



# Engaging Families and Communities to Promote Child Health

## Strategies for Local Health Departments

### Key Purpose and Messages

Children's earliest experiences and environments shape their future health and development. Research shows that healthy early childhood experiences lay the foundation for lifelong success, impacting everything from academic achievement to chronic disease prevention. Local health departments help children have the tools they need to thrive. This document offers strategies for effective family and community engagement, focusing on collaborating with the child care system to reach and support families.

### Why Family and Community Engagement Matters

Community engagement is vital for local health departments in promoting children's health. Through respectful, strength-based interactions, partnerships with families emphasize the importance of their roles in enhancing children's development. Collaboration with community partners is an effective strategy to engage families of young children. In particular, [Child Care Resource and Referral \(CCR&R\)](#) agencies and child care programs are valuable partners for local health departments. These organizations serve as hubs in the community and have extensive networks and direct access to families and child care providers, making them invaluable allies in reaching and engaging families of young children in promoting health. [Click here to find a local CCR&R in your area.](#)

## Benefits of Family and Community Engagement for Local Health Departments

1. **Enhanced Child Health Outcomes:** When families are actively involved in their child's health and development, children experience better health outcomes, including improved physical and mental health, enhanced social-emotional development, and increased school readiness.
2. **Stronger Community Partnerships:** Building trusting relationships with families fosters open communication and collaboration. This can lead to more effective public health initiatives and greater community support for health programs.
3. **Increased Community Trust:** Local health departments that engage with families and communities build stronger trust and credibility. This trust is essential for the success of public health interventions and emergency response efforts.
4. **Improved Health Equity:** By engaging families from diverse backgrounds, health departments can address health disparities and ensure that all community members have access to the resources they need to achieve optimal health.
5. **Enhanced Program Effectiveness:** Family and community engagement leads to more relevant and responsive health programs. Local health departments can better tailor their services to meet the community's needs.
6. **Strengthened Community Ties & Positive Community Impact:** Engaging with the community fosters mutual support, increased resources, partnerships, a positive reputation for the health department, and ultimately, a healthier community.
7. **Improved Public Health Surveillance:** Active engagement with families can enhance data collection and public health surveillance, providing better insights into community health trends and needs.

## The Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework

While designed for child care programs, the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework offers valuable principles and guidance that can be adapted for local health departments seeking to engage families and communities in promoting child health. This framework will be referenced throughout this document.

### How Local Health Departments Can Utilize the Head Start PFCE Framework's Key Components

- 1. Program Foundations:** Local health departments can adapt the concept of program foundations to focus on establishing a strong infrastructure for family and community engagement. This includes:
  - **Leadership:** Securing commitment from leadership to partnering with child care organizations like CCR&Rs and child care programs for sustained family and community engagement in health promotion efforts.
  - **Continuous Improvement:** Regularly evaluating and adapting family and community engagement strategies based on feedback and outcomes.
  - **Positive Environment:** Creating a welcoming and inclusive environment within the health department that fosters collaboration with CCR&R staff and child care providers in mutual work to build trust and respect between staff and families.
- 2. Program Impact Areas:** Local health departments can align program impact areas with their specific goals for promoting child health. This might include:
  - **Family Resource Navigation and Connection:** Partnering with CCR&Rs to help families identify and access community resources that promote child and family well-being, such as food assistance programs, housing support services, and mental health resources.
  - **Health Education:** Collaborating with CCR&Rs to develop and deliver accessible and culturally relevant health education resources and workshops for families on topics such as nutrition, physical activity, and child development.
  - **Community Partnerships:** Working with CCR&Rs to identify and engage other community stakeholders to create a comprehensive network of support for families.
- 3. Family Outcomes:** Local health departments can focus on achieving positive family outcomes that contribute to child health, such as:
  - **Increased Knowledge and Skills:** Partnering with CCR&Rs to deliver workshops or training sessions about child health and development and skills to promote healthy behaviors at home.

- **Improved Health Behaviors:** Working with CCR&Rs to provide resources and support for families to adopt healthy habits, such as regular checkups, immunizations, and nutritious eating.
  - **Increased Access to Resources:** Leverage partnership with CCR&RS to connect families to the resources and services they need to support their child's health and development.
4. **Child Outcomes:** Ultimately, local health departments aim to improve child outcomes through family and community engagement, such as:
- **Optimal Child Health:** Ensuring children receive the preventive care (including staying up to date on vaccines), early intervention, and health education they need to thrive.
  - **School Readiness:** Collaborating with child care providers to promote early literacy and social-emotional development in child care settings, ensuring children are prepared for school success.
  - **Reduced Health Disparities:** Working with CCR&Rs to identify and address health inequities among children from diverse backgrounds, ensuring all children have access to quality health care and early education resources.

## Key Takeaways for Local Health Departments

By adapting the Head Start PFCE Framework to their specific context, local health departments can create a comprehensive, family-centered approach to promoting child health. This involves:

- Building strong partnerships with families and communities.
- Providing accessible and culturally relevant health education and resources.
- Collaborating with key stakeholders like CCR&R agencies and child care providers.
- Continuously evaluating and improving family and community engagement efforts to achieve positive outcomes for children and families.

## Effective Family and Community Engagement Strategies

Successful family and community engagement strategies revolve around two core values reflected in the Head Start PFCE framework:

- **Holistic Perspective:** Considering all aspects of a child's growth and development, including intellectual, physical, social, and emotional health.
- **Inclusive Approach:** Recognizing and embracing the diverse experiences of families, including their backgrounds, cultures, languages, and abilities, while supporting them in achieving their goals.

## Strategies in Action

Putting these ideas into practice, the following chart shows how the family and community engagement approaches connect with the framework and gives real-life examples. This can help you enhance your efforts and identify new ways to implement health promotion activities.

Strategies	Framework Correlation	Putting It Into Practice
1. Partner with families to identify and achieve their health goals.	Family Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offer holistic educational resources and refer families to appropriate health resources or healthcare providers.</li> <li>• Collaborate with CCR&amp;Rs and other child care partners to develop a resource guide for families that outlines key developmental milestones and gives tips for promoting them.</li> <li>• Develop educational materials (e.g., brochures, workshops) in partnership with CCR&amp;Rs, addressing common health concerns identified by families.</li> </ul>
2. Support all aspects of school readiness.	Program Impact Areas ( <i>Teaching &amp; Learning</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a training and resource guide for families that outlines key developmental milestones and offers tips for promoting them.</li> <li>• Provide up-to-date information on recommended routine vaccines, usually required for school enrollment, while incorporating the importance of non-mandated vaccines against respiratory illness.</li> <li>• Partner with CCR&amp;Rs to train child care providers on developmental milestones and strategies to promote them in the child care setting and at home.</li> <li>• Host educational opportunities in collaboration with CCR&amp;Rs for families on topics such as nutrition, physical activity, sleep, and social-emotional development, equipping them to make informed health choices for their children.</li> </ul>
3. Tailor communication to individual family priorities and needs.	Program Foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use plain language in health information brochures and resources.</li> <li>• Offer translated materials or interpretation services for families who speak languages other than English.</li> <li>• Use a variety of communication channels (e.g., emails, texts, newsletters, social media) to reach diverse families and account for information preferences.</li> </ul>

<p>4. Foster an inclusive environment that values cultural and linguistic diversity</p>	<p>Program Impact Areas <i>(Family Partnerships)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partner with community organizations such as CCR&amp;Rs to offer culturally relevant health education opportunities.</li> <li>• Use health education materials that reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the community.</li> <li>• Partner with CCR&amp;Rs to organize community health fairs and events that celebrate the cultural diversity of the community, providing information in multiple languages.</li> <li>• Create resources that adhere to accessibility guidelines to optimize the impact of information and resources.</li> </ul>
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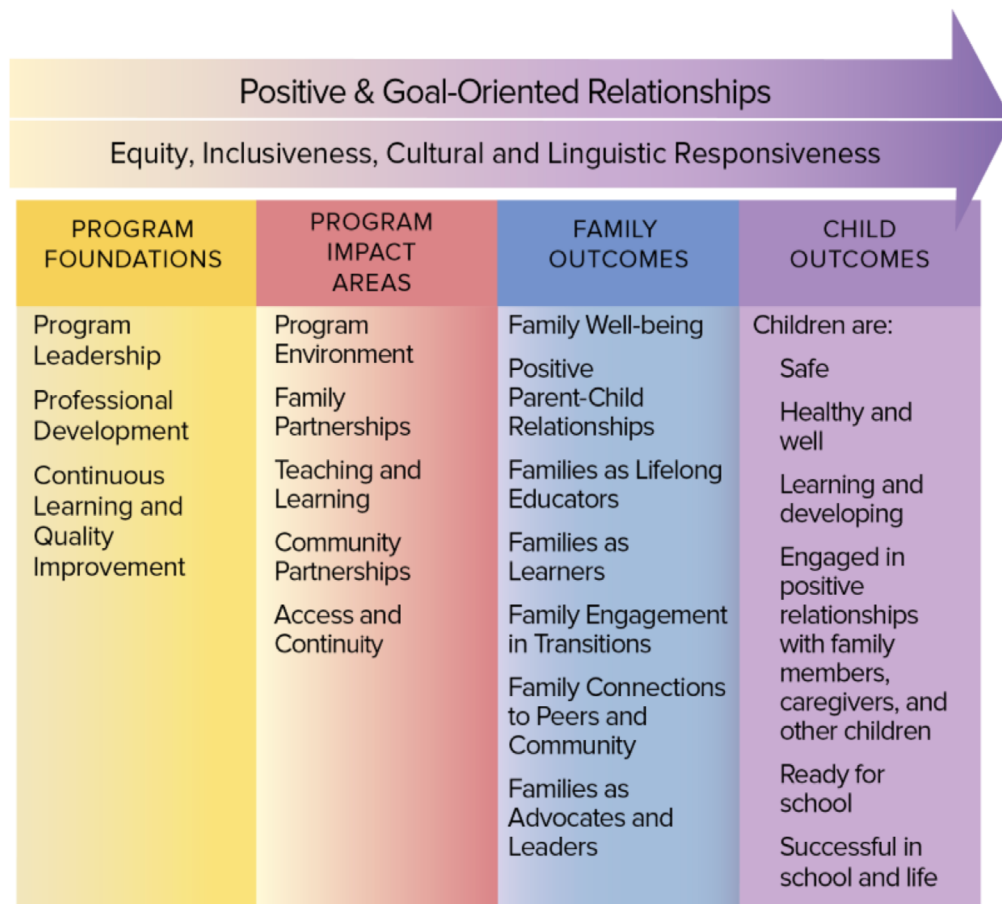
## Resources and References

1. [Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework](#)
2. [PFCE Framework - Defining Family and Community Engagement](#)
3. [Overview of Early Childhood Health Promotion – Rural Health Information Hub Toolkit](#)
4. [Early Childhood Health and Development \(aap.org\)](#)

## Addendum: Head Start (PFCE) Framework

The Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework (PFCE) Framework<sup>1</sup> is a foundation, a map, to guide engagement efforts in communities and with parents and families. It can be used in strategic planning, program design and management, continuous learning, and improvement activities. The Framework is also useful as a professional development tool. It can help staff members understand their roles in systemic, integrated, and comprehensive family and community engagement, and coordinate their efforts with others

“ Community engagement refers to the mutually respectful, strengths-based interactions of staff and families with community members and agencies at all levels. These partnerships support parents’ roles as valued community members and their progress toward their goals for themselves and their children.<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup>Head Start PFCE Framework

<sup>2</sup>Head Start PFCE Framework - Defining Family and Community Engagement