Professional learning: Working with parents and carers

Topic 1: A culture of partnership

Leadership team guide
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A culture of partnership

What will participants learn from this topic?

When you have completed this topic, participants will:

- have an increased understanding of the elements of an effective partnership between early childhood services and families
- have developed skills, confidence and commitment to building partnerships with families
- have developed an understanding of the importance of partnerships in supporting children’s mental health
- have considered ways in which their service can invite and develop partnerships with families.

Preparation for this session

Resources

- Component 3 Topic 1: Professional Learning Participant Workbook
- Video 1.1: What is a partnership?
- Video 1.2: A culture of partnership
Suggestions for how to run this topic

1  Introduce the topic to the group

Topic 1 focuses on building effective partnerships between early childhood services and families.

Content includes:

- an introductory activity for participants to explore their attitudes and beliefs about working with families
- a video about the importance of partnerships and their impact on families, children and educators
- an activity about what a partnership might look like and how services can promote partnerships with families
- a video about the importance of valuing all families and committing to a culture of partnership at an early childhood service
- a discussion about how services can develop relationships with families, which are the foundation of effective partnerships.
2 Introductory activity: Exploring our attitudes and beliefs

The aim of this activity is to help participants identify and reflect on their attitudes and beliefs about working with families, and to set the scene for discussions to come.

Instructions

1. Ask participants to position themselves in a line facing forward. Explain that one end of the line is ‘agree’ and the other, ‘disagree’. If the group is small, ask participants to instead use the 1–10 scale on page 2 of their Participant Workbook.

2. Ask participants to position themselves along the line in accordance with whether they agree or disagree with the below statements about working with families. Emphasise that there are no right or wrong answers, and people will have differences of opinion. Also emphasise that the discussion to follow should not identify parents, carers or children at the service.

3. Read out the following statements:
   - When we work together with families, this benefits children’s mental health.
   - Parents and carers are usually open to letting us help with any concerns about their child.
   - Parents are the primary educators of their children.
   - We need to be informed about what is happening at home.

4. If time permits, ask volunteers to share their thoughts and reasons for standing where they are/choosing their position on the 1–10 scale. You may like to choose to discuss the statements which generated the most interest or difference.

5. Ask participants:
   - What do you consider your strengths to be in working with families?
   - What do you think are some of the challenges to working with families and how do you work to overcome these?
   - What do you hope to learn that will help you feel more effective in working in partnership with families?

Tips for this reflection

- Debrief the activity by explaining that we all have different attitudes and beliefs about the children and families that we work with, and these can impact on our interactions.
- There is a space for participants to make notes about the discussion questions on pages 2–3 of their Participant Workbook.
- Ensure participants only share information if they feel comfortable doing so. Remind participants about the self-care information available under the professional learning resources for each Component on the website.
3 Video 1.1: What is a partnership?

The video covers:
- defining the term ‘partnership’ in relation to early childhood services and families
- the importance of partnerships between services and families
- the impact of partnerships on children’s mental health
- how the educator role is supported by having a good partnership with families.

Tips for watching this video
- There is space for participants to make notes about this video on page 4 of their Participant Workbook.

4 Activity: A culture of partnership

The aim of this activity is for participants to think about what a culture of partnership might look like and to consider how a service might promote a culture of partnership.

Instructions
1. Ask participants to read the service flyers on page 6–10 of their Participant Workbook and for each flyer, answer the following questions:
   - Do you think this is evidence of a culture of partnership? Why/why not?
   - What do you think the service is doing well to promote a culture of partnership?
   - What could the service do to better promote a culture of partnership?
   - What else would you like to know in order to consider whether this service is promoting partnerships with parents?

Tips for this discussion
- There is space for participants to make notes about the discussion on page 6–11 of their Participant Workbook.
5 Video 1.2: A culture of partnership

The video covers:
- how services can demonstrate value for all families
- what it means for a family to feel valued and respected by a service
- the importance of educators committing to the practice of shared decision-making with families.

Tips for watching this video
- There is space for participants to make notes about the video on page 12 of their Participant Workbook.

6 Discussion: Relationships with families

The aim of this discussion is for participants to gain a shared understanding of why collaborative partnerships are beneficial and to increase educator’s awareness of the role they play in developing partnerships with families.

Instructions
1. Lead a discussion around the following questions:
   - How do partnerships between services and families support the mental health and wellbeing of children, families and educators?
   - All families have hopes, dreams and wishes for their children. What are some of the ways educators might ‘tune in’ to the needs of parents?
   - Different families have different interest levels and capacities to be involved at a service, depending on a range of factors including work and family circumstances, financial and social situations, and past personal experiences. How do you develop collaborative partnerships with all families while respecting different interest levels and capacities to be involved?
   - What policies or practices does your service have in place to help develop collaborative partnerships with families? Are there any more that you need to review or develop?
Tips for this discussion

- Services may be at different stages in terms of how they build relationships with families. This discussion is a good opportunity to establish where the service is currently operating, acknowledge good practices and support participants to start thinking about opportunities for further development.

- Emphasise that the discussion should not identify families or children at the service.

- There is a space for participants to make notes about the discussion questions on pages 13–14 of their Participant Workbook.

7 Activity: Moving forward

The aim of this activity is for participants to set some short and long-term goals for promoting and developing partnerships with families at their service.

Instructions

- Ask participants individually:
  - What is one thing I could do to promote and develop partnerships with families over the next week?
  - What is one thing I could do to promote and develop partnerships with families over the next 12 months?

- Ask participants to answer the following questions as a large group or in smaller groups if there are a lot of people:
  - What is one thing we could do as a service to promote and develop partnerships with families over the next week?
  - What is one thing we could do as a service to promote and develop partnerships with families over the next 12 months?

Tips for this discussion

- There is a worksheet for this activity in the Participant Workbook on page 15.
Reflecting on new content is a good way to wrap up each topic and summarise what has been covered. The following questions can support reflection, although you may wish to add your own questions to suit your team. Reflective questions can be considered during the topic, at the end of the topic or at a separate time. Reflective questions can be completed individually, in pairs or as a group.

- Think of an effective partnership that you have with a family or parent at your service. How does this partnership support the mental health and wellbeing of their child?
- Why might partnerships with families change over time?
- Think of a time you have worked on building a partnership with a family or parent while also overcoming differences or difficulties in your relationship. What were the challenges you had to overcome? How did you overcome these?

**Tips for this activity**
- Reflective questions can be found in the *Participant Workbook* on page 16.