



# Engaging Families and Communities for Health

## A Guide for Early Care and Education Professionals

### Key Purpose and Messages

Investing in early childhood health is an investment in a child's future. Research shows that healthy early childhood experiences lay the foundation for lifelong success, impacting everything from academic achievement to chronic disease prevention. As trusted community members, child care professionals are uniquely positioned to champion health. This document provides an overview of community engagement strategies to help child care professionals promote health effectively.

### Why Family Engagement Matters

Community engagement focuses on respectful, strength-based interactions between aligned partner organizations and community members, including families of young children. These partnerships emphasize the importance of family roles and preventive health measures to enhance young children's development. The child care community, including CCR&R and child care program staff, plays a crucial role in community engagement efforts. CCR&Rs have extensive community networks and direct access to child care providers and families. They employ successful strategies to engage others, collaborate with various stakeholders, such as local health departments or other public health agencies, and seek community input for continuous improvement and effective partnerships in promoting health and wellness.

## Benefits to the Child Care Community

1. **Enhanced Child 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. This translates to a more positive and enriching classroom experience for child care professionals.
2. **Stronger Partnerships with Families:** Building trusting relationships with families fosters open communication and collaboration. This can lead to greater parental involvement in their child's learning and development, making the child care professional's job more effective and rewarding.
3. **Increased Job Satisfaction:** Child care professionals who actively engage families and communities often experience greater job satisfaction. They feel more connected to their work and see the tangible impact they are making on the lives of children and families.
4. **Professional Growth:** Engaging with families and communities exposes child care professionals to diverse perspectives, cultures, and experiences. This can broaden their understanding of child development and health, leading to professional growth and development.
5. **Reduced Stress and Burnout:** When families are actively involved in their child's care and education, it can alleviate some of the burden on child care professionals, reducing stress and the risk of burnout.
6. **Improved Program Quality:** Family engagement is a key indicator of high-quality child care programs. By prioritizing family engagement, child care professionals can enhance the overall quality of their programs.
7. **Strengthened Community Ties & Positive Community Impact:** Engaging with the community fosters mutual support, leading to increased resources, partnerships, a positive reputation for the program, and ultimately, a healthier community.

Actively engaging families and communities in health promotion creates a situation where everyone benefits – the children, the families, the community, and the child care professionals themselves.

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

The Head Start PFCE Framework is a valuable tool developed to guide child care programs in effectively engaging families and communities. It emphasizes a holistic approach to child development, recognizing the vital role that families play in promoting children's health and well-being. This framework will be used throughout this document to illustrate how specific strategies align with its four key components:

1. **Program Foundations:** The underlying principles and structures that support family engagement, including leadership, continuous improvement, and a positive program environment.
2. **Program Impact Areas:** The specific areas where family engagement efforts can make a difference, such as family partnerships, teaching and learning, and community partnerships.
3. **Family Outcomes:** The positive changes that occur in families as a result of effective engagement, such as increased family well-being, stronger parent-child relationships, and families as lifelong educators.
4. **Child Outcomes:** The positive developmental outcomes for children that result from family engagement, including social-emotional, cognitive, and physical development.



## Effective Community Engagement Strategies

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

1. **Holistic Perspective:** Considering all aspects of a child's growth and development, including intellectual, physical, social, and emotional health.
2. **Inclusive Approach:** The 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

To illustrate these strategies, the following chart connects the community engagement strategies with aspects of the framework and provides practical examples for putting these strategies into action. This can help you increase your efforts and determine new strategies to integrate health promotion activities into your practice.

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>• Use a simple questionnaire to learn about each family's health priorities.</li> <li>• Create a visual goal chart with the family to track progress towards their chosen health goals.</li> <li>• Celebrate successes, big or small, with the family, like trying a new healthy recipe or completing a health checkup.</li> </ul>
2. Support all aspects of school readiness.	Program Impact Areas ( <i>Teaching &amp; Learning</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Host a workshop for families on creating a healthy home environment that supports learning and development. Topics could include nutrition, sleep routines, screen time management, and creating spaces for play and exploration.</li> <li>• Provide a list of age-appropriate books and games that promote emotional awareness and healthy coping skills.</li> <li>• Share information with families about local resources that support holistic development, such as libraries, parks, museums, and community programs. Encourage families to take advantage of these resources and make learning a part of their everyday lives.</li> </ul>
3. Tailor communication to individual family priorities and needs.	Program Foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use visual aids like pictures or charts to simplify health information.</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 different families.</li> </ul>
4. Foster an inclusive environment that values cultural and linguistic diversity.	Program Impact Areas ( <i>Family Partnerships</i> )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build relationships with families so they feel welcomed, valued, and respected.</li> <li>• Equip staff to engage in respectful and culturally responsive conversations about health.</li> <li>• Partner with community organizations to offer culturally relevant health education workshops.</li> </ul>

## Resources and References

1. [Head Start Parent, Family, and Community \(PFCE\) Engagement Framework](#)
2. [Head Start PFCE Framework - Defining Family and Community Engagement](#)
3. [Early Care and Education Providers – On the Frontlines of Public Health | Early Care and Education Portal | CDC](#)
4. [Overview of Early Childhood Health Promotion – Rural Health Information Hub Toolkit](#)
5. [Improving Early Childhood Development: World Health Organization Guideline](#)
6. [Early Childhood Development | UNICEF](#)
7. [Early Childhood Health and Development \(aap.org\)](#)

## Addendum: Head Start (PFCE) Framework

The Head Start (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 child care program-wide strategic planning, program design and management, continuous learning, and improvement activities, as well as with governing bodies, community, and parent groups. The framework is also useful as a professional development tool. It can help all staff members in a community-based organizational or a child care program understand their roles in systemic, integrated, and comprehensive PFCE, and to coordinate their efforts with others.

Positive & Goal-Oriented Relationships			
Equity, Inclusiveness, Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness			
PROGRAM FOUNDATIONS	PROGRAM IMPACT AREAS	FAMILY OUTCOMES	CHILD OUTCOMES
Program Leadership	Program Environment	Family Well-being	Children are:
Professional Development	Family Partnerships	Positive Parent-Child Relationships	Safe
Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement	Teaching and Learning	Families as Lifelong Educators	Healthy and well
	Community Partnerships	Families as Learners	Learning and developing
	Access and Continuity	Family Engagement in Transitions	Engaged in positive relationships with family members, caregivers, and other children
		Family Connections to Peers and Community	Ready for school
		Families as Advocates and Leaders	Successful in school and life



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