



Tips for Building Relationships with Families

1 Show respect in communications with families.

- ☑ Ask parents how they would like to be referred to (such as Mr., Ms., first name, etc.).
- ☑ Pronounce names correctly and ask families when uncertain.
- ☑ Use warm tone of voice and positive nonverbal signals (uncrossed arms, leaning forward with interest, etc.) to show you are listening.
- ☑ Practice compassionate, active listening.
- ☑ Avoid interruptions and distractions (phones, computers, etc.).
- ☑ Share concerns in a sensitive and solution-focused way.
- ☑ Approach differences or disagreements with an openness to learn and change.

2 Build relationships with families by connecting informally.

- ☑ Be approachable; greet families warmly.
- ☑ Conduct get-to-know-you calls.
- ☑ Welcome parents into the classroom.
- ☑ Create a routine, two-way communication system with each family.
- ☑ Share photos of what their child did at school.
- ☑ Initiate conversations with parents and convey genuine interest.
- ☑ Find a balance between positive comments and concerns.
- ☑ Follow up on previous conversations.

3 Ensure classroom materials and communication with families are inclusive of all families.

- ☑ Display photos of children's families in the classroom.
- ☑ Provide dolls, clothing, pretend food, and other toys in the dramatic play area that include diverse cultures, ethnic backgrounds, and abilities.
- ☑ Provide children's books that reflect storylines, history, and/or celebrations from various cultures.
- ☑ Ensure information for families in the classroom and school hallways is translated into their home language.
- ☑ Consider aids such as pictures, symbols, gestures, and/or videos to support communication with all families.

4 Use a strengths-based approach when partnering with families.

- ☑ Approach families as partners.
- ☑ Acknowledge strengths and competencies of families first.
- ☑ Respect and learn from differences.
- ☑ Adapt practice based on family strengths and preferences.
- ☑ Brainstorm creative ways to use a parent's strengths in the classroom or as a part of their child's educational team.
- ☑ Share decision-making.

5 Work with families to minimize language, cultural, emotional, and logistical barriers to partnership.

MINIMIZING LANGUAGE BARRIERS

- ☑ Explain educational terms in an understandable way; avoid educational jargon or “teacher talk.”
- ☑ Provide a word bank or handout with family-friendly definitions when explaining educational terms.
- ☑ Use visuals to aid communication such as pictures, common symbols, and/or videos.
- ☑ Use bilingual staff or a trained interpreter at meetings, school events, or when calling parents. Avoid using children as translators.
- ☑ Provide translated versions of written communications.
- ☑ Check for understanding frequently.
- ☑ Be accepting of differences in how parents speak and listen to the message they are conveying.

MINIMIZING BARRIERS RELATED TO CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

- ☑ Be curious about each family’s culture and worldview.
- ☑ Recognize and respect that your values and beliefs may be different from those of families from backgrounds, cultures, or ethnic groups other than your own.
- ☑ Be aware of families’ cultural or religious practices, including any dietary restrictions, that might impact the child at school.
- ☑ Initiate communication with families. Parents from some cultures may hesitate to voice their opinion, as they consider the teacher to be the experts.
- ☑ Be considerate of families’ communication styles (use of eye contact, touch, personal space, body language), which can differ across cultures.
- ☑ Be understanding and open-minded about the decisions parents make for their children. We all make decisions through a lens based on our experiences.

MINIMIZING LOGISTICAL BARRIERS

- ☑ Create multiple ways a family can engage at school so they can choose what fits their needs.
- ☑ Set aside several meeting times so that a parent who has a more complex schedule has options.
- ☑ Use different modes of communication that meet the needs of all families (e.g., virtual meetings).
- ☑ Allow a family to bring their children to a conference and arrange for child care at school.
- ☑ Offer a home visit or meet in another agreed-upon location.
- ☑ Be flexible and understanding.

MINIMIZING EMOTIONAL BARRIERS

- ☑ Be welcoming and approachable.
- ☑ Be supportive of families experiencing stress (due to crisis, grief, mental health, finances, etc.) and have a list of community resources on hand.
- ☑ Find a balance between positive comments and concerns.
- ☑ Watch for parent cues during conversations (e.g., facial expressions, tone of voice, body language) to get a sense of how they are feeling and receiving your message.
- ☑ Communicate concerns in a clear and direct, yet respectful and kind, way. Show empathy and keep conversations solution-focused.
- ☑ Ask the family how frequently they want to be updated about their child’s behavior.
- ☑ Stay aware of your own emotions, moods, and triggers during interactions with families.
- ☑ Communicate that you care about their child, and focus on your shared goal related to the child’s development, growth, and success.

Go to **cliengagementfamily.org** to find more family engagement resources!