



First Years in the First State:

Improving Nutrition & Physical Activity Quality in Delaware Child Care

PARTNERING
WITH FAMILIES



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Introduction

The Partnering with Families Guide is intended to assist child care providers in engaging families as partners to support healthy habits. It will help you understand the benefits of building positive relationships with families and give you tools to engage parents and guardians as partners in making your child care environment the best it can be! Materials in this guide include:

- What Families Want to Know
- Best Practices for Creating Family-Provider Partnerships
- Effective Communication Strategies
- Resources for Family-Provider Partnerships
- Self-Assessment Tool
- Action Planning Template
- Family Feedback Survey
- Parent Interest Tool
- Success Stories from Delaware Child Care Providers
- Ideas for Engaging Families
- Ideas for Extending Center-Based Learning to the Home Environment

Note from the authors: For readability, we have used “parent” instead of “parent/guardian” in many places throughout the guide, but in all situations intend the term to cover both. Similarly, we have used the term “center” to cover both child care centers and family day care homes.

The *First Years in the First State* series includes:

- I. *First Years in the First State: Improving Nutrition & Physical Activity Quality in Delaware Child Care: Administrators’ Guide*
- II. *First Years in the First State: Improving Nutrition & Physical Activity Quality in Delaware Child Care: Menu Planning Guide*
- III. *First Years in the First State: Improving Nutrition & Physical Activity Quality in Delaware Child Care: Shopping Cheat Sheet*
- IV. *First Years in the First State: Improving Nutrition & Physical Activity Quality in Delaware Child Care: Instructors’ Guide*
- V. *First Years in the First State: Improving Nutrition & Physical Activity Quality in Delaware Child Care: Foods that Meet Delaware CACFP/Delacare Rules*
- VI. *First Years in the First State: Improving Nutrition & Physical Activity Quality in Delaware Child Care: Partnering with Families*

First Years in the First State series may be downloaded from the USDA State Sharing site:
http://healthymeals.nal.usda.gov/nal_display/index.php?info_center=14&tax_level=1&tax_subject=554

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How to Use This Guide

This guide will help you to assess, plan, implement and evaluate your efforts to create effective partnerships with families. This work is best done in collaboration with families from the very start. Consider using the following steps to guide you through the process:

Step 1: Create a welcoming environment for families. Get to know each of them; learn their interests, hobbies, concerns, strengths, etc. Create a culture of inclusion that allows everyone to feel that they're contributing to the overall health and well-being of the children. Express to each family your desire to build a strong relationship with them.

Step 2: Create an action team focused on family involvement. If you work at a center, the team should include administrative, teaching and food service staff, as well as families. If you work at a child care home, consider asking one or two parents to work with you on this effort.

Step 3: Assess your current practices using the Family Engagement Checklist on page 22. Complete this checklist with your action team in a group setting, where you can discuss each question and its answer, or ask all members of the action team to complete it individually and come together to compare your answers. You will likely find that opinions differ on some questions; be sure to consider all team member points of view and come to an agreement on a group answer.

Step 4: Assess family perspectives on your center/home's efforts to engage families using the Family Survey on page 19. Ask all of your families to complete the survey. Offer the survey electronically on a free survey website (e.g., Survey Monkey) or as a hard copy to accommodate everyone's needs. Create a place (envelope at front desk or on the bulletin board) where families can anonymously return the hard copy of the survey. Electronic surveys can also generate an anonymous response. You're more likely to get honest answers if the surveys are collected in this way.

Step 5: Identify areas for improvement based on the results from the Family Engagement Checklist and Family Survey. Choose three or four areas to focus on, and use the Action Plan template on page 25 to set goals, action steps and responsible parties for each area. Use the information in this guide to come up with ideas and tools for implementation. Remember, it's okay to start small! Make sure your goals are clear and achievable.

Step 6: Present your Action Plan to your families at a meeting, event night or individually—tell them what you heard from them and what you're working on. Ask families whether or not they feel this plan will help to address their needs. Make adjustments based on their feedback.

Step 7: Put your plan into action! Use the tools in this guide as resources. Meet with your action team regularly to discuss progress on the plan. Address challenges and make changes where needed.

Step 8: Celebrate and publicize your successes! Communicate your successes to staff and families and thank them for their involvement. Note your achievements in your center newsletter and hold a healthy family event to celebrate your work together.

Step 9: Add new goals to your Action Plan as you achieve the older ones. Quality improvement is a process that will continue over time. Know that your time and efforts are worthwhile, appreciated by families and supportive of the children in your care.