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Topic 1

In this topic you will learn about:

1A Seeking information about families

1B Involving families in the service

Providing families with opportunities to be involved in the service

When a child starts at your service, it is essential to make a good first impression on both the child and their family members, who may include mothers, fathers, siblings, grandparents, extended family, kin and foster children. The first impression you make on a family plays a large part in the opinion they form of you and the service. It may also influence their decision to use your service and the way in which they communicate with you.

A positive relationship between the parents (or other significant people who have a commitment to and responsibility for the child) and the educator is very important for the child and the family.

Your enthusiasm and positive presentation also influences families' participation in the care process.

The following table maps this topic to the National Quality Standard and both national learning frameworks.

National Quality Standard		
	Quality Area 1: Educational program and practice	
	Quality Area 2: Children’s health and safety	
	Quality Area 3: Physical environment	
	Quality Area 4: Staffing arrangements	
	Quality Area 5: Relationships with children	
✓	Quality Area 6: Collaborative partnerships with families and communities	
	Quality Area 7: Governance and leadership	
Early Years Learning Framework		My Time, Our Place
Principles		
	Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships	
✓	Partnerships	
	High expectations and equity	
	Respect for diversity	
✓	Ongoing learning and reflective practice	
Practice		
✓	Holistic approaches	Holistic approaches
	Responsiveness to children	Collaboration with children
	Learning through play	Learning through play
	Intentional teaching	Intentionality
	Learning environments	Environments
✓	Cultural competence	Cultural competence
✓	Continuity of learning and transitions	Continuity and transitions
	Assessment for learning	Evaluation for wellbeing and learning
Outcomes		
	Children have a strong sense of identity	
	Children are connected to and contribute to their world	
	Children have a strong sense of wellbeing	
	Children are confident and involved learners	
	Children are effective communicators	

Whole of community parenting

An extension of the family-centred approach is the theory of parenting called ‘whole of community parenting’. This theory focuses on the belief that it benefits both families and society if children are supported and cared for by the whole community.

Your service is part of this as it shares education and care roles with families. Further benefits are seen when children are:

- ▶ valued by their whole community
- ▶ included in community decisions that affect them
- ▶ encouraged to express themselves and participate in community activities
- ▶ protected from harm
- ▶ helped to reach their full potential.

Create a welcoming atmosphere

The first impression of your service is crucial to the ongoing relationship you develop with each family. When meeting families for the first time, greet them with a friendly smile. Speak clearly and use words and terms they will understand. Be sincere in your welcome with body language that matches your words. Making families feel comfortable in your service environment encourages them to speak freely and provide you with the information you need.

As part of your welcome, emphasise the service’s understanding of the importance of the parenting role and your commitment to caring for their child while the child is in your care.

Provide an appropriate welcome that mirrors the values, cultural customs and philosophies of your service, as well as those of the family; for example, how you welcome an Indigenous Australian may be different to how you welcome a Muslim family. Think about the language you need to use and the things that make each family feel important and considered.

Follow your organisational standards, policies and procedures when welcoming a family who uses languages other than English or requires cultural communication different to your own. This may include the following actions:

- ▶ Set up for success; find out everything you need to know about the family’s culture and traditions at orientation.
- ▶ Make an effort to show parents you are happy they are using your service.
- ▶ Use an interpreter and/or translator if required.
- ▶ Provide information in the family’s language if possible.
- ▶ Provide information in a variety of ways (for example, verbally, written and demonstrated) to enable parents of all abilities to understand.
- ▶ Ask about cultural practices and expectations early so you know how to communicate appropriately and consider the child’s culture when preparing activities.

Watch this video about families’ different cultural expectations.



Give enough information	<p>Ensure you tell families everything they need to know to make a decision or to feel comfortable in a situation. If the information is negative, do not leave out the parts you have concerns about.</p> <p>Present the information positively and openly in a variety of methods that suit each family.</p>
Ensure your information or message is consistent	<p>Prepare appropriately and check that you are clear about the information. Be aware of issues and questions that may arise so you can be ready to respond positively.</p> <p>Demonstrate consistency by following through, and consider the body language and gestures you use, as these can convey a negative attitude or lack of interest.</p>
Have realistic expectations	<p>The role of parent is demanding, and draws on many areas of skills and knowledge. The parent must balance this demanding role and any others they undertake outside of the family during the time their child is in an education and care service.</p> <p>Things that may seem very important to you may seem irrelevant to a parent who is focused on getting from one place to another on time and is completing a range of tasks.</p>

Collaborative relationships

Collaboration is essential in a family-centred approach as you are in a partnership with the parents, supporting each other and working together towards a common goal by sharing knowledge and learning, and building consensus.

An ongoing collaborative relationship enables families to keep you up to date with their current needs and enables them to share significant events with you. Most of these key events have an impact on the child's abilities, behaviour or needs.

To help your collaboration be successful, you must implement skills that are common to all your education and care services relationships. For example:

- ▶ be non-judgmental
- ▶ be open to different perspectives
- ▶ apply empathy
- ▶ demonstrate active listening
- ▶ check understanding
- ▶ follow organisational standards, philosophies, policies and procedures.

Respect the amount of information a family provides about their life, as it is essential that you create a relationship in which families feel comfortable confiding in you. Often the amount of information you receive relates to the positive or negative feelings that the parent links to the event. This may also be influenced by their fear that they will be judged or that their child will be treated differently.

Always consider how you would feel about sharing with others the details of your own key events.

Practice task 1

1. Briefly outline the nonverbal ways a service says 'welcome'.

2. What would indicate whether or not a service is family-centred? Explain using examples.

3. Read the communication choices in the following table. Place a tick next to the appropriate communication choices and a cross next to the choices you feel are inappropriate, and explain why.

Communication choice	Appropriate/ inappropriate? (✓ or X)	Explanation
Leila, an educator, helps to settle Amethyst into the room. Once Amethyst is settled, Leila reminds Amethyst's father about the family day on the weekend and comments that it would be lovely if they could attend.		
Wibawa, an educator, asks Gunne, a parent, if he has completed the survey about the lunch menu. Gunne says he doesn't really care. Wibawa tells him that his parenting needs to improve and that he should care about what his child eats during the day.		

1B Involving families in the service

Part of your role as an educator is to respond to parents' questions, concerns and requests promptly, accurately and courteously, and to encourage them to participate in your service's activities. Communicating well is a crucial skill that includes:

- ▶ excellent writing, speaking and presentation skills
- ▶ knowledge of your workplace and children
- ▶ good people skills; that is, being able to relate to a variety of people and communities
- ▶ strong organisational skills.



As described in Section 1A, the communication methods you use with families include informal chats and discussions, and formal methods such as enrolment forms, enrolment interviews and meetings.

Other suggestions for communicating and involving families:

- ▶ Schedule meetings with the parents and the child to establish goals and communicate any changes in the service.
- ▶ Listen to parents tell you about their child's strengths and how they learn.
- ▶ Ensure educators have access to phones or email to communicate with parents during the day.
- ▶ Ensure parents know the phone numbers or email addresses of the service.
- ▶ Try to communicate with any parents who do not normally attend the service; for example, if a child's dad always drops off and picks up the child, try to occasionally make contact with the mother.
- ▶ Provide parents with structured ways to comment on the service's communications; for example, by email, phone or take-home surveys.
- ▶ Speak to parents directly (this does not include leaving messages on an answering machine).
- ▶ Provide copies of service information in a variety of ways; for example, handbooks or online.

There is a fine line between attempting to increase your relationship with a family through communication, and disrespecting their involvement choices or abilities by pressuring them. To ensure you are being respectful, always:

- ▶ try to assess what level of participation a parent wants to have, based on their situation and their level of involvement
- ▶ watch for body language; this may indicate to you that the person is shy, not interested, in a hurry or needs to tell you something
- ▶ consider your message and how it may affect or influence the person.

Learning checkpoint 1

Providing families with opportunities to be involved in the service

Part A

Read the case study, then complete the questions that follow.

Case study

At High Street Child Care, the foyer is filled with colourful signs and posters of happy-looking families from a variety of cultures. There is a cosy couch to sit on and the noticeboard demonstrates various celebrations occurring in the community. From the ceiling hangs the word 'Welcome' in a variety of languages.

A new Vietnamese family has arrived who speak very little English. They enter their children's play space. Educators are busy undertaking a variety of tasks. There are whispers saying, 'You go, you speak to them!' The family cling together waiting for someone to make them feel welcome and safe.

A child now arrives with her father, Reg. Kymberly, an educator, comes over and says, 'Happy birthday, Mindy! We have a cake for you'. Mindy's dad is angry as he has explained to Kymberly that Mindy will not celebrate her birthday due to their religious beliefs (they are Jehovah's Witnesses).

1. How would you ensure the Vietnamese family is made to feel welcome? Provide **two** ideas.

2. What knowledge, skills, expertise or aspects of family life and culture could you encourage the Vietnamese family to share with you and the group of children?

3. How would you make sure you know about Reg's cultural requests if you were Mindy's educator?

What to do	How to implement	Methods to use
Request the family's insight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Ask parents about any issues they have or foresee, past experiences, personal feelings and unsuccessful strategies. ▶ Gain greater background knowledge of the child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Diaries ▶ Communication books ▶ Surveys ▶ Discussions ▶ Forms ▶ Interviews
Provide information or support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Provide information about their child and the child's situation and progress, so they are able to work toward future goals positively and successfully. ▶ Put parents in touch with support services and advocacy networks. ▶ Parents are likely to be interested in any research or relevant parent education you come across. ▶ Provide parenting advice and education to any parent who seeks it in relation to an issue, such as toilet learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Resources such as books, videos and brochures ▶ Photographs ▶ Portfolios ▶ Routine displays ▶ Interviews ▶ Meetings ▶ Guest speakers

Discussions with parents

You need to make time in your day for discussions with parents. By sharing what you know about a child with parents, you include them in your curriculum and demonstrate your interest in their child. In addition, if parents view their child's records, they can then pass on information that you may not be aware of, including cultural aspects and experiences outside the service.

Parents may share concerns or ways they have dealt with issues themselves at home. This assists you to communicate with the parent and discuss shared strategies. This collaborative approach shows respect for families and their connection with their community.

Your approach to parents should reflect your thoughts about the parenting role. One important aspect to consider is your beliefs about your own role. If you act like an expert at all times, you may miss the opportunity to be involved in a shared role with parents. For example, you may be giving advice all the time and never asking for opinions or information from parents. This is likely to build a wall that may stop effective communication, and parents may feel that they are being belittled or that their role is not valued.

2B Making decisions with families

Being in a partnership with parents means that all decisions are shared. Your service should have a range of strategies you can implement to facilitate this and ensure all parties are satisfied with the outcome. Decisions may need to be made about an aspect of the program or requests parents have made.

Understanding parent requests

Families may make requests for you to provide or do something for their child.

A family may make a special request because they:

- ▶ feel it is important to their family
- ▶ have seen or heard of other families requesting it
- ▶ have had this request provided for them in another service, or know someone who has
- ▶ were brought up in this manner
- ▶ lack skills in certain areas
- ▶ need additional support.



Requests from families may be appropriate or inappropriate, as the examples in the following table demonstrate.

Appropriate requests	Inappropriate requests
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Having a supply of alternative or additional food or drink to meet dietary needs. ▶ Special requirements for routine times; for example, cuddles before sleep, no sleep, cloth or disposable nappies, unusual content in a bottle or no late snacks. ▶ Taking the child to the doctor or dentist. ▶ Relaying messages to people who work outside your organisation, such as a teacher or a specialist. ▶ Transporting the child to kindergarten or a school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Requests that are inappropriate for your program or do not fit with your philosophy; for example, bottles, dummies or nappies provided for older children, or infants undergoing toilet learning. ▶ Expecting alternative strategies for behaviour management; for example, smacking, biting back or isolating the child.

Agreement on specific requests deemed appropriate can be reached by negotiating. This requires you to be sensitive to the family's point of view. Try to see things from their perspective and solve the situation, not just by identifying what you think your role is, but by considering why or what the family really wants or needs. Although you may encounter a small number of families who can be difficult, critical, demanding, irresponsible or uncooperative, most families have a justifiable reason for asking for your cooperation, so consider these requests openly and flexibly.

Example

Different reactions to the same incident

Helga, an educator, is in charge when an incident involving three children occurs. When she relates the situation to the three families, they respond in the following ways:

- ▶ Parent 1 starts yelling, saying, 'You are meant to be looking after my child!' He wants to know who the other children are and how to contact their parents. He says he will report the service.
- ▶ Parent 2 becomes distraught and needs some time to talk through her feelings. She asks for a counselling service and feels that she can't have her child in an education and care setting until she knows everything is safe in the service.
- ▶ Parent 3 thanks Helga for how she has dealt with the situation and asks what will be done to stop it from happening again.

The next day, Helga observes the families and discusses the situation with each parent. She uses a simple question, 'Is there anything you need from us today?' to open up discussion between the parents and herself about the incident and its impact.

- ▶ Parent 1 apologises for his reaction and says he was just shocked at the time. He says that he has not reported the service, but wants to be reassured that a policy change will occur.
- ▶ Parent 2 brings her child into the service and stays for a while before leaving. She has taken her child to see their family doctor, who said the child is fine.
- ▶ Parent 3 does not come into the service today. Helga gives her a call to check if everything is okay, but she says she feels more upset than she did initially. She says that she really needs to have a one-on-one meeting and be clear about what happened.

Involving parents in resolution strategies

Parents can be involved in developing these resolution strategies, or they can assist to decide which strategy they feel happiest with. Involving parents at this level is not just about 'doing the right thing'; parents who are involved in developing a solution will see that you consider their child's and their own interests a priority, and that you wish to resolve situations in ways that are responsive to all needs. These feelings assist to create security and respect.

You may involve parents through:

- ▶ an individual meeting to review the situation and share information and ideas for improvement
- ▶ an open meeting where interested parents can share their ideas
- ▶ a survey providing sections for suggestions and comments
- ▶ asking them directly which solution they feel is most appropriate
- ▶ asking them if the solution you decide on suits their needs.

The strategies that you choose to implement should be influenced greatly by what the parents feel are appropriate.



Topic 3

In this topic you will learn about:

3A Sharing information about the service

3B Sharing information about the community

Providing information to families about the service and the community

When a family is looking for an education and care service, they may already understand how this type of environment works, or may have no idea of the function and operation of this type of environment.

Despite their level of understanding, most parents have similar questions and concerns. It is with this in mind that most service staff are able to develop a procedure for introducing new families.

Part of your responsibility is also to provide information to parents about services and resources in the wider community that are available to help and support families. You need to be aware of the various support networks and the type of information they can provide that will meet the needs of the families who use your service.

Your role may include identifying appropriate services, providing information, making contact with the family and/or supporting them during a process.

Providing a positive impression of the service

Always be aware of what impression you and your service are making on prospective and existing families. The process through which you influence the impressions that families form of the service is known as ‘impression management’.

Impression management is important at all times; however, it is most important when families are shown through your service for the first time. As discussed in section 1A, families collect verbal and nonverbal information during an initial visit and begin to form an impression of the environment and how well it is suited to their child and family.

Parents should be shown the space where their children will be cared for and the noticeboard area where important information is communicated. Depending on your service, they may also be shown a variety of indoor and outdoor areas that their child may use and that they may be given access to. Parents may also benefit from viewing kitchen and utility areas to gain confidence in how health and safety is managed in these areas.

Watch this video about conducting orientation with families.



Behaviours and actions of staff

The following table outlines some common behaviours, actions and other aspects that families may look for when developing their impressions of the service. This information may influence a family’s feeling about whether your service can meet their needs.

Behaviour and actions of staff	Aspects of the service
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Greeting and farewelling families and children ▶ Smiling ▶ Managing behaviour positively ▶ Clearly talking to children ▶ Showing a positive attitude ▶ Reacting to children’s emotions ▶ Answering children’s questions ▶ Helping children with activities and routines ▶ Being warm and caring, and showing interest in their child as an individual ▶ Listening to the families and respecting their wishes ▶ Being enthusiastic and lively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ A bright and interesting environment ▶ Close to home/work/public transport ▶ A positive and happy atmosphere ▶ Family involvement is encouraged ▶ Lots of interesting equipment and activities ▶ Already has many children enrolled from the family’s cultural or language background ▶ Has a multicultural and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus ▶ Operating hours that meet the family’s needs

Information to share	Identify what information is appropriate to share with parents and what information is confidential to the service. If you are unsure, ask for clarification when you commence employment or seek advice from a supervisor before you share information with parents.
How messages can be relayed	<p>There are many methods of sharing information (for example, discussion, newsletters, noticeboards and emails), but no single method will meet the needs of every family.</p> <p>Individuals learn and take in information in different ways, so you must provide a range of communication methods to ensure your messages are received, especially when parents have language difficulties.</p>

Communication issues are likely to emerge if information is not shared regularly between educators and parents, is not updated regularly, or does not cover all aspects of the day-to-day routine and curriculum of activities. Always consider the parents and their ability to understand the information you provide.

Example

Taking account of parents' abilities

Sven is an educator who wants to tell families about an upcoming fundraiser. He knows that some families welcome a handout and any email information that comes through, but there are also families who have little understanding of English and other families whose reading skills are poor.

Eliab, a parent, has reasonably good English skills and is happy to translate and interpret information into Arabic if needed. Sven asks Eliab to help translate some simple information about the fundraiser into Arabic.

Sven knows that there are three Indonesian families who will not be able to understand the newsletter. Sven approaches the father of one of the families, who agrees that his oldest son Bisma can translate the information from English into Bahasa Indonesian.

Sven knows there are some parents whose reading skills are poor, so he adds to his communication by setting up a simple video to play in the foyer. He records a staff member explaining the fundraiser and demonstrating what the plans are. Then he adds Eliab speaking in Arabic about the fundraiser. Finally, he asks Bisma to record the information in Bahasa Indonesian.

Practice task 6

1. If the main language in your community was Italian, how would you access a translator or interpreter?

3B Sharing information about the community

As part of your role as an educator, you need to share community information with families so they know what support is available and how to access it. Information may relate to a variety of issues, particularly parenting issues, advocacy services, family planning, financial assistance, housing support, medical services, specialist care, and education and care outside of your service.

Watch this video about providing support to families with additional needs.

Some community services and resources that are available are outlined in the following table.



Parent education and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Family education workshops on topics suggested by parents (such as toilet learning and family planning), and held at times and places easily accessible to all parents ▶ Resources such as books and websites on parenting ▶ Toy resources ▶ Support groups for families with special interests and needs
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Meetings ▶ Specialists to help parents address concerns or complaints ▶ Parent groups ▶ Family partnerships ▶ Reference groups
Community outreach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Information and referral ▶ Strategies to reach out to adults, families and children of all ages and cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds in the community ▶ Local civic and service groups involved in ways such as mentoring, volunteering and helping with fundraising events
Specific services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Financial assistance ▶ Medical support ▶ Housing support

Providing information

A service has a responsibility to pass on information about agencies, resources, community meetings and support groups that are available in the community to support families. Typical ways to communicate information include noticeboards, newsletters, brochures and resource folders. Technology is increasingly used for sending emails, advertising programs and special occasions, and developing databases of information.

Supporting families with information

To assist families to identify, locate and access the support and resources they need, you should first establish what they require. Ask questions and make suggestions to ensure you have sufficient information to help you choose the right support or resources for the parent.

When you have a more accurate idea of what is needed, you can put into place some actions to find the best resource.

Ways to find the most suitable resources:

- ▶ Look back on support and resources you have used successfully in the past.
- ▶ Check on support and resources you already have details of.
- ▶ Use online sites for research; for example, try sites that link you to resources or support such as:
 - <http://aspirelr.link/parent-easy-guides>
 - <http://aspirelr.link/child-and-family-relationship-services>
- ▶ Use online sites that provide relevant and current information; for example:
 - Children of Parents with a Mental Illness at: <http://aspirelr.link/copmi>
 - Raising Children Network, the Australian parenting website at: <http://aspirelr.link/raising-children-network>
- ▶ Ask others internal or external to your service for resources that may be relevant and useful.

Remember, you may have a number of families looking for the same support/resources, so it may be appropriate to provide information to the whole group at once; for example, during a parent group education session.

When you locate the support/resource you believe is appropriate, it is wise to make the first contact if the families agree. This way you can check if this is the correct support/resource and gain all details that the parents may require.

Example

Maintaining information about community resources and support

Caitlin develops a resource library that she sets up at the entry of her service. It mainly contains brochures about services in the community, but she also adds new information regularly. She includes one or two posters and signs she feels are relevant to parents.

To keep everything up to date, Caitlin does the following:

- ▶ She neatens the resources whenever she walks past as a routine task. She feels parents will find it more useful if they can easily find what they need. At the start and middle of each year, she checks that the services, contact details and offerings are still current.
- ▶ She changes the posters in the middle of each month, saving any new ones until then, or requesting new posters from services that she thinks are appropriate for the families in the service.
- ▶ If she hears any issues being discussed in the service, she approaches relevant services and gains any information they can provide.
- ▶ She redevelops the sign at the end of the each month showing what is happening in the community during the coming month. She accesses this information from the local government calendar.

2. Select a language other than English. Preferably this should be a language that is spoken in a local service or your community.

Using Google Translate or a similar method, write **two** sentences in the language you have chosen that provides information about the service quality. Provide the English meaning as well.

Summary

- ▶ Families are interested in initial information at enrolment, such as the type of care provided, cost, facilities available, hours, policies and procedures, safety and the service's values and beliefs.
- ▶ As families get to know your service, they may be interested in different aspects, such as different programs/services available, standards, accountability, government programs, funding, staff training and the service's role in the community.
- ▶ Each family will have different questions about how the service works and their child's education and care.
- ▶ It is important to communicate clearly and to identify the communication needs of family members.
- ▶ Information must be provided in languages that are used by families so they are able to fully participate.
- ▶ Part of your role as an educator is to share community information with families so they know what support is available and how to access it.
- ▶ Information and resources that parents may need include community outreach services, parenting advice or education, advocacy services, family planning, financial assistance, housing support, medical services, specialist care, and education and care outside of your service.
- ▶ Typical methods of communicating information include using a noticeboard, newsletters, brochures, resource folders, emails and the service's website.
- ▶ Use a range of strategies to ensure the information on services and resources remains current, such as checking dates of publications and throwing away out-of-date information, and ensuring that materials represent appropriate practice, service beliefs and current contacts.
- ▶ Use a range of strategies to continually access new resources and information, such as subscribing to community services information, attending meetings and developing networks.
- ▶ Families may need assistance to make contact with those who are providing resources and services.