



Engaging with Parents

Self-Study Guide

Table of Contents

Engaging with Parents Self-Study Unit

How to Complete the Engaging with Parents Self Study Unit	5
Introduction and Overview	7
Ideas for Putting the Principles into Action	9
Section 1 — Partnership	11
Section 2 — Shared Power	21
Section 3 — Family Strengths	33
Section 4 — Cultural Competence	43
Section 5 — Family-Driven	55
Section 6 — Social Support	67
Section 7 — Hope & Joy	77



This publication was released by the Office of Children's Services, produced at a cost of \$7.02 per copy to provide training to Early Childhood Professionals. Printed in Anchorage, statewide distribution.

How to Complete

Engaging with Parents Self-Study Unit

1. Look through the entire packet before beginning the self-study unit.
2. Choose a section to work on.
3. Read the handout or article in the section and work through the accompanying study sheet.
4. Choose an action step and begin working on the step you have chosen. You do not need to be completed entirely with the chosen action step before turning in your materials, as some action steps are ongoing. You need only report on the progress you have made.
5. Attend or host a family night and fill out the 1/2 sheet entitled: **Tell Us About Your Family Night Experience!**
6. Complete the **Engaging with Parents Self-Study Report**.
7. After completing the entire section, return the **study sheet** and **study report** to the Resource & Referral Agency in your region for training credit. Envelopes are provided.
8. Continue with another section.





Engaging with Parents Self-Study Unit

Based on the Principles of Strengthening Families and Stronger Together

Introduction and Overview

Welcome to a new self study training unit! We are excited to be offering the information from Parent Services Project's Stronger Together Family Support and Early Childhood Education curriculum.

We hope the information in this self study packet sparks new ideas for you to engage with the parents of the children in your care.

We have anticipated some possible questions you may have regarding this unit of study. They are listed below. Please read through them carefully. If your questions have not been answered, please give us a call! We will be happy to walk you through this exciting self study option.

What is Strengthening Families?

Strengthening Families Alaska is a state-wide approach involving early learning programs to build protective factors around children by supporting families in relationship-based practice. This approach has been proven to reduce child abuse and neglect when staff in early learning programs participate in activities that strengthen five protective factors. These factors are:

- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Concrete support in times of need
- Healthy social and emotional development of children

What is Stronger Together?

Stronger Together is a Provider-Parent curriculum which stresses the importance of working with families when caring for their children.

The curriculum is based on 7 principles of family support within the context of early care and education settings. These principles help to guide us all who work with young children and their families. They are:

- Partnership
- Shared Power
- Family Strengths
- Cultural Competence
- Family-Driven
- Social Support
- Hope and Joy

These principles are embedded in this self study training packet and will be explored fully, one at a time within this unit of study.

This material is based on the Stronger Together: Family Support in Early Childhood curriculum of the Parent Services Project. For more information, visit their web site at www.parentservices.org or call 415-454-1870.



Engaging with Parents Self-Study Unit

Based on the Principles of Strengthening Families and Stronger Together

How can working through this self study unit help me enrich my program?

Working through this self study unit will help you enrich your program by:

1. Reflecting on your relationship with the families of the children you have in care.
2. Identifying areas of strengths and areas which need strengthening within your program involving and honoring families.
3. Strengthening your working relationships with families and children. Building your knowledge and skills in working with parents to provide for their children.

What is involved in this unit? How does this work?

The unit is broken into seven sections, one for each of the Stronger Together Principles. You will be invited to explore each principle, identify strengths and goals, take an action step toward your goal, and reflectively write about your learning experience.

Family Nights sponsored by your Child Care Resource & Referral Agency, the Library, and other community sponsored events will serve as your “active study lab”. If you prefer to hold your own family nights, that would be great too! You will use the Family Night as a platform for acting on the particular principle you are studying.

How many training hours is this unit worth?

Each section is worth 3 hours. 2 hours are allowed for completing each section. Attendance at the Family Night is worth 1 hour. This gives a possible of 3 hours per section. There are a total of 7 sections in this unit of study, which gives total possible training hours of 21.

Do I need to do the whole unit in order to get training credit?

In order to get a complete picture of the Stronger Together principles, we encourage completion of the entire unit. However, after looking through the sections, you identify a few areas in which you want to focus more energy, complete those sections. Upon completion of each unit, send your study and reflection sheets to us and we will award a training certificate for 3 hours. Keep in mind that these study units are designed to use in conjunction with the Family Night events in your community or the ones you host yourself.

Alaska's Child Care Resource & Referral

South Central

Child Care Connection, Inc.
P.O. Box 141689 Anchorage AK
99514-1689
Tel 907.563.1966 Fax 907. 563.1959
Toll Free 1.800.278.3723
Toll Free Fax 1.877.563.1959
www.childcareconnection.org

Southeast

AEYC-SEA
P.O. Box 22870 Juneau, AK 99802
Tel 907.789.1235 Fax 907.789.1238
Toll Free 1.888.785.1235
www.aeyc-sea.org

Northern/Interior

C.A.R.E.S. Resource and Referral
1908 Old Pioneer Way
Fairbanks, AK 99709
Tel 907.479.2214
Fax 907.479.2486
Toll Free 1.866.878.2273
www.alaskacares.org



Ideas for Putting the Principles into Action

Based on the Principles of Strengthening Families and Stronger Together

The following are some ideas using the principles of the Stronger Together curriculum. We hope they help you in making the shift from child-centered care to family-centered care. **Each section contains action steps specific to that section's principle as well.**

One way to begin making this shift is to experience social events with the families of the children in your care. This self study unit uses monthly family nights as a platform for this purpose. You may choose to attend one of the family nights hosted in your community through your Resource & Referral Agency and partner organizations or you can arrange your own family nights within your program or in conjunction with other early learning programs. The idea is to gather together and build relationship with your families in order to provide more responsive care for the children.

Research has shown that the well-being of children is tied to the well-being of families. Social support is a powerful predictor of family well-being. Best practice in the field of Early Care and Learning tells us that in order to care for the child; we must acknowledge that the child comes with a family that must also be nurtured.

When planning to attend a family night or planning your own family night, the following are some steps you can do to help put the principles into practice.

1. Post the flyer or postcard announcing the family night on your parent bulletin board.
2. Have the children make invitations to the event to give to their parents.
3. Preview the book that will be read at the family night by sharing the book with the children and their parents. Perhaps you might even send home a project the family can do together in preparation for the family night that relates to the featured book.
4. Ask families if they are in need of transportation to the event and help them connect with other families who plan to attend.

Build community by making special badges or fun hats for everyone in your program to wear while at the event. Parents are more likely to wear something silly if they know their children made it for them.

During the family night:

1. Sit with your families as a sign of shared support and shared experience.
2. Focus on being present, not only for the children but their parents too.
3. Pick one principle and think about one action you could do during the family night that makes the principle real for you.
4. Share laughter and joy with the families.
5. Focus on the strengths of the families. Every family has them.



Section 1
Partnership

Partnership

Section 1, Study Sheet 1, Principle 1

Definition: *The relationship between families and staff is one of equality and respect, resulting in the creation of a mutually beneficial partnership. Success comes from promoting the excellence of all partners.*

Read the Handout on the next page, entitled Value Shift. Pay attention to how you feel as you read each statement. Reflect on these statements and the feelings you have about them. Once you have read through the handout and reflected on your feelings, answer the following questions. Remember, there is no right or wrong answer to each question. This exercise is simply to get you thinking about the principle of partnering with parents and providing a more family-centered approach in your program.

1. In what ways does your program reflect the more traditional values listed on the left hand side of the handout?
2. In what ways does your program reflect the family support values listed on the right hand side of the handout?
3. Which family support values listed could you see yourself adopting?
4. Which family support values do you disagree with and why?
5. What questions, concerns, or issues has this handout on Value Shift brought out for you?
6. How do you plan to resolve these issues or questions for yourself?

Partnership

From “*Stronger Together: Family Support and Early Childhood Education*”

Value Shift

Family-centered programs share some values that differ from those that may be found in traditional early childhood or other settings. These values determine how parents, staff and children think about themselves and relate to one another.

Traditional Values

The family alone is responsible for raising their children.

Seeking support signals weakness something to be embarrassed about.

Deficit thinking — what’s the family missing?

Exclusive. Parents must prove they belong. Services only for some family members.

Parents are barriers to their child’s development. Parents are passive vessels to pour information into.

Families are victims, beholden to experts who tell them what’s good for them. Program is expert-driven.

Families are recipients of service. Programs control which services are offered.

Crisis-oriented. Intervention is mandated or prevention is needed to avoid problems.

When families are poor they shouldn’t dream; they have to settle for less.

Family Support Values

A community of support is fostered to help families raise their children.

Seeking support is a sign of strength, the first step to getting what’s needed.

Asset-based thinking — which strengths are present to build upon?

Inclusive. Everyone is in. Staff supports growth of all family members.

Parents are resources for their child, the staff and school community. Parents count as decision makers.

Program fosters equality, co-ownership, partnership, mutual contributions. Families and staff have expertise.

Families are active partners and consumers, deciding which services they want.

Focus on promotion and capacity building. Programs encourage all to reach their own excellence.

Everyone has goals and dreams that can be developed and realized together.



ACTION STEPS for Partnership

Section 1, Action Steps, Principle 1

Choose one or more of the following action steps to work on when studying this principle. Feel free to create an action step that better fits your program. Just be sure that your action step includes the principle of Partnership.

1. Create a venue for celebrating each family. Ideas include:
 - A wall with a photo of each child and his family, depicting favorite activities they like to do. Be sure to have you and your staff share family photos as well.
 - A birthday calendar noting the birthdays of everyone in the family, just not the child in care.
 - Spotlight a family each month with a blurb in your program's newsletter.
2. Communicate in a meaningful way everyday with parents.
 - Keep a clipboard with blank paper handy. Each day record at least one positive anecdote about each child in care. Share with parents at pick up time.
3. Getting to know the names of all the parents of the children in your care is an essential partnership piece. Ideas include:
 - Play name games at potluck and family nights.
 - Place parents' names alongside children's names on the sign-in board.
 - Greet each parent by name daily.
4. Learn as much as you can about each child's family, not for nosy reasons, but to better partner with them and know about where the child goes every evening.
 - Post a weekly "How did you spend your weekend" question by your sign-in board. Supply pens and sticky notes. Invite families to jot down one or two things they did the weekend before. Use these as conversation starters with parents and children. Save them in children's folder for future reference.



Tell us About your Family Night Experience!

Date of Family Night: _____

1. Please describe the Family Night Event.

2. How did you invite your families?

3. How many families came?

4. What did you do to make the principle come alive for you during the family night experience?

5. What were some of the reactions of your families about the experience?





Section 2
Shared Power

Shared Power

Section 2, Study Sheet 2, Principle 2

Definition: Families are their own best advocates. They are decision-makers on a collaborative team. Confident and competent families empower their children to achieve success and well-being.

Encouraging active involvement is both challenging and necessary in order to have shared power in your program. "Creating a welcoming environment, building respectful relationships, and fostering relationships among families helps to encourage the active involvement of families." *Stronger Together Family Support and Early Childhood Education*, 2006.

1. Read the article entitled, "Why Isn't There More Involvement?"

Also included in this section is the handout entitled, *Understanding Power*.

2. List some of the challenges you have involving families in the program.

3. For each challenge listed, identify what the program could do to overcome the challenge.

Shared Power

From “*Stronger Together: Family Support and Early Childhood Education*”

Benefits for Programs

Family involvement builds overall capacity for program excellence. As parents make decisions, and design and implement activities and services, the quality of those services increases. Family involvement increases community pride and ownership of the program.

Continuity of child care increases as families and caregivers have opportunities to interact and understand cultural perspectives and ways of caring for children. This is essential to all quality early care and education programs.

Why Isn't There More Involvement?

With all of the obvious benefits that family involvement can bring, one might wonder why there are not more parents at school. The following table explores the challenges of involving families.

You're Setting the Tone: Does Your Program Encourage or Discourage Participation?

Discourages Participation

No vested interest: Parents don't see the value of the activities; they attend reluctantly only when it's mandatory.

Pressure to perform: Parents, especially those who speak another language, feel vulnerable in situations they feel ill-equipped to handle.

Parents don't know anyone at the activity.

Daily stresses make people feel they can't do even one more thing.

Families receive no concrete support — child care, transportation — for getting involved in center activities.

Parents perceive no change; they mistrust the “same old system”.

Parents feel they are a “charity case.”

Family members feel they are coming to be “fixed” at a place where weaknesses and deficits are the focus, where an expert decides what's best for you.

Encourages Participation

Parents develop vested interest in activities that they've helped plan and choose to attend.

The program provides many opportunities to get involved. Parents set their own agendas.

People connect. Social support reduces isolation, feelings of powerlessness.

Activities counteract daily stresses.

Parents receive ample support to participate in family activities: child care, food, transportation scheduled at parents' convenience, translation.

Parents express needs, see immediate results. Change is tangible.

Parents are encouraged to reciprocate in a climate based on giving and getting support.

Families' intrinsic strengths are acknowledged. There is strength in getting help. Variety prevails and choices are encouraged.

The Smell Gets Them Every Time

When it seems like one of those “everybody needs to be there” kind of times, plan a barbecue. The fun and food might even bring out families you've never met before.



Shared Power

From “*Stronger Together: Family Support and Early Childhood Education*”

Understanding Power

Many people are uncomfortable talking about power. Most people can recall an experience when they were on the wrong side of a situation in which someone misused their power. Yet, perceptions of power, the existence of hierarchies and the use of power impact the ways that people related to one another and in groups.

Recalling an experience when a child had a tantrum makes one realize that power dynamics are present from the moment a human being is born. A child in a full-blown tantrum can be a powerful force. Many adults feel powerless in the presence of a screaming child. We work hard to avoid power struggles with children. Yet, in actuality, a child engaged in a tantrum may be feeling powerless, unable to control his or her life at that moment. Experienced caregivers learn how to respond in ways that help children develop trust, feel safe and express their power in constructive ways.

Staff in family supportive programs work in ways that enable families to feel more powerful in their ability to enhance their lives and their children’s lives. As partners they strive to share power, respecting parents’ choices and acknowledging their strengths. In the field of early childhood education, power issues arise in provider-parent relationships, especially with turf issues and shared decision-making. We can help others more effectively when we’re aware of how power works in family relationships, in work environments and in our wider community.

What Did I Miss?

Tell people who couldn’t come to a meeting what they missed. Keep a camera handy at the meeting to capture special moments to share with others.

Family Skill List

Family members with unique talents are encouraged to post their services on the center exchange board. Parents swap all kinds of services — from baby-sitting to tax preparation.

ACTION STEPS: for Shared Power

Section 2, Action Steps, Principle 2

Choose one or more of the following action steps to work on when studying this principle. Feel free to create an action step that better fits your program. Just be sure that your action step includes the principle of Shared Power.

1. Get to know the parents of the children in your program and what is important to them. Knowing what is important to parents helps to channel their involvement in the program.
 - Create a “Wish List” poster and hang in by the sign-in board. Attach a pencil by a string and invite parents to write down their wishes. The wishes give you a clue to what the parent values.
 - Create a suggestion box. Have scrap paper and pens close by. Invite parents to jot down suggestions for the program and place in box. Check it often and respond with action.
2. Choose one of the challenges and action steps you created on the previous study sheet.
3. Rather than doing things for parents, the family support model encourages parents to do for themselves and the program. Ideas include:
 - Create a parent share board and encourage parents to post their own needs, such as play dates for their children, services they provide, or items to sell or trade.
 - Bear’s “Barely Used” box. Put a stuffed bear next to a large cardboard box or plastic bin with a sign inviting parents to bring an item they barely use. This can be the beginning of a clothing and toy exchange for parents.



Tell us About your Family Night Experience!

Date of Family Night: _____

1. Please describe the Family Night Event.

2. How did you invite your families?

3. How many families came?

4. What did you do to make the principle come alive for you during the family night experience?

5. What were some of the reactions of your families about the experience?





Section 3
Family Strengths

Family Strengths

Section 3, Study Sheet 3, Principles 3

Definition: Families are assets, not barriers to overcome or work around, They are vital resources to themselves and to one another. Programs build on the strengths of families. Seeking services is a sign of strength.

Adopting a strength-based approach with families of the children in your care takes effort. The child comes with a family and the family is a great resource in learning about the child. You cannot care for one without caring about the other. By focusing on families' strengths, we build upon and nurture relationships which will serve children throughout their lives.

1. Fill out the Family Strengths assessment on the next page.
2. Identify your program's strengths and list them below.
3. Identify areas in which you would like to strengthen your program and list them below.
4. Choose one of the areas you would like to strengthen and brainstorm some actions you could do to help become stronger in this area. Be creative and think outside the box.

Family Strengths

From “*Stronger Together: Family Support and Early Childhood Education*”

Take a Closer Look

Use this assessment tool to learn whether staff are employing best practices in adopting a strength-based approach with families in their care.

Description of Attitude or Behavior	Not at all	Sometimes	Most of the Time	Always	Does not apply to my position
I recognize and appreciate families' participation in workshops and activities.					
I respect and support a family's decision to seek child development services.					
I recognize the importance of extended family by including them in activities and welcoming them into the facility.					
I recognize the importance of families. I tell parents about their importance to their children.					
I connect people to resources I am familiar with.					
I am able to identify strengths in every family in my care.					
I recognize the things that families do well. I share that with families.					
I link parents to one another.					
I point out positive things that are happening in the program.					
I recognize my own strengths and talents.					
I use the talents of the families to strengthen the program.					
I observe and point out the things that children are able to do.					
I respect families as experts concerning their children. (I ask for information. I seek the opinion of parents regarding their children and in all aspects of the program).					

* Adapted from Take a Closer Look: Evaluating Family-Supportive Child Care Programs (San Rafael, Calif.: Parent Services Project, Inc.), 2003



ACTION STEPS for Family Strengths

Section 3, Action Steps, Principle 3

Choose one or more of the following action steps to work on when studying this principle. Feel free to create an action step that better fits your program. Just be sure that your action step includes the principle of Family Strengths.

1. Sharing the positive aspects of each child with their parents helps the parents see their children through someone else's eyes and feel proud of them. Ideas include:
 - "What the kids said today". This could be simply a note to each parent about something their child said that day or try using a daily sheet with each child's name on it. Put the sheet on a clipboard and record at least one thing each child says under their name. At the end of the day snip that section from the sheet and hand it to the parent, elaborating on the context in which the child said it.
 - Post each child's name and their photo low enough for the children to see and yet in a spot the parents are likely to see it too. By each child's cubby is a good choice. Each week post a positive attribute or action for each child.
2. Parents know things about their children that can help you to better care for them. To get them to share this information:
 - By creating an easy and quick survey for parents to fill out that tells you a little about the child and the child's life at home. Include questions having to do with favorite foods, bedtime preferences, and family activities. Be sure to follow up with the information gained from this survey by commenting positively and integrating into your program and activities.
 - Informally engaging parents in conversation about their child.
 - By including a Family theme unit in your program's activities. Within the theme you can study each child's family routines, favorite foods, extended family members, etc.



Tell us About your Family Night Experience!

Date of Family Night: _____

1. Please describe the Family Night Event.

2. How did you invite your families?

3. How many families came?

4. What did you do to make the principle come alive for you during the family night experience?

5. What were some of the reactions of your families about the experience?





Section 4
Cultural Competence

Cultural Competence

Section 4, Study Sheet 4, Principle 4

Definition: *Each family's culture is recognized, valued, and respected. Programs are community-based and are culturally relevant to the families they serve.*

Child care providers work with children whose families are sometimes very different than their own. We need to learn about, understand, and celebrate these differences if we are to find common ground and mutual respect for one another. True family-centered care cannot happen without it.

1. Read the articles on the next two pages that discuss ideas about creating a learning environment that welcomes and invites cultural diversity and family sharing.
2. What opportunities have you created in your program for sharing and learning about the cultures, beliefs, and traditions of the families you have in care?
3. What are at least 3 ideas in the articles that were new to you or that you did not completely understand or with which you agreed?
4. What could you do to become more culturally competent?



Cultural Competence

From “Stronger Together: Family Support and Early Childhood Education”

Creating a Learning Environment About Culture

When we first started to move away from the “tourist curriculum,” we decided to have a cultural awareness day. We asked families to help their children share something that represented their culture. I thought it would be a meaningful activity until many of the children came to school with items that their parents had just purchased at the store. I realized that all of us, parents and staff, needed to think about culture differently. Culture isn’t only about a costume that reflects your ancestry or ethnicity. It’s not about something you have to buy. Culture is about the everyday things and actions in our lives. It is not enough to do culture on one day, but learn about one another’s culture every day.

— Teacher

Besides supporting families as they pass on their culture and language to their children, early childhood programs can create an environment where adults and children relate to and learn from those whose culture and language are different from their own.

Opportunities to talk Programs that provide opportunities for families to speak and think critically about bias help them raise children who will thrive in diverse communities. Parents may want to talk to experts, staff and other parents about:

- How to handle teasing and other behavior directed at one’s identity.
- How to handle teasing and other behaviors directed at someone else.
- How to raise children who will grow up with the ability to appreciate and work with people of diverse backgrounds.
- How to understand and help children to be culturally competent at home and in mainstream culture.

Opportunities to share Some programs promote a diverse learning environment by setting up special times when family members are invited to share a song or cultural tradition. Other programs ask families to bring in samples of what they eat at home, then choose a theme — breads and grains, for example. The different breads and grains are identified with the family’s name and are placed near the sign-in sheet so adults can have a taste as they pick up their children. Recipes can be there to take home as well.

In other programs, teachers create a family corner as a permanent part of their classroom environment. There, families can share photos or mementos from important occasions in their life; the birth of a baby, a holiday or religious observance, a recent vacation or weekend activity.

Opportunities to learn about culture Hosting events and activities based on families’ own experiences is a popular way to encourage the sharing of cultural practices. In one center, an uncle of a child whose family celebrates the traditional Japanese New Year demonstrated how to pound mochi (rice cake) during cooking time. In another, the parents and siblings of a child enrolled in the program were marching in a holiday parade, and all the programs’ children and their families were invited to come and watch. The more real an activity is to the lives of families, the greater the opportunity for making important learning connections.

How Do You Carry the Baby?

Ask parents how their infants and toddlers like to be carried — especially when they need comforting. A little bit of information goes a long way to providing a culturally comforting environment for new children.



Cultural Competence

From “Stronger Together: Family Support and Early Childhood Education”

Holidays... In or Out?

Remember when red and green colors were mandatory décor in December? Do you still celebrate holidays in your program? Which ones? Do you do everyone’s holidays? Does someone object to the celebration of one particular holiday in the program? What should we be doing?

Celebrations, important to the life of a child, family and community, bind us to one another. They can be magical occasions, full of hope, and they can teach children about history, culture – and one another.

When individuals and families make choices about holiday observances, the celebration can take on great meaning. However, program staff that make choices about holidays must be aware of how their decisions affect children and families of culturally diverse backgrounds. No child or family should feel excluded or ignored.

In evaluating a holiday practice, it helps to look at the motivation behind its celebration. Is it being celebrated because “we’ve always done it this way?” Are key staff members set on celebrating a favorite, personally meaningful holiday? Are you celebrating holidays meaningful to families? Are you deciding not to celebrate holidays because you believe it’s not developmentally appropriate curriculum for children?

Programs that work to affirm each child’s culture need to examine their holiday policies to ensure that the celebration of culture is driven not just by the staff but also by every family’s desire to share its special and everyday activities with the school community. Programs should start where children are, and honor what has meaning in their lives and in the lives of their families.

What is Cultural Competence?

Caregivers often work with people who are different from themselves – families that speak another language and have different beliefs. Being competent in your work means developing the capacity to interact respectfully with each child and family.

Cultural competence is a lifelong process that begins with understanding one’s own biases and cultural practices. Learning to identify how we define our own cultures and hearing how others define theirs can help bring clarity when differences are present. This awareness can increase our sensitivity to the existence of cultural bias and reduce the tendency to stereotype others. As cultural competence increases, we are more able to:

- Overcome barriers: discomfort, lack of information, distorted information.
- Explore our own culture and examine our own beliefs and values.
- Approach a family’s culture with respect; recognize all cultures’ strengths.
- Develop the skills to learn from and work with families from cultures other than our own.
- Change the way we work and feel more comfortable with people from diverse cultures.

Family Sharing

Rather than promoting mainstream holidays, set up a family sharing time and family area.

This practice gives all families a chance to share and affirms each child’s cultural identity. Another affirmation of families is sharing photographs and family histories to create family trees, a wall of family photos or a family photo album.



ACTION STEP for Cultural Competence

Section 4, Action Steps, Principle 4

Choose one or more of the following action steps to work on when studying this principle. Feel free to create an action step that better fits your program. Just be sure that your action step includes the principle of Cultural Competence.

1. Include families' care giving practice in the program:
 - Ask the parents of the infants in care to send in a tape of them singing or talking to their babies. Explain that you would like to play this tape during the day to help calm the baby.
 - Ask families to share a recipe with the program for a favorite family snack or lunch item. Feature these foods on your menu from time to time, calling each one by the name of the child's family. For example: Carolyn's family chicken sticks or Brian's family tuna sandwiches or Sierra's family tortilla soup.
2. Create a space for families to linger in the program and share items from their lives. Some ideas include:
 - Making a space just inside your classroom with an easy chair and rug. Provide a table and invite families to bring framed family photos, textiles, vacation souvenirs, etc. to share and discuss during comings and goings.
 - Make a "Weekender" bulletin board and invite families to bring items to place on the board that represent their weekends. For some this might be movie ticket while for others it might be book. Whatever a family brings will give everyone an opportunity to know them better and provide a forum for discussion.
3. Create "talk-able moments". Some discussions won't happen unless there is prompting. Some ideas to prompt discussions are:
 - Use the theme of "All about Me" to create discussions between children about skin color, hair, eyes, families, traditions etc.
 - Invite friends and colleagues into the program who are differently-abled (use a wheelchair or service dog). This can be a casual visit to read a story or simply hang out to play.



Tell us About your Family Night Experience!

Date of Family Night: _____

1. Please describe the Family Night Event.

2. How did you invite your families?

3. How many families came?

4. What did you do to make the principle come alive for you during the family night experience?

5. What were some of the reactions of your families about the experience?





Section 5

Family-Driven

Family-Driven

Section 5, Study Sheet 5, Principle 5

Definition: Families determine program services that affect them. They choose to participate in activities that reflect their own needs and interests. When appropriate, programs are a bridge between families and other services.

Parents need to work. Working parents need child care. For most parents, finding child care that meets their needs as well as their children's needs is laden with emotion, effort, and expense. Child care providers become family and the program often becomes a home away from home. We would like to create that experience for every child and every parent.

1. Look over the next two pages. As you read, think about your own program's activities for families.
2. What, if anything about this principle is new to you?
3. Does your program provide any events for families?
4. If it does not, what would it take for you to offer family fun nights or other services such as the ones listed on the second page?
5. Who could help you begin to plan some family events?
6. What kinds of resources would you need? Think about events that don't cost a lot of money and are simple and family-oriented, perhaps things you enjoy with your own family.

ACTION STEPS for Family-Driven

Step 5, Action Steps, Principle 5

Choose one or more of the following action steps to work on when studying this principle. Feel free to create an action step that better fits your program. Just be sure that your action step includes the principle of Family - Driven.

1. Create your own menu of services for your families. It will probably look different than the one in this section. It should, since your program's needs and the families' needs are unlike any others. Leave your sections blank and have parents them in with their ideas for activities. Possible sections could include:
 - Celebrations
 - Food or Snack Share
 - Meet and Greet
 - Book Club
 - Parenting Support
2. Create your menu of services together with your families. Hang a sheet of butcher paper on the wall by the sign-in area and encourage parents to "make a wish" to write suggestions for services they would like to see the program offer. Encourage whimsy and brainstorm. Doing this will generate many ideas.
3. If your program does not currently host family nights, now is a good time to start. Begin small and simple. Some ideas include:
 - Meeting your families at the park at pickup time. Encourage everyone to linger and play for a few minutes by having bubbles, balls, and other fun activities.
 - Hosting a Soup for Supper night. Each family can send an ingredient with their children in the morning to child care. As part of the day's activity, the children can help make the soup. Have the soup ready at pickup time for a relaxing snack together before everyone departs for the day.
4. Offer a forum for parents to get their questions answered. Some topics of interest might be:
 - Child development. Invite a specialist from one of many service agencies in your community who deal with special needs or early childhood to speak with your parents.
 - Kindergarten readiness. Invite a kindergarten teacher or other person from the school district to speak to the parents about the skills their children should have by the time go off to kindergarten.



Family-Driven

From “*Stronger Together: Family Support and Early Childhood Education*”

Beneath the Surface of Family Fun

When asked, families everywhere choose family fun as an activity that they would like their early childhood program to offer. Whether it’s zoo trips, bingo nights, picnics, pot lunches or holiday celebrations, families know the value of being together with their children and with one another as a community. This is a comfortable starting point and, for many, the first time they have participated in such events.

Yet, when budgets are tight, these often are the first activities to be cut. Early childhood educators, like policy makers, find it hard to justify spending on family fun. Some feel tempted to throw a little “education information” into the bumper bowling party.

Many providers lament that parents only “show up” when fund things are happening. Parents have the answer to why this is so. They vote with their feet for what providers intuitively know in their hearts: Family fun is not just important – it’s essential.

Family fun activities are vehicles for building trust and relationships. From elaborate field trips to the simple sharing of meals, they bring families together, provide parent and children with informal learning experiences, offer respite from stress, promise good will and laughter. Families isolated in daily life get a chance to share something of themselves and learn new ways of doing things. Family fun events, with their relaxed atmosphere and free-flowing conversations, are often where ideas and projects benefiting children and families are conceived.

Each time families get together, it reinforces our inter-connectedness and reminds us of the blessings of belonging to a community.

A Menu of Activities

Family support programs encourage parents to both plan and implement family activities that make sense to them. Finding out what parents want and need without seeming intrusive or patronizing requires sensitivity on the part of leaders. There’s a difference between activities planned for families and activities planned by and with families.

One way to increase family involvement and decision-making is to develop a menu of services based on families’ expressed hopes, needs and preferences. A menu lets parents choose activities and services that make sense to them; because families differ from program to program, menus will differ, too.

Bear’s Barely Used Box

Each spring, the families are greeted by a giant stuffed bear that invites children, parents and staff to bring in something and to take something from the “barely used” box.



Engaging with Parents Self-Study Unit

From "Stronger Together: Family Support and Early Childhood Education"

Paper Doll Holiday

Pass out paper dolls to children to mail to family or friends in another neighborhood or state, include a self-addressed, stamped envelope for the doll's return trip. Ask recipients to mail the doll back with a description of a make-believe adventure that the doll might have had on the trip.

Weekend Zoo Trip

Instead of making a trip to the zoo during the middle of the week, plan a field trip on the weekend so many more family members can join in the fun. Staff can get flex time or stipends to encourage their participation.



Sample Menu of Services

This sample menu of services illustrates the variety of activities and services in which families may want to participate. In all programs, family fun activities are popular events, bringing parents and children together to share enjoyable experiences.

<p>Family Fun</p> <p>Opportunities for all family members to relax with their children, have fun with other families and expand social support networks.</p>	<p>Activities</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Potluck dinners</td> <td>Movie/video nights</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Holiday celebrations</td> <td>Picnics</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bingo games</td> <td>Special group trips</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sports events</td> <td>Camping</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Craft nights</td> <td>Cultural shows</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Cultural affairs</td> <td>Fashion shows</td> </tr> </table>		Potluck dinners	Movie/video nights	Holiday celebrations	Picnics	Bingo games	Special group trips	Sports events	Camping	Craft nights	Cultural shows	Cultural affairs	Fashion shows
Potluck dinners	Movie/video nights													
Holiday celebrations	Picnics													
Bingo games	Special group trips													
Sports events	Camping													
Craft nights	Cultural shows													
Cultural affairs	Fashion shows													
<p>Adult Activities/Services</p> <p>Opportunities for parents to nurture themselves for a change or to learn practical skills. The center provides or makes arrangements for child care.</p>	<p>Activities</p> <p>Mothers' clubs Mens' groups Game nights Support groups Night on the town Outlet shopping On-site mail services</p>	<p>Classes and Workshops</p> <p>Computer classes Family literacy Ethnic cooking Exercise classes Safety/first aid ESL classes Career development Money management</p>												
<p>Parents' Time Off</p> <p>Child care provided at no charge to parents on evenings or weekends to allow parents time off for themselves.</p>	<p>Ways to Get Time Off</p> <p>Regularly scheduled respite time Extended hours on special days Emergency care Sick child care Parent baby-sitting co-ops</p>													
<p>Parent Options Fund</p> <p>Money earmarked for the parent group to determine use and to replenish.</p>	<p>Ideas for Options</p> <p>Grants Loans Scholarships Fund-raising activities</p>													
<p>Leadership Activities</p> <p>Planning and advocacy activities where parents provide input into program and develop leadership skills.</p>	<p>Ways to Get Involved</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Parent leadership committees</td> <td>Presentations</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Steering committees</td> <td>Board meetings</td> </tr> <tr> <td>PTA meetings</td> <td>Conferences</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Parent policy councils</td> <td>Advocacy</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Community outreach</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>		Parent leadership committees	Presentations	Steering committees	Board meetings	PTA meetings	Conferences	Parent policy councils	Advocacy	Community outreach			
Parent leadership committees	Presentations													
Steering committees	Board meetings													
PTA meetings	Conferences													
Parent policy councils	Advocacy													
Community outreach														

Tell us About your Family Night Experience!

Date of Family Night: _____

1. Please describe the Family Night Event.

2. How did you invite your families?

3. How many families came?

4. What did you do to make the principle come alive for you during the family night experience?

5. What were some of the reactions of your families about the experience?





Section 6
Social Support

Social Support

Section 6, Study Sheet 6, Principle 6

Definition: Support is important to all families. Social support networks create connections and reduce isolation, promoting the well-being of the child, the family and the community.

Everyone needs a little help sometimes. Social networks act as buffers to stress and promote family well-being. Child care programs can play a part in getting parents networked with others.

1. Read the article on the next page entitled, "Help Comes in Many Forms".
2. The article defines 4 types of help:
 - **Instrumental** (concrete help such as food or referrals to housing)
 - **Informational** (parent information or skill development)
 - **Emotional** (day to day sharing of support and care)
 - **Appraisal** (insight into relationships formed over time, leading to better understanding.)
3. Of the 4 types of support listed above, which do you feel the most comfortable giving? Why?

4. Which type of help do you feel the least comfortable giving? Why?

5. What would it take to get you more comfortable giving all 4 types of help and support?



ACTION STEPS for Principle 6

Section 6, Action Steps, Principle 6

Choose one or more of the following action steps to work on when studying this principle. Feel free to create an action step that better fits your program. Just be sure that your action step includes the principle of Social Support.

1. Connecting Parents with each other:

- Casually acquaint parent with each other at pick up and drop off time, mentioning interests or needs they may have in common.
- Create a wall with children's photos and strings which lead to their parents' photos. Label each child and parent with their names.
- Create a parent-share bulletin board where parents can post business cards, trade services, arrange transportation, or trade parenting tips.
- Host family nights on a regular basis for purely social activities-games, crafts, movies, etc.

2. Connecting Parents with services and the community:

- Host a "transition to kindergarten" meeting and invite parents with children going off to kindergarten, along with kindergarten teachers.
- Post community calendars or notices for events you think the parents in your program would be interested in attending.
- Gather brochures from social support agencies and make an area in your program to display them.
- Invite parents to an event you are attending. Offer transportation if that is an issue in keeping them from going. While out with parents, introduce them to people you know.



Social Support

From “*Stronger Together: Family Support and Early Childhood Education*”

Help Comes in Many Forms

Everyone needs help sometimes. It may come from a friend who listens or offers encouragement during a difficult time, or from a family member who offers child care for a sick toddler whose parent can't take time off work. Within a network, reciprocity occurs naturally among the members who receive support from and give support to each other.

Informal networks of family and friends generally are more accessible than formal, organizational networks. When you need health advice in the middle of the night, an aunt who is a doctor might be much easier to reach than your family physician. When you just want a sounding board for life's stresses, a good friend might be a better bet than the mental health worker at the local Social Services Department. Friends won't ask you to fill out a form. They already know you, and asking for their help doesn't carry the risk of making you feel like a “charity case” or raise issues of indebtedness. That's because you know you can reciprocate when your friends are in need.

All families, however, occasionally need help from formal, professional resources such as banks, schools and public health facilities. These tend to have rules and specific hours of operation, and many are not intended for long-term use.

Staff in early childhood settings can link families to formal and informal resources. A program may contract with a psychologist to teach a workshop on child discipline. Another may put on potlucks where parents share going-to-bed stories and family-tested strategies for getting children to listen. Still others may combine aspects of both by hiring a facilitator to guide parents' discussions about discipline that incorporate their own experiences. Both formal and informal supports are necessary, and early childhood program staff should ask parents to decide what seems most helpful to them.

Social Support as a Stress Buffer

Social support, especially from informal networks, acts as a buffer to stress, promotes family and individual well-being, and contributes to positive mental health. By helping one another, individuals gain confidence to positive mental health. By helping one another, individuals gain confidence and self-esteem and ultimately become better equipped to make positive changes in their lives. Based on the Stress Buffer Model in mental health, four types of help are available when people come together.³

- Instrumental: Direct, concrete help such as food, clothing, child care and referral to housing, jobs or services.
- Informational: Skills development through informal conversations, workshops or classes.
- Emotional: Empathy, love and trust that come from day-to-day sharing of experiences, social activities and support groups.
- Appraisal: Insight through relationships formed over time, which promotes better understanding of others and ourselves.

³Stein, Alan, M.S., M.P.H., and Haggard, Molly, M.A. (December 1988). “Parent Services Project Evaluation: Final Report of Findings.”

Moms Taking Care of Moms

Three single moms who met in a children's center began having a weekly slumber party for their three daughters. While the girls had a lot of fun with each other, the mothers took turns going to classes, doing their laundry and having a night to themselves.



Tell us About your Family Night Experience!

Date of Family Night: _____

1. Please describe the Family Night Event.
2. How did you invite your families?
3. How many families came?
4. What did you do to make the principle come alive for you during the family night experience?
5. What were some of the reactions of your families about the experience?





Section 7
Hope and Joy

Hope and Joy

Section 7, Study Sheet 7, Principle 7

Definition: *Hope and joy are essential elements in building healthy communities. A partnership of families and staff creates a context to experience and nurture hope and joy. Hope is connected to action, which creates the energy and vitality to work for change.*

The principles explored in this unit were born out of a desire for change in our communities. Where there is hope that all children can be nurtured in a community of caring adults, there is desire to work toward that goal. When families are supported in raising happy and healthy children, those children grow up to nurture happy and healthy families. Where there is hope, there is also joy.

1. Read the article on the next two pages entitled “*Making Change Happen*”.
2. What are some changes you would like to make in your program to move toward more family-centered care?
3. How can you involve the families in these changes?
4. What are some ideas you have for making these changes joyful and hopeful for you, the children, and the families?
5. Why do you think it is important to share hope and joy with your families?

ACTION STEPS for Hope and Joy

Section 7, Action Steps, Principle 7

Choose one or more of the following action steps to work on when studying this principle. Feel free to create an action step that better fits your program. Just be sure that your action step includes the principle of Hope and Joy.

1. Create a joyful space for parents and children to enter each day. Some ideas include:
 - Hang colorful streamers in the entryway. The door opening and closing will cause them to sway.
 - Hang wind chimes in the entryway. The happy sounds of the chimes will bring smiles to those who enter.
 - Post a joke of the day for families to read and laugh together.
 - Take pictures of the children doing funny things, print them out, and mat on colorful construction paper. Add some funny captions to the pictures. Always ask the children before posting their pictures though to avoid embarrassing them.
2. Share funny anecdotes and accomplishments with parents. It is uplifting to hear how much someone enjoys your children. Some things to share:
 - “Patty, can I share with mom the funny thing you said today?” Just one or two funny anecdotes shared at pick-up time can alter the course of a family’s evening from grumpy to relaxed and playful.
 - “Johnny figured out how to make his J’s today!”
 - “Do the chicken dance for dad. You are so good at it.”

You get the idea. I am sure once you think about it; there are numerous joyful things to share with parents at the end of a long day with children.



Hope and Joy

From “*Stronger Together: Family Support and Early Childhood Education*”

Making Change Happen

Communities have a profound impact on a family’s ability to raise their child, which in turn affects the family’s ability to impact the community. Families do better and have more impact when they are part of communities that offer them support plus the opportunity to contribute and make decisions.

Most families belong to several communities. Some have strong neighborhoods, other people’s communities revolve around work, school or church.

Sadly, some families are isolated and feel little connection to a community. Because early care and education programs are so central to families’ lives, they can create a sense of community for the children, families, educators and others connected to them. When families, educators and friends foster a sense of community, they strengthen their own personal support networks.

In family-centered programs where people feel a sense of ownership and trust, one of the greatest gifts that evolves is a capacity to make change happen. The change can benefit one child and family; it can also improve conditions for a group of families or an entire community.

Making change together requires an intentional effort to engage individuals to get involved, to dream and talk together, to organize and act with purpose. It pushes us to see ourselves as leaders and to nurture the leadership around us. It requires individuals to work as a team and to believe that as a group they can make a difference.

Families and caregivers must be more than “participants” or “employees”; they need to believe in the possibility of change and act as agents of change. This chapter explores strategies and stories of how families, early childhood professionals and communities can work together to create positive change.

Planning for Change

Change is inevitable. The world of a child and his or her family is constantly changing. In early childhood programs, change happens on a regular basis as well. Children move to different classrooms or different care giving arrangements as they grow older. Caregivers may leave as jobs change or families may relocate to new neighborhoods.

Some changes are predictable. Families and educators, as a community, can plan for how a change will happen. By being proactive and involving all of the stakeholders, planning and responding to change can be a positive experience.

Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much.

— Helen Keller

Begin with a Vision

Many great visions have emerged from discussions that begin with asking everyone (including children) to pretend to wave a magic wand, then describe a beautiful dream they have for children and families over the next 5, 10 or 25 years.



Hope and Joy

From "Stronger Together: Family Support and Early Childhood Education"

Advocacy as a Personal Decision

Being an advocate for children and families is to call attention to the need for change. Advocacy is the act of speaking out for the needs of others and ourselves. A supportive community can advocate for an individual family or for many people. Acquiring knowledge and information positions us better to bring about change. Advocacy happens on many different levels – from personal life issues to national political issues. Personal advocacy, advocating on someone's behalf with another person or agency, is something many people are familiar with. Parents are obvious advocates for their children. They speak for them, make their needs visible, and take part in the political process on their behalf. Caregivers often act as advocates as well, working with co-workers, community and school representatives on behalf of a child and/or a family.

Easing Transitions

Each summer at a rural Head Start program, the parents and teachers know that the time is coming when the children will make the transition to kindergarten at the public school next door. At their site council meetings, they have talked about how they can prepare their children for the changes to come. They have also discussed what parents, Head Start staff and school staff will need to know and to do to make the transition go well. The plan of action they put in place has many elements:

- On each Friday in the month prior to the first day of school, the children, teachers and parents of the Head Start program make arrangements to have lunch in the school cafeteria next door. They walk the halls of the school together and become friends with the principal and staff who may be in their classrooms.
- They have invited the kindergarten teachers to drop by the Head Start site to meet the children.
- The Head Start teachers have created portfolios that families can share with their child's new teacher.
- The principal is asked to read a story to the children and to meet with the parents.
- Someone from the PTA provides an orientation at a parent meeting to talk about how parents can be involved at the school.
- A committee plans a celebration for all of the families and staff to say goodbye and have one last good time together.

Family Team Meetings

Learning about a family in crisis requires more than reading a case file. At family team meetings, families tell their own stories, focus on goals and identify solutions. In family team meetings, families decide who besides themselves and the staff will be at the meeting and when it will take place.



If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I?

— Rabbi Hillel

Tell us About your Family Night Experience!

Date of Family Night: _____

1. Please describe the Family Night Event.

2. How did you invite your families?

3. How many families came?

4. What did you do to make the principle come alive for you during the family night experience?

5. What were some of the reactions of your families about the experience?





Developed by: Shelia Wray, Association for the Education of Young Children, Southeast Alaska. Based On: *Stronger Together: Family Support and Early Childhood Education* of the Parent Services Project. www.parentservices.org, (415) 454-1870.

Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education. www.strengtheningfamilies.net (202) 371-1565



Printed by: State of Alaska, Department of Health & Social Services, Office of Children's Services, Strengthening Families Alaska, 323 East 4th Avenue, Anchorage, AK 99501, (907) 269-8923, Web site: hss.state.ak.us/ocs/families/