

Tip Sheets

Working with Infants and Toddlers: The Importance of Family Partnerships



Providing a quality environment that promotes healthy attachment is necessary for the development of family and provider/caregiver partnerships.

Early care and education providers should reach out to families and support them in the goals and dreams they have for their child. When caregivers support and encourage parents, a parallel process will often occur, which is when the feelings and interactions from one relationship are brought into another relationship. By providing parents with responsive, sensitive and nurturing support, a caregiver is modeling how they can be with their children.

Supporting families of infants and toddlers is especially important since they may be feeling some guilt about leaving their child in someone else's care. And for some families, this may be their first experience in the world of child care. The following are useful strategies to help create respectful and valuable partnerships with families:

1. Ask questions
2. Active listening
3. Empathy
4. Accentuate the positive
5. Be honest

Ask Questions

While a caregiver may be the expert in the provision of quality care, a parent is the expert on his/her child. Encourage parents to share helpful tips and knowledge about their child. In addition to

the usual questions related to daily care, caregivers should be curious about the child and ask questions such as:

- What works best to comfort the child
- Child preferences
- Temperament
- Family culture and beliefs

Active Listening

Active listening requires the giving of undivided attention to a parent. Beyond just hearing what a parent has to share, this requires the use of thought, feelings, and paying attention to internal physical responses to understand an interaction.

Tips for Active Listening

Stop: Stop what you are doing and pay attention. This communicates to the individual that you value what they have to say.

Look: Make eye contact with the speaker, and look for non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and body language for additional information about the individual's thoughts and feelings.

Listen: Pay attention to words and tone of voice. Keep in mind that some messages are unspoken.

Respond: Use eye contact, nods, smiles and other indicators that you are listening. Reflect on what was shared to ensure your understanding and communicate that you have been listening and have "heard" what was said.

Empathy

Empathy can be used to help others feel understood, cared for, and valued. The use of empathy involves taking on the perspective of the other individual in order to try to imagine how they might be feeling and what they might be experiencing. It is important to keep in mind that often the individual may just want someone to listen and not necessarily to “fix” the issue.

Accentuate the Positive

Focus on what is going well. Offer positive support and encouragement for who the individual is and what they are doing.

Be Honest

If you don't know the answer to a question, be honest. Being able to say, “I don't know. I'll have to find out and get back to you,” communicates self-awareness and knowledge of professional limits. It is not possible to know or have the answer to everything.

Additional Resources

Minnesota Association for Children's Mental Health
<http://www.macmh.org>

Center on the Developing Child – Harvard
<http://developingchild.harvard.edu>

Zero to Three
<https://www.zerotothree.org>

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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Funding provided by the Minnesota Department of Children, Youth, and Families.