



## THE MANY WAYS TO ENGAGE WITH FAMILIES

**Activity overview:** The following vignettes highlight ways to engage families in the ongoing child assessment process. In this activity, participants will review and synthesize the material covered in this session. You will analyze the vignettes for approach, timing, and the benefits of collaboration.

**Directions:** Read through each vignette and answer the questions in the boxes below. Discuss the questions with other participants.

### Vignette: Jason

Jason and two teacher aides have 20 children in their classroom. They collect many anecdotal records as part of their process of ongoing child assessment. But Jason knows that the information gathered in his classroom does not give him a full understanding of the children. Jason and the teacher aides look for opportunities to listen when family members share their children's experiences outside the classroom. For example, David's mother tells Jason how her son surprised her by counting the birds in their yard. Sandra's grandmother proudly brings in a birthday card Sandra had made for her. Devon's father laughs about a video that caught shy little Devon cheering wildly at his brother's soccer game.

Jason thanks the families and writes down many of the anecdotes. He often asks to copy samples of the children's work, family photos, or video clips. The story David's mother told him gave him the idea to put pictures of birds on a bulletin board and ask the children to count the birds they see on the playground. David and his mother were both pleased and interested to see the lesson connect to David's life outside of school.

When families share how the children act in other environments, it helps Jason and the aides get to know them better. David doesn't seem interested in books at school, but likes to read books with his uncle. Mary follows classroom directions well but resists family routines. Jason has found that the insights families share during daily interactions and at conferences truly improve his ability to fine-tune classroom teaching. The families in his class know he values them as partners in his work to help their children progress.

What is the teacher's approach to engaging families? His attitude towards it?

In what ways does it happen?

What is the benefit of involving families?



## Vignette: Tamika

Tamika is a co-teacher for a class of 18 children. Many of the children's families are originally from other countries or cultural backgrounds. Tamika understands that views of child development and approaches to raising children differ among cultures. She is respectful when talking with families and works to earn their trust.

Tamika finds that her program's resources help her gather child assessment information from family members in a manner that is linguistically and culturally appropriate. She makes sure that the most important forms are translated into the primary language of the family. She also converses with the families in their primary language, or collaborates with a colleague who speaks that language.

In conferences, Tamika often asks family members open-ended questions. She says, "Please tell me about how your child gets ready to come to our classroom" to find out how the child is progressing in the area of personal care tasks. Tamika learns more about children's interests and strengths by asking, "What does your child like to do best with other children? With adults? When playing alone?" In daily interactions, Tamika listens with interest when a family tells her about a celebration or event, and she may invite a family member to tell the class about it. She may ask if they would like to bring in a photo, object, or costume she could show the class or use to create a project.

Tamika creates a portfolio for each child. She reviews the portfolio with the family on a regular basis and uses it to monitor, with the family, the child's progress. In addition to work samples, photographs, and anecdotal notes on children's behaviors at school, Tamika also includes documentation that families send her from home. The families of Tamika's class know they have many choices of how they can contribute to their child's portfolios, including taking photographs, sending written notes, sharing work samples, and completing short checklists.

What is the teacher's approach to engaging families? Her attitude towards it?

In what ways does it happen?

What is the benefit of involving families?



## Vignette: Crystal

Crystal routinely talks with family members of the 20 children in her classroom at drop off and pick up times or by phone. During these brief conversations, Crystal mentions to Juan's father that Juan wrote his numbers from 1 to 10 for the first time. She asks Sophia's aunt if Sophia is feeling more at home in the family's new apartment, and shares how Sophia talked about her new home during dramatic play. When William's grandfather mentions that William is fascinated with his workshop, Crystal tells him about the elaborate block castle William built that day. Shawna's mother asks Crystal about Shawna's progress in an area that they were both concerned about, and Crystal shows her a completed checklist that helps them discuss what to do next.

Crystal uses her monthly observation cards to organize the assessment information she and her assistant have gathered. During a periodic conference, Crystal shares the contents of one of these cards. The cards are divided into sections for each domain of the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework. In this way the family members become familiar with the content of the Framework domains.

Crystal finds that, because she communicates regularly with family and listens to their problem-solving ideas, she and the family members achieve a common understanding of each child's development and learning. The teaching team and family are then able to set priority learning goals that take into account the child's needs, and the family's needs and preferences. Because Crystal and the family have worked together to understand the child's development and establish learning goals, the teaching team and family can support one another to help the child progress.

What is the teacher's approach to engaging families? Her attitude towards it?

In what ways does it happen?

What is the benefit of involving families?



## Vignette: May

May, a teacher for a class of 16 children, shares child assessment information with family members in the language they prefer. She is sensitive to their cultural differences and interested in learning from them. May asks a family member, "What would you like to tell me about Nikki?" Or, "What would you like to know about how Marco is doing in class?" She makes positive comments that highlight the child's strengths. She asks for the family's perspective and suggestions on concerns or challenges she has about their child.

In this way, the teaching team and family members reach a mutual understanding of the child's development and learning. When May discusses possible next learning steps, she asks the family for input on setting priorities. Together they design activities the children can do at home. The teaching team and family often find ways to jointly problem-solve and support children's progress toward learning goals. They also celebrate accomplishments together. In situations where, despite adjustments in teaching, a child is not progressing as expected, May and the child's family work together to identify additional resources. When working with families of children with disabilities, May uses her program's resources to understand varied cultural views of disability, and to offer suggestions and support that is consistent with the family's values and goals for their child.

What is the teacher's approach to engaging families? Her attitude towards it?

In what ways does it happen?

What is the benefit of involving families?