



RELATIONSHIP-FOCUSED FAMILY ENGAGEMENT FOR FAMILIES

Family engagement is created from relationships between caregivers, helpers, and communities in support of a child. Research shows that when families and helpers build strong partnerships, children learn and grow. The Pennsylvania Family Engagement Birth through College, Career, Community Ready Framework offers a resource for promoting effective family engagement. Here, the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media at Saint Vincent College builds on this tool and shares relationship-focused considerations for families as they develop strong partnerships with their children's helpers.

Trust Yourself

Families bring a wealth of knowledge to family engagement relationships. Families can advocate for their child by asking questions and sharing what they know about their child's needs.

Keep Empathy Central

We are all more than one thing. Just as families have many competing limits to their own time, it

“I think the most important thing to do is set the stage with them that you are partners. Remember that you all are partners in this child's educational future.”
- Caregiver

is hard to know all that is happening in the lives of your child's helpers. We can build relationships by listening with empathy to helpers, and acknowledging their experiences and perspectives.

You Are Not Alone

As you navigate building relationships with your child's helpers, keep in mind that you are all on the same team together. Each adult in your child's life can bring different value to your child and to you just as you bring so much value to your child's life.

There is not a single “best” way to do family engagement. Rather, partnerships are built from everyday interactions that occur between families and their children’s helpers. Here are some small ways that families can build partnership with helpers.

Families and helpers are connected when they are present with one another. This can occur when talking, listening, or working together to make decisions. Families can build connections with helpers by:

- Engaging with the helper from a foundation of mutual trust and respect.
- Sharing with the helper something your family appreciates about their support and their interactions with you and your child.

Conversations between families and helpers are two-sided and both parties bring an important perspective. Engaging in back-and-forth interactions can help to strengthen partnerships with children’s helpers. Families can think about reciprocal relationships with helpers by:

- Sharing knowledge of the child with the helper. For example, sending a note that gives some background about the child or communicating with the helper about the child’s progress.
- Asking the helper how they prefer to communicate (perhaps by text, email, in-person, everyday, or once a week) shows respect and trust.

Creating a community of support around the child, including the child’s helpers, may help to support the child’s learning and growth. It is important to welcome helpers into conversations about the child and family to build partnerships. Families can invite and include helpers by:

- Sharing a big or small moment happening in the family or the child’s life.
- Getting to know other families and helpers that can support the child and family.

Building a partnership with helpers may happen step-by-step. Some situations may be easy while others may be more challenging. Families bring so much expertise to the family engagement relationships including knowledge of a child’s strengths, growth areas, interests, and dislikes. Families can support helpers by:

- Providing relevant background information about the child or family.
- Listening and trying to understand everyone’s perspective of a situation.

“People have to be able to understand both sides of a coin... So it really is just about being honest and open and being willing to let somebody in to help solve problems.”
- Caregiver