

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES FROM REFUGEE BACKGROUNDS

Partnerships with families are based on good communication and trusting relationships, with the goal of developing a responsive children's learning program.

Engaging with families as an educator

- Warmly greet families every time they enter the service in appropriate ways and by name.
- Learn and practice the pronunciation of the names of family members (sensitively including significant family members not in Australia when appropriate).
- Ask families to teach you some basic phrases in language such as *hello, goodbye, thank you, Mama will be back soon* etc.
- Encourage frequent informal 'conversations' between home and the service. Ask families how they prefer to communicate (e.g. the family might use a phone translator app for text messages).
- Be open to asking for help. For example if you are having difficulty pronouncing a name or word, ask the family to say it and repeat if necessary.
- Encourage families to observe your interactions with their children. This builds relationships and demonstrates warm, responsive engagement and 'play-based learning'.
- Invite families to stay for part of the session, especially if they have other children. Repeated invitations may be necessary.

"In my country, teachers were not so friendly. I am proud to be friends with my child's teacher."

- Parent Advisor, Craigieburn

- Ask respectfully about the practices of each family e.g. child-rearing, parenting, nutrition, family celebrations.
- Ask families what their preferred method is for receiving photos and examples of children's work. Some families prefer formats that make it easy for them to forward to relatives overseas.

Engaging with families as a service

- Employ educators of diverse backgrounds to reflect the backgrounds of the community and provide cultural sensitivity training to educators.
- Encourage bicultural educators to build relationships with families.
- Provide professional interpreters for all events and individual discussions.
- Provide translated versions of repeatedly used forms e.g. excursion forms and orientation booklets.
- Ask families how they would prefer to receive communications from the service especially if language translations are not yet available. Rather than emails, a flyer written in simple English given in person at drop-off or pick-up might be useful and allows families time to read and understand the flyer.
- Use a consistent template for notices when requiring permission or signature from families. Ensure that this process is clearly explained to families.



- Ask families for their opinions and suggestions, especially in planning for individual children.
- Create opportunities to co-design ways to communicate between the service and families, e.g. working with families to develop visual notice boards in their languages.
- Use visual and audio resources to engage with families.

Organising regular catch ups

- Invite families for more frequent discussions with an interpreter about the strengths of their child in the program.
- Speak informally with families more frequently, using phone interpreters as needed.
- Give personal reminders close to the time of meetings and events. A phone call from a bicultural educator or interpreter is often the most successful method.
- Reflect on 'what works' when partnering with each family and share your findings with other educators in your service.

Useful Resources

Rebuilding Shattered Lives
www.foundationhouse.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Rebuilding_Shattered_Lives_Complete.pdf

Raising Children in Australia
www.foundationhouse.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Raising-Children-in-Australia.pdf

Foundation House Tip Sheet 2: Working effectively with interpreters to support families from refugee backgrounds
www.foundationhouse.org.au/specialised-programs/early-years

The National Quality Framework (NQF), Quality Area 6 - Collaborative partnerships with families and communities
<https://www.acecqa.gov.au/nqf/national-quality-standard/quality-area-6-collaborative-partnership-with-families-and-communities>

Reflective Practice Questions:

1. How do you communicate with families from refugee backgrounds who:
 - a) speak languages other than English?
 - b) may not have access to technology?
2. How do you collect and reflect on data that measures your communication with each family from a refugee background?

