



# Discover and Uplift Family and Community Strengths Worksheet

## Introduction

The strengths of families and their communities reflect the diversity of backgrounds and experiences that families bring to our Head Start programs. We can better see those strengths when we learn to set aside our biases, prioritize equity, and spend time with families. By listening carefully to their stories and dreams for themselves and their children, we can learn to discover, respect, and celebrate their unique history, race, and culture — and better serve all children.

## Practicing a Strengths-based Approach

As Head Start staff, we practice a [strengths-based approach](#) with families. This approach acknowledges that parents are their children's first and most important teachers. This acknowledgment helps strengthen early childhood professionals' efforts to build relationships as they learn from parents and family members.

A strengths-based approach is especially important when building relationships with families who have been historically marginalized. For example, people of color, especially Black and Indigenous people, have faced great obstacles to being heard, seen, and acknowledged.

## The Influence of Biases on How You Understand Families' Strengths

Recognizing and naming our biases is essential, so we can begin taming them and intentionally adjusting our behaviors. Even when we are well-intentioned and want to take a strengths-based approach, our biases may still creep in, influencing what we do or do not consider to be a parent's or family's strengths. Biases also influence the ways we engage families.

To promote equity, it is important to recognize when you are falling into this deficit way of thinking. When this happens, you can develop strategies for shifting your thinking to focus on families' strengths. Families hold much wisdom and knowledge, and many strengths, all of which we can discover as we build relationships.

## Prioritizing Equity as You Discover and Uplift Families' Strengths

When we first meet a family, we take time to get to know them and learn how we can partner with them. Focusing on learning about a family's needs and challenges can be easier than focusing on their strengths.

Families who have been historically and currently marginalized — including but not limited to families experiencing poverty, people of color, families with children who have disabilities, families experiencing homelessness, and immigrant families — are often seen for their weaknesses and needs — their deficits.

The first step in practicing a strengths-based approach with families is to learn about their strengths. Next, you can consider how to uplift those strengths throughout all family engagement activities and interactions. Remember, racial equity means considering how race and context are relevant in all situations. Families of color (specifically Black, Latino, and Indigenous families) may experience disadvantages because of implicit and explicit biases and discrimination.

Taking a fair and tailored approach to family engagement means uplifting the strengths of families of color to help counteract the discrimination and oppression many families have faced. For example, many programs uplift the strengths of Black families during February for Black History Month. Others uplift Indigenous and Latino families' strengths during their recognition days in September. Find ways to honor families of color and families who have been marginalized throughout the whole year as well.

## Activities

This worksheet features three activities to complete:

1. Practicing a Strengths-based Approach by Recognizing Our Biases
2. Prioritizing Equity as You Discover Families' Strengths
3. Using Systemic, Integrated, and Comprehensive Family Engagement Practices to Center Racial Equity and Uplift Families' Strengths

Each activity builds on the one before it, so make sure to do them in order:



If you only have 15 minutes, complete Activity 1.



If you only have 30 minutes, complete Activity 1 and Activity 2.



If you have an hour, complete all three activities.

You may choose to spend more or less time on each activity depending on your needs or the needs of your group.

## Activity 1. Practicing a Strengths-based Approach by Recognizing Our Biases

How we talk about families' experiences can reveal subtle yet powerful biases about our thoughts. Families can receive these biases as negative or positive. Consider, for example, this statement: "Patrick is suffering from depression." Reworded to be strengths-based, the sentence could read, "Patrick is experiencing depression."

### Journaling Activity: "Re-writing" How We Talk with Families

- Review each sentence below.
- Reflect on how to make it more strengths-based.
- Rewrite each one in the space provided.

Thomas is always very loud and distracts all the other kids.

Sara's parents often cancel home visits. They don't care to talk about Sara's education or development.

Maria is very quiet and timid. She struggles with talking to other children.

## Activity 2. Self-reflecting to Understand Your Biases

Name it to tame it. The first step to knowing and acknowledging our biases is to observe and reflect on them (“name it”). Then, we can reduce and combat our biases (“tame it”). This activity focuses on naming biases. It helps to make it personal. Since we all have biases, it is important to examine our own values and cultural upbringing, as well as our experiences (or lack of experiences) with racism and/or discrimination. Consider, for example, how your biases and experiences influence how you build relationships with families, particularly those whose race, ethnicity, or cultural background is different from your own.

### Role-playing and Journaling Activity: Conversation Starters

- Explore the conversation starters below.
- Choose a few or create your own in the space provided.
- Practice using the conversation starters in a role-play with a colleague or supervisor.
- When you feel comfortable, try using them with a family in your program.
- Come back to this activity and use the blank space provided to document your reflections after your interaction with the family.

What are some of the values and traditions of your culture or family that give you strength and remind you to be brave? Which ones make you feel joyful and loved?

Reflection After Using with a Family

What are some activities you enjoyed or traditions you had when you were young that you would like to pass down to your children? Why are those things important to your family or culture?

Reflection After Using with a Family

Describe some instances where you felt most proud of your child(ren). What makes you smile the most when you think of those instances?

Reflection After Using with a Family

What are some goals that you hope for your child(ren) to achieve in the next year? What actions can you take to support your child in reaching those goals?

Reflection After Using with a Family

Your Conversation Starter: \_\_\_\_\_

Reflection After Using with a Family

Your Conversation Starter: \_\_\_\_\_

Reflection After Using with a Family

Your Conversation Starter: \_\_\_\_\_

Reflection After Using with a Family

### Activity 3. Using Systemic, Integrated, and Comprehensive Family Engagement Practices to Center Racial Equity and Uplift Families' Strengths

For parent, family, and community engagement practices to be effective and have long-term impact on children and families, they must be systemic, integrated, and comprehensive (SIC). Here is what we mean by SIC:

- Systemic means that everyone works together to promote a shared vision of uplifting the strengths of all types of families in your program.
- Integrated means that everyone coordinates to reinforce each other's efforts.
- Comprehensive means that all staff consider families' full range of strengths.

Reflect on how to uplift the strengths of the families in your program in a way that is systemic, integrated, and comprehensive.

#### Journaling Activity, Part 1: Uplifting Families' Strengths

- Review each question.
- Reflect on how to uplift the strengths of the families in your program in a systemic, integrated, and comprehensive way.
- Use the space provided to record your thoughts and respond to the questions.

#### Reflection Questions: Focus on Systemic Practices

How can you work with others in your program to uplift families' strengths? Get creative!

What types of things will show families that you see their strengths?

What can you do to show families that their strengths are celebrated?

**Reflection Questions: Focus on Integrated Practices**

How can your coworkers reinforce and support you in your efforts?

How can you reinforce and support the efforts of your coworkers?

**Reflection Questions: Focus on Comprehensive Practices**

How are strengths different among different families?

How can you be sure to recognize and reinforce different types of strengths?

## Journaling Activity, Part 2: Uplifting Families' Strengths Together

- Review and discuss each question and your responses in Part 1 with a colleague.
- Ask your colleague to give you feedback and add new ideas.
- Together, think about ways you can uplift families' strengths in your program that are systemic, integrated, and comprehensive.
- Consider the additional reflection questions below.
- Use the space provided to record your thoughts and respond to the questions.

### Reflection Questions

Which families or communities have been historically or currently viewed as having fewer strengths than other families and communities?

How can you engage those historically or currently marginalized families in your program planning?

How can you discover and uplift those families' strengths to balance any negative biases, discrimination, or oppression they may face?



## Extend Your Learning

If you want to extend your learning, create an individual professional development goal related to this equity driver using S.M.A.R.T.I.E. as a guide. Use the space provided to record your goal.

- **S:** Specific. What specific goal do you hope to achieve? What actions will you take to get there?
- **M:** Measurable. How will you know when you have reached your goal?
- **A:** Achievable. What is in your power to accomplish? Who can you invite to help you reach your goals?
- **R:** Realistic. What can you realistically achieve when considering your resources (e.g., time, material goods, funds, etc.)?
- **T:** Timebound. What is your timeline for reaching the goal?
- **I:** Inclusive. How can you bring historically excluded individuals and groups into the process?
- **E:** Equitable. How are you thinking about being fair and addressing inequities?

## Professional Development Goal

For more information, please contact us: [PFCE@ecetta.info](mailto:PFCE@ecetta.info) | 1-866-763-6481

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