



Reflection and Planning Tool for Partnering with Families Experiencing Homelessness

Consider how you might enhance what you already do to partner with families experiencing homelessness. Use this tool to:

- **Reflect on your program’s relationship-building practices, using a strengths-based approach, and working with families experiencing homelessness**
- **Plan for your program’s next steps in supporting families experiencing homelessness**

Reflect

Read the statements in the first column of the table. Assess your progress in the specific practice by placing a check mark in one of the four remaining columns. Consider the statements on your own, with a colleague, team, coach, or supervisor.

Refer to Supporting Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness: An Interactive Learning Series for Early Childhood Professionals, Module 7: Building Relationships with Families for more details and examples for each practice.

Reflect on these practices	I do this	I could enhance how I do this	I do not do this yet	I would like support to do this
Using a Strengths-Based Approach to Connect with Families				
• Focus on parenting strengths.				
• Recognize each family’s passion for their child’s well-being.				
• Support each family’s aspirations to make progress toward stability.				

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledge the strengths of families first. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build shared understanding and learning from differences based on family preferences, including respect for the family’s unique cultures, beliefs, and circumstances. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show openness to adapting practices and asks for families’ input. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share decision-making with families. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approach families as equal and reciprocal partners. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See families as capable of making their own change. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strive to provide consistent and reliable support to families. 				
Program Environment: Creating a Welcoming Environment				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide time and supportive space for parents to have confidential conversations with service providers, or with other parents if they wish to do so. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have materials visible and available (e.g., brochures, flyers, or posters) that generate discussion about housing needs, a greater understanding of available resources for housing and basic needs, and the rights of children and families without a stable home. 				

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post clear information about access to emergency services and contact information. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share information with providers and families about how community programs, organizations, and agencies determine eligibility for public benefits, services, and supports. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invite parents to share their experiences with enrollment and participation to find out which policies and practices they found helpful, supportive, or challenging. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer access to a washing machine and dryer, clean clothes, or food, where possible. 				
Program Environment: Staying Connected to Families				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask parents about specific ways they would like to be involved. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer multiple ways for families to contribute to an activity or event so each family can engage in a way that works for them. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remind parents you consider them part of the community even when they are not able to participate. 				

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Family Partnerships: Engaging in Sensitive Conversations				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide reassurance about the program’s commitment to responding to the family’s immediate goals and share your commitment to working with the family and problem-solving as needed. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Apply active listening skills that demonstrate compassion and respect. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider the questions you ask carefully. For example, ask for permission, set aside assumptions, avoid words or phrases that may cause embarrassment, and explain the reasons for your questions. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be available for long-term planning and program participation when parents are ready. Families experiencing homelessness are likely to focus on immediate needs and short-term goals. 				
Family Partnerships: Communicating with Families Who Are Already Enrolled				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be available for more frequent communication and offering to talk privately. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep in close contact with families through their preferred form of communication. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share positive news with families about their child’s day. 				

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Family Partnerships: Demonstrating Flexibility and Understanding				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide families multiple ways to submit paperwork, including by text, fax, or email. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accommodate requests on short notice to postpone or change the location of an appointment or home visit. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with families to identify ways to address potential barriers to program participation. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be flexible about attendance. 				
Teaching and Learning: Fostering Children’s Well-Being and Learning				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss the shared goal of the family’s well-being and their child’s healthy development and learning. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share observations of positive interactions between the family and their child. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen to the family’s goals and discuss any concerns they may have for their child. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reassure parents that children are in a safe and caring environment. At the same time, avoid minimizing any fears or concerns. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create times for children to receive extra attention, get additional rest, or to help with a special project. 				

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observe and comment on positive interactions between the parent and their child. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reaffirm the importance of this relationship and seek the parents' expertise whenever possible. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build on the family's passion for their child by sharing positive anecdotes, celebrating strengths, and partnering to provide additional support. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage parents to engage in simple activities such as playing, hugging, rocking, walking, and jumping. Daily caretaking routines like dressing, eating, and getting ready for bed are also chances for connection and learning. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reaffirm that positive interactions and experiences with parents and other people are more important to healthy development and learning than toys and other activities, which may require a fee. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share ideas for simple ways families can engage children in learning at home, such as telling stories, singing, dancing, counting objects, and naming colors. 				

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Partnering with Families to Minimize Stress				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer materials and services such as clothing, food, and transportation. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connect families with community partners and help with access to services, depending on the availability of resources and the program's structure. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce parents to other families who have offered to provide peer support and help broaden families' support network. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep in mind that parents want the best for their child and family and may be doing the very best they can in that moment. 				
Support for Professionals				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer support to professionals and encourage self-care. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance knowledge and skills related to engaging families through training. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide coaching and support to professionals who partner with families. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with peers and supervisor to eliminate the stigma of homelessness. 				

Plan

Once you have completed your reflection, choose two practices you would like to enhance or implement in your work with families. Document your plans to enhance or implement these practices in the table below. Discuss with a colleague, team, coach, or supervisor.

	Select two practices you plan to focus on	What can I do to build upon what I already do well?	What skills or knowledge do I need to develop?	What support do I need?	Notes
Practice #1					
Practice #2					

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please contact us: PFCE@ecetta.info | 1-866-763-6481



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