the traditional models of “parent involvement” or “parent education” are one-sided approaches that fail to give educators the knowledge or insights they need to provide learning experiences that are fully responsive to each child’s needs and experiences.

The following descriptions of educators’ behavior indicate the kinds of relationships that are developmentally appropriate for children from birth through the primary grades, in which family members and educators work together as members of the learning community.

A. Educators take responsibility for establishing respectful, reciprocal relationships with and among families. As they work to facilitate their own relationships with families, educators also encourage and support families to get to know each other, serve as resources to each other, and collaborate within and outside of the program. They strive to ensure mutual respect, cooperation, and shared responsibility and to help negotiate conflicts as they work toward achievement of shared goals. (Also see guideline 1, “Creating a caring community of learners.”)

B. Educators work in collaborative partnerships with families, seeking and maintaining regular, frequent, two-way communication with them and recognizing that the forms of communication may differ for each family. Early childhood educators employ a variety of communication methods and engagement skills, including informal conversations when parents pick up and drop off children, more formal conversations in teacher-family conference settings, and reciprocal technology-mediated communications, such as phone calls, texting, or emails. When educators do not speak a family's home language, they enlist the help of community resources to provide interpreters or use volunteers identified by the family. The use of children as translators should be avoided.

C. Educators welcome family members in the setting and create multiple opportunities for family participation. Families are offered multiple ways of participating, including weighing in on any program decision about their children's care and education. If families cannot communicate with educators during drop-offs and pick-ups, alternative means provide frequent, ongoing communication.

D. Educators acknowledge a family's choices and goals for their child and respond with sensitivity and respect to those preferences and concerns. In the event of disagreements between the family and the educator, educators listen carefully to the family's concerns and use the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment to guide their decision making as they strive to find mutually agreeable solutions.

E. Educators and the family share with each other their knowledge of the particular child and understanding of child development and learning as part of day-to-day and other forms of communication (e.g., family get-togethers, meetings, support groups). Educators support families in ways that maximally promote family decision-making capabilities and competence. When communicating with families about their children, educators stress children's strengths and abilities and use this information to support future instructional decisions.

F. Educators involve families as a source of information about the child (before program entry and on an ongoing basis). They engage families in the planning for their child, including teaching practices, curriculum planning and implementation, and assessments.

G. Educators take care to learn about the community in which they work, and they use the community as a resource across all aspects of program delivery. The community serves as an important resource for implementing the

curriculum as well as a resource for linking families with a range of services based on identified priorities and concerns. Early childhood educators also look for ways that they can contribute to the ongoing development of the community.

Audience: *Administrator (director or principal), Faculty, Family, Student (higher education), Teacher, Trainer*

Age: *Early Primary, Infant/Toddler, Kindergarten, Preschool*

Topics: *NAEYC General, Position Statement, Other Topics, Developmentally Appropriate Practice*

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