

Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement

Overview for Early Childhood Professionals



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Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement: Overview for Early Childhood Professionals

The Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement:

Overview for Early Childhood Professionals describes the relationship-based competencies (RBCs)—knowledge, skills, and individual practices—for professionals working with young children and their families in Head Start and Early Head Start, child care, or home visiting programs.

Early childhood professionals working in these settings can use these competencies as a guide to engage and partner with families effectively. The competencies can also serve as a resource to early childhood leaders who work in the programs, organizations, and institutions that offer opportunities for professionals to further their relationship-building skills. All early childhood professionals can use the competencies to build on family engagement efforts and support positive outcomes for children and families.

The RBCs are organized as a set of four resources: an overview and three additional resources designed for specific roles—family services professionals, teachers and child care providers, and home visitors. Each role-specific resource also describes related competencies for supervisors and leaders. To get the most benefit, pair this overview (highlighted in green) with the most applicable role-specific resource. Family engagement is everyone’s business.

Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement

All early childhood professionals can use knowledge, skills, and practices to support family engagement. This set of resources defines the RBCs for all early childhood professionals and for those in the roles shown below.



What are the Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement?

The RBCs describe the knowledge, skills, and individual practices that early childhood professionals use to engage families effectively in positive, goal-oriented relationships. The competencies are based on research and recommended practice across many fields working with families from pregnancy through the early childhood years. These fields include early care and education, early intervention, infant mental health, child welfare, maternal and child health, pediatrics, social work, and psychology.

The RBCs are consistent with specific state core knowledge and competencies for early childhood professionals and other preparation resources for the early childhood workforce. The competencies can reinforce and extend efforts across states to increase family engagement in early childhood programs. The RBCs are aligned with the Head Start Program Performance Standards and the 2016 Child Care and Development Fund Final Rule. The RBCs were developed by the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (NCPFCE) with input from the Office of Head Start (OHS), the Office of Child Care (OCC), early childhood professionals, parents, and other early childhood national training and technical assistance centers funded by OHS and OCC.

The RBCs are a critical tool to implement the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework and the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems (see page 8 for a visual guide to the Framework). The RBCs support professional practice that can contribute to the Family Outcomes of the PFCE Framework: family well-being, positive parent-child relationships, families as lifelong educators and learners, family engagement in transitions, family connections to peers and community, and families as advocates and leaders.

Why is Family Engagement Important?

From the beginning of life, families nurture the capacities that children will need to be successful in school and in life. Parent-child relationships and family well-being are both powerful predictors of children's long-term development, learning, social experiences, health, and well-being (Anda et al., 2006; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000). Early childhood professionals' knowledge, skills, and practices are important for helping families support children's development, improving children's life outcomes and family well-being, and making progress toward family goals (National Academy of Sciences, 2015; NCPFCE, 2014; National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000; Zaslow & Martinez-Beck, 2006).

Effective family engagement means that professionals and families work together to build trusting relationships that recognize families' strengths for supporting their family's well-being and their child's healthy development. Each family has strengths, experiences, and cultures that give meaning and direction to their parenting, family goals, and to their engagement in early childhood programs. Early

childhood professionals partner with families to individualize services in response to each family's living situations, cultures, beliefs, values, languages, practices, and traditions.

Successful family engagement can improve family well-being and resilience by promoting families' abilities to build on their strengths, realize the potential of their talents and passions, pursue their goals, and overcome challenges arising from adversities, including social isolation and other challenges that may stem from poverty. In turn, family well-being and resilience make it easier for parents to be the sensitive and responsive caregivers they want to be for their children (NCPFCE, 2013; 2014). This is especially important for families who experience trauma and chronic stress. Shared understanding and commitment between families and early childhood professionals can ensure that children, parents, families, professionals, and programs can reach their full potential.

Guide to Key Terms in the Relationship-Based Competencies

A **Relationship-Based Competency** is a set of knowledge, skills, individual practices, and other characteristics, including attributes, behaviors, and actions, that are necessary to be effective in one's family engagement work.

Professional practice is a combination of knowledge, skills, and individual practices that are measurable or observable, and describe what a person needs to know and how to do the work successfully. Specifically,

- **Knowledge** refers to what early childhood professionals need to know.
- **Skills** refer to what early childhood professionals need to apply their knowledge.
- **Individual practices** include key examples of what early childhood professionals do.

Early childhood professional is used to represent anyone who works with young children and their families in support of child and family well-being. Professionals may include those who identify as providers, practitioners, teachers, family services staff, therapists, nurses, home visitors, directors, or administrators.

Parent and family are used interchangeably throughout this resource. These terms may be viewed differently from the lenses of different cultures. However, the use of **parent** and **family** here refers to all adults who interact with early childhood programs and systems in support of the children in their care. This would include biological, adoptive, foster and step-parents, grandparents and other caregiving kin, and legal and informal guardians. This could also include parents who do not live with the child. When practicing relationship-based family engagement, professionals should keep in mind that families may also include siblings, cousins, and other family members living in the household.

Please refer to the other resources in this set of Relationship-Based Competencies for guidance about additional key terms relevant to the RBCs and family engagement.

Who Can Use the Relationship-Based Competencies—and How?

Family engagement is everyone’s business. Everyone working in early childhood plays a role in supporting family engagement and can benefit from using the RBCs. As defined in the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework and the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems:

Family engagement is an interactive process through which early childhood professionals and families, family members, and their children build positive and goal-oriented relationships. It is a shared responsibility of families and professionals that requires mutual respect for the roles and strengths each has to offer. Family engagement means doing with—not doing to or for—families.



At the program level, family engagement involves parents’ engagement with their children and with early childhood professionals as they work together toward the goals that families choose for themselves and their children. Staff work together with families, other professionals, and community partners in ways that promote equity, inclusiveness, and cultural and linguistic responsiveness.

All adults who work with young children and their families help support strong parent-child relationships and family well-being. The RBCs can guide family engagement practices across a range of professional roles and settings, including:

- teachers and child care providers supporting children’s early learning in centers and homes
- family services staff working in Head Start and Early Head Start programs
- home visitors working with parents to support child development at home
- all other professionals in early childhood programs who come in contact with families, including bus drivers, cooks, maintenance and janitorial staff, translators, health professionals, therapists, and administrative staff
- those who supervise and support the professionals who work directly with families
- organizational leaders who determine program policies and support all professionals across the organization.

Certain RBCs may be emphasized more in some roles and settings than in others. Some may become more important depending on the kind and size of the program. The RBCs that are the most important may also depend on the community where the program is located, the strengths and challenges of individual families, and the resources available.

To implement the RBCs effectively, early childhood professionals need policies, infrastructure, governance structures, and professional development that support the use of the RBCs. These include having space and time for reflective practice. Early childhood leaders—program managers, directors, family representatives, community members, and state, district, and county policymakers—can set the vision and provide guidance and resources for professionals to engage with families effectively.

A Special Note to Supervisors and Administrators

Family engagement requires both time and commitment to working with families. Professionals benefit from an environment that values relationships and assigns manageable workloads. Adequate time provides opportunities for professionals and families to get to know one another and work toward family goals. Professionals also need space and time for reflective practice.

Regulations limiting classroom size, and home visiting and family services professionals caseloads, are based on research showing that large workloads limit professionals’ ability to offer services that work for each family. Large workloads also lead to high rates of staff burnout and turnover (Boston Children’s Hospital, 2012; Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2016; Social Work Policy Institute, 2010, Howes, Phillips, & Whitebook, 1992).

When professionals have manageable workloads, they have time to engage with families and learn about each family’s experiences and cultures. They also stay in their positions longer and are better able to address challenges that arise. These benefits lead to more positive outcomes for children and their families.

Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement

The RBCs guide professional practice that supports and extends family engagement efforts. Individual competencies may be used differently, depending on the strengths, interests, and challenges of families and resources within the program and community. Professionals can strengthen their abilities to use the RBCs through daily work with children, families, and colleagues. Each competency is paired with a professional practice that is observable.

The table below shows only a few examples of what each competency looks like in practice. For more examples, please refer to the three role-specific resources in this set. The RBCs are most effective when professionals and programs have an ongoing commitment to family engagement practices that are responsive to each family’s cultures and languages.

RELATIONSHIP-BASED COMPETENCIES TO SUPPORT FAMILY ENGAGEMENT		
COMPETENCY	PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE	SELECTED EXAMPLES—SEE ROLE-SPECIFIC RESOURCES FOR MORE EXAMPLES
1. Positive, Goal-Oriented Relationships	Engages in mutually respectful, positive, goal-oriented partnerships with families to promote positive child and family outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands the importance of working together with parents by sharing planning and decision-making to support child learning and development and family well-being • Helps families feel comfortable, safe, and respected by building trusting relationships over time • Shows respect for each family’s cultures, values, and life situations
2. Self-Aware and Culturally Responsive Relationships	Respects and responds to the cultures, languages, values, and family structures of each family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands that each family has unique strengths and resilience • Reflects on one’s own beliefs, values, experiences, ethics, and biases to enhance self-awareness • Engages in relationships that are responsive to others’ cultures, languages, and values

RELATIONSHIP-BASED COMPETENCIES TO SUPPORT FAMILY ENGAGEMENT, cont.

COMPETENCY	PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE	SELECTED EXAMPLES—SEE ROLE-SPECIFIC RESOURCES FOR MORE EXAMPLES
3. Family Well-Being and Families as Learners	Supports families' reflections on and planning for their safety, health, education, well-being, and life goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knows how to recognize family resilience, strengths and resources, unique gifts and talents, and what families already do to maintain family well-being and cope with challenges • Knows what steps to take and who to talk with if family or child safety may be threatened • Works with families to identify opportunities for education, training, and employment to increase family economic mobility
4. Parent-Child Relationships and Families as Lifelong Educators	Partners with families to build strong parent-child relationships and supports parents as the first and lifelong educators of their children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands that children's early relationships and experiences in their families form the foundation for development and learning • Understands the value of focusing on family strengths—what families already do to build strong parent-child relationships and support each family member's development and learning • Observes and recognizes positive parenting interactions, and describes to parents how the interactions support child development
5. Family Connections to Peers and Community	Works with families to strengthen their support networks and connections with other parents and community members who can address families' strengths, interests, and challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connects families with resources and events available in the community (for example, recreational facilities, libraries, museums, parks and other outdoor activity resources, and civic organizations) • Encourages families to identify, develop, and use informal and formal social support networks (for example, family-led organizations, family support networks, neighborhood groups, faith/spiritual communities, and civic organizations) • Facilitates parent-to-parent interactions in the program through formal and informal means
6. Family Access to Community Resources	Supports families' use of community resources to make progress toward positive child and family outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understands that families and family networks are important forms of community social support • Is knowledgeable about resources available to families in the community • Works with families to identify what services might benefit them in reaching their goals
7. Leadership and Advocacy	Works alongside parents to build on their strengths as advocates for their families and as leaders in the program and community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Works with families to plan ways to advocate for their child and family in other early childhood and family services settings • Includes families in decision-making and in planning, implementing, and evaluating change at the program level • Encourages parents to engage one another to advance policy change in the program and community
8. Coordinated, Integrated, and Comprehensive Services	Works with other professionals and agencies to support coordinated, integrated, and comprehensive services for families across the organization, community, and system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtains permission from families before sharing confidential information with other service professionals, and respects families' wishes if they choose not to share information • Understands the importance of coordinating with other professionals on health, social, and educational services for children's learning and development and for families' well-being • Works respectfully with families to access health, social, and educational services for supporting children's ongoing learning and development and family well-being
9. Data-Driven Services and Continuous Improvement	Collects information with families and reflects with them to inform goal-setting, planning, and implementation to effect progress and outcomes for families, children, programs, and communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asks families about what they know and what information they feel is important to share about their children • Engages families as active participants in gathering and interpreting data to enhance and individualize services (for example, through surveys, observation, or other information from families) • Uses information about family well-being and child development to help individualize services, decision-making, and practices
10. Professional Growth	Shows professionalism and participates actively in opportunities for ongoing professional development related to family engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engages in ongoing self-reflection to gain new insights that enhance work with children and families • Develops self-care habits for one's own well-being and to be better able to build responsive relationships with others • Creates and follows through on individual professional development plans to further deepen competencies to support family engagement effectively

How Can Professionals in Different Roles Use the Relationship-Based Competencies?

Early childhood professionals can integrate the RBCs into their work with children and families. They can guide the work of supervisors, program leaders, consultants, coaches, and specialists. The RBCs can also guide state and county administrators and institutions of higher education that help prepare early childhood professionals for careers working with young children and their families. Below are examples of how to use the RBCs in different professional roles.

Early childhood professionals can use the RBCs to:

- Strengthen relationships with all families
- Support families in taking positive steps toward their own goals
- Identify personal and professional strengths and challenges for supporting family engagement
- Choose professional development opportunities in their program and community to enhance their relationship-based practices

Program directors, managers, supervisors, coaches, and consultants can use the RBCs to:

- Understand and identify the skills and knowledge that early childhood professionals have and need
- Plan and lead professional development opportunities
- Plan and implement opportunities for reflective practice and coaching
- Develop program strategies and policies for enhancing strengths-based, culturally and linguistically responsive family engagement
- Create job descriptions for professionals and supervisors that include family engagement
- Enhance partnerships with community organizations that support families with young children

State, district, county, and community leaders can use the RBCs to:

- Develop strategic plans to enhance early childhood workforce development
- Form new partnerships or strengthen existing partnerships with colleges and universities to support the inclusion of family engagement in educational opportunities
- Help make decisions about the use of existing resources to promote family engagement
- Develop systems/infrastructure to support collaboration among community partners
- Coordinate family engagement efforts across early childhood initiatives and systems

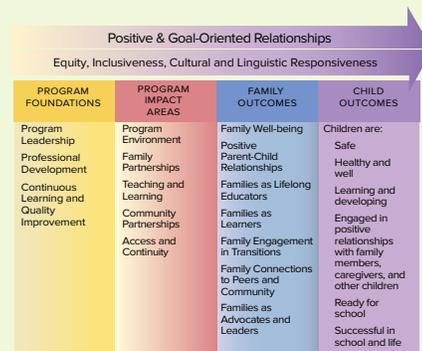
Higher education and professional associations can use the RBCs to:

- Share information at conferences and workshops and in professional learning communities to motivate participants to use RBCs in their everyday work with families
- Develop curricula for professional preparation, pre-service training, and in-service training based on family engagement research and practical applications for working within a diverse society
- Conduct research about how the quality of relationships with families affects family engagement and child and family outcomes
- Develop and use measures of professional practices outlined in the RBCs and document their relationship to positive family engagement and family outcomes

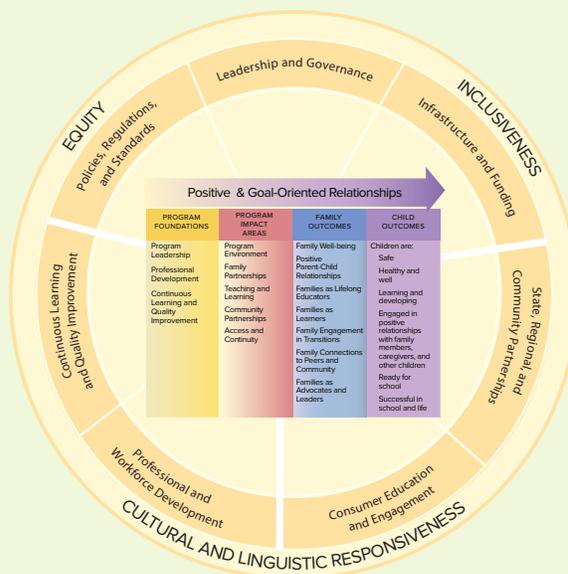
Relationship-Based Competencies and the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework

The RBCs are a critical tool for use in implementing the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework and the Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems. The PFCE Framework is a visual guide for understanding how professionals, programs, and systems can work together to promote positive, enduring outcomes for children, families, and communities.

Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework



Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems



Related Head Start Program Performance Standards

- § 1301.3 (b) Policy council and public committee; Composition
- § 1301.4 (a-b) Parent committees
- § 1302.11 Determining community strengths, needs, and resources
- § 1302.16 Attendance
- § 1302.17 Suspension and expulsion
- § 1302.30 Purpose
- § 1302.31 Teaching and the learning environment
- § 1302.33 Child screenings and assessment
- § 1302.34 Parent and family engagement in education and child development services
- § 1302.35 Education in home-based programs
- § 1302.36 Tribal language preservation and revitalization
- § 1302.41 Collaboration and communication with parents
- § 1302.42 (a-c) Child health status and care
- § 1302.44 (a)(2)(viii) Child nutrition, promote breastfeeding
- § 1302.45 Child mental health and social and emotional well-being
- § 1302.46 Family support services for health, nutrition and mental health
- § 1302.47 (b)(4) Safety Training (5) Safety practices
- § 1302.50 Family engagement
- § 1302.51 Parent activities to promote child learning and development
- § 1302.52 Family partnership services
- § 1302.53 Community partnerships and coordination with other early childhood and education programs
- § 1302.61 (b-c) Additional services for children [with disabilities]
- § 1302.62 Additional services for parents
- § 1302.63 (c) Coordination and collaboration with the local agency responsible for implementing IDEA [parent request for IFSP or IEP]
- § 1302.70 (a-c) Transitions from Early Head Start
- § 1302.71 (b-c) Transitions from Head Start to kindergarten
- § 1302.72 Transitions between programs
- § 1302.80 Enrolled pregnant women
- § 1302.81 Prenatal and postpartum information, education, and services

Related Head Start Program Performance Standards, cont.

§ 1302.82 Family partnership services for enrolled pregnant women

§ 1302.90 (b-d) Personnel policies

§ 1302.91 (d-e) Staff qualifications and competency requirements

§ 1302.92 (a-c) Training and professional development

§ 1302.101 (b) Management system: Coordinated approaches

§ 1302.102 Achieving program goals

§ 1302.103 Implementation of program performance standards

§ 1304.11 (b)(2) Basis for determining whether a Head Start agency will be subject to an open competition

§ 1304.20 (c) Selection among applicants

§ 1304.41 (a) Head Start Fellows program [qualifications]

Related 2016 Child Care and Development Fund Final Rule Requirements

§ 98.1 Purposes

§ 98.15 Assurances and certifications

§ 98.16 Plan provisions

§ 98.18 Approval and disapproval of Plans and Plan amendments

§ 98.30 Parental choice

§ 98.31 Parental access

§ 98.32 Parental complaints

§ 98.33 Consumer and provider education

§ 98.41 Health and safety requirements

§ 98.44 Training and professional development

§ 98.46 Priority for child care services

§ 98.51 Services for children experiencing homelessness

§ 98.52 Child care resource and referral system

§ 98.53 Activities to improve the quality of child care

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Related Resources

Explore these related resources on the Head Start Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center (ECLKC) and Child Care Technical Assistance (CCTA) website:

- Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework
- Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework for Early Childhood Systems
- Relationship-Based Competencies to Support Family Engagement:
 - Overview for Early Childhood Professionals
 - A Guide for Early Childhood Professionals Who Work with Families
 - A Guide for Early Childhood Professionals Who Work with Children in Group Settings
 - A Guide for Early Childhood Professionals Who Make Home Visits
- Measuring What Matters: Using Data to Support Family Progress



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