

Module Seven: Partnering with Staff, Families and Your Community

Time: 45 minutes

Goal: To learn how to partner with families, center/home staff and the community to create an environment that supports healthy lifestyle choices in child care.

Handouts

- Engagement Self-Assessment

Additional Materials

- *First Years Toolkit – Administrators’ Guide*

Objectives:

- List three ways to partner with staff, families and your community to support healthy eating and physical activity.

I. Discussion (25 minutes)

Partnering with Staff, Families and Your Community (slide 1, title slide):

[Introduce yourself (if you haven’t already done so).]

SAY:

- In this session, we will be discussing ways to partner with others who interact with children on a daily basis and are influential in shaping their health behaviors.
- Partnering with staff, families and your community is an important step in developing healthy habits.
- Sometimes getting others on board to make changes can be the most difficult step toward success.
- We will be discussing tips on how to partner with staff, families and your community to create healthier environments for children to grow and thrive.

Learning Objective (slide 2):

SAY:

- By the end of this session, you will be able to:
[Read slide.]

Partnering with Staff (slide 3):

SAY:

- In this first section we are going to discuss how to partner with staff.
- It is important to note that we are using the term “staff” here, but if you are a classroom teacher, foodservice personnel, etc., you can look at this as how to partner with colleagues in your center or home.
- For child care homes, you may want to view these ideas as ways to partner with other home child care providers.

Why Partner with Staff (slide 4):

SAY:

- Building a team environment is extremely important. Teachers play a large part in shaping classroom behaviors and have a large influence on the choices children make.
- All staff members are role models. Children look to them and mimic the behaviors they are doing.
- They set the tone for the center and home environment. Staff members who are actively engaged with the children create a happy, healthy environment.
- Teaching children to make healthy choices fosters healthy development by teaching them to be independent and develop life skills at an early age.
- Staff members also have the opportunity to engage in new experiences with the children. Knowing someone else is experiencing the unknown with them may make the children more likely to try.

Role Modeling (slide 5):

SAY:

- All adults are role models to the children they encounter.
- There are many ways to role model healthy behaviors.
- If children see adults being enthusiastic and trying new foods, they are more likely to try them as well.
- Having a positive attitude toward healthy eating and physical activity is essential to encourage children's participation.
- All staff can develop a healthy mealtime environment by talking about new foods – how they look, feel, taste, smell, etc. Doing so will encourage children to try new foods by easing the anxiety of the unfamiliar.
- Family style dining teaches children to try new foods, engage in conversation, adopt healthy habits and listen to their hunger cues.

Division of Responsibility Staff v. Child (slide 6)

SAY:

- Division of responsibility means that an adult's job is to provide a child with the appropriate amount of healthy food based on age and a child's job is to decide how much to eat.
- Children will eat different amounts from day to day, but over the course of a week they will eat the amount they need to grow. It's normal for their appetites to fluctuate.
- Teach children to recognize their own hunger and fullness cues as a way to self-regulate.
- Looking for common signs of hunger and fullness can help you avoid overfeeding children. This will, in turn, lead to less overeating by children who feel they need to finish everything on their plate.
- Infants' hunger cues are rooting or putting their fists in their mouths.
- Slowed or distracted eating signifies fullness.
- Signs children are full may include pushing the plate away or playing with their food. If this occurs, do not force children to finish the food on their plate. Doing so teaches them to ignore their hunger and fullness cues. Ask if they are finished with their meal and instruct them to continue with the after-lunch routine (cleaning up their place, reading a book, talking with friends, or whatever the specific routine at the center or home may be).

- Again, family style dining allows the children to regulate how much they serve themselves.
- Serving the correct amounts based on age is important to ensure children are not receiving more than they need.
- Allow enough time for children to eat their food. Encourage them to chew before swallowing, not to talk or play while they are eating, and to eat slowly. This way, they can identify when they are full. When children eat too fast, they tend to eat a larger amount of food before they realize they're full.

FAQ

Family style dining is allowed in child care. Children should be encouraged to take the amount needed for their age by using pre-measured scoops or serving utensils.

Partnering with Staff (slide 7)

SAY:

- Communication is important in creating a collaborative environment. Keep staff updated through meetings, e-mails, newsletters or other communication channels. Encourage them to provide feedback or ask questions whenever necessary.
- Allowing staff to participate in menu planning encourages creativity and allows for new ideas. You can have a potluck as a staff meeting, a recipe exchange or a taste-testing party to engage staff in the menu planning process.
- Ask staff what type of educational opportunities they would like to have in order to improve their nutrition and physical activity knowledge.
- Look for free resources and educational opportunities for skill development as well as ways to improve classroom resources.
- Motivation is the key to productivity. Provide healthy incentives to encourage behaviors. Things like a healthy lunch, parking spot, gym trial, etc. will show staff that you appreciate their efforts. And don't forget to say "thank you!"
- Start an advisory group at your center. Allow feedback and open dialogue to voice successes and challenges. Working to develop solutions and improvements will allow the center to grow over time and create a collaborative environment.

Discussion (slide 8)

SAY:

- You may have other ideas on how to partner with staff than what has been discussed here.

ASK:

- *What are some ways that you partner with staff to promote healthy nutrition and physical activity?*
- *For those of you who see an opportunity to change the way you communicate with staff, what are some ways you could partner with them?*

[If limited response, **ASK** if these ideas seem feasible in participants' home or center. For those that do not have staff, do they think it is an option to partner with other child care providers to shop, take field trips, role model, etc., as a way to engage one another?]

Partnering with Families (slide 9)

ASK:

- *Would anyone like to share why they think it is important to partner with families?*

[Take a few answers. If limited answers, **ASK** if anyone would like to share challenges they encounter that prevent them from being able to partner with families. Take one or two answers before moving into the presentation.]

SAY:

- Next, we will be discussing the importance of partnering with the families of the children in your care. This can be one of the most difficult, yet crucial, tasks to accomplish. Engaging families in the healthy eating and physical activity efforts being made at child care can help parents understand and support the Rules you follow and reinforce healthy habits at home.

Partnering with Families (slide 10)

SAY:

- Partnering with families is essential in developing healthy habits.
- Families are children’s first teachers and influence behaviors with every interaction.
- Partnering with families will enhance the relationships between child care and home. Behaviors are more likely to “stick” and be repeated as children grow older if they are similar in multiple environments. Doing so also keeps consistency in children’s daily routines.
- Family relationships can provide valuable resources such as volunteers when needed, new ideas for recipes, games, etc. Parents may also have skills required in the center/home (e.g., if a parent is an electrician and you need some electrical work done, a positive relationship may encourage him/her to lend a hand).
- Lastly, parents are your clients. Fostering solid relationships will make it more likely they keep their children at your center and encourage them to recommend your services to others.

Partnering with Families (slide 11)

SAY:

- You are in a unique position because the relationships you build with families can engage them as partners in developing healthy behaviors in children.
- Keeping parents/guardians informed ensures that they have the knowledge and skills to reinforce healthy behaviors at home.
- There are many ways to communicate with parents about the nutrition and physical activity efforts occurring in your center or home.
- Some ideas are listed here:

[READ slide.]

Ideas for Partnering with Families (slide 12)

SAY:

- Communication is the first step in keeping parents up-to-date on healthy eating and physical activity. We already discussed ways to communicate and now we will talk about the type of information to share.
- Asking questions about what is going on with the family shows interest and involvement with their child. Ask things like, “Are there behaviors you are working on at home that you would like us to look for in child care?” “What are your hopes for your child in this classroom?” “What type of communication would you like to receive about your child’s day in child care and how would you like to receive it?”
- If you see a potential problem (e.g., behavior, health), use your professional expertise and connections to make the appropriate referral (if necessary).

- Encourage parents to be actively involved in your center/home. Form a parent advisory group to offer feedback on what is going well in the center/home and how things could be improved. Ask for volunteers from families to come in for special days, to read to children, to share information about their career, etc.
- Ease interaction between families by organizing family activity nights, potlucks, blogs, social networking pages, etc. Many parents or guardians have questions, comments and suggestions around children's behaviors. Giving them an opportunity to communicate with one another will enhance the sense of inclusion and community at your home or center.

Discussion (slide 13)

ASK:

- *We have talked about the importance of communicating and partnering with parents, guardians and families. What communication techniques have you found to be particularly effective and what type of information do you share with your families?*

[Take a few answers. **ASK** if they are from a home or a center, as you might find some ideas that are more helpful for one or the other.]

- *If you are not currently communicating with families or feel that you could improve your means of communication, what are some ways that you could achieve this?*

[Again, take a few answers. If no one is responding, **ASK** if they think there is any information they have learned today that they believe may be helpful to pass along to families.]

Partnering with Your Community (slide 14)

SAY:

- We have discussed how to partner with staff and families, and now we are going to move on to partnering with the community as a way to ensure that children can eat healthy and be physically active in their own communities.

Why Partner with Your Community? (slide 15)

SAY:

- A community plays an important role in developing children's healthy habits. In order to make healthy choices, they need access to healthy foods and safe spaces for physical activity. It is also important for children to know who in their community helps to keep them healthy.
- Community members can donate their time and skills to teach children about safety (police officers, firefighters), healthy behaviors (dentists, doctors, chefs, etc.), and places in their community (zoos, parks, hospitals, etc.).
- Community members and businesses can also donate financial resources and time to develop a community that is a healthy place to grow up.

Partnering with Your Community (slide 16)

SAY:

- There are many ways to involve your community in the healthy eating and physical activity efforts occurring in child care.
- Some of these activities are as follows:

[READ slide.]

Discussion (slide 17)

ASK:

- *Does anyone have other ideas for engaging the community in your efforts to improve physical activity and healthy eating?*

[If limited responses, ASK if they can think of places in their neighborhood where children can be active, learn about healthy foods or the people in their community who work to help them be healthy.]

Toolkit Resources (slides 18 and 19)

SAY:

- There are sections in the *First Years Toolkit – Administrators’ Guide* entitled “Partnerships” and “Feeding” which contain the information we just discussed.
- The “Parent Tip Sheets” show age-appropriate serving sizes for foods and beverages and give information on feeding children at specified ages. (pp.49 – 69)
- There are two letters directed to parents regarding feeding infants and children in child care. They are signed by the Department of Education and the Office of Child Care Licensing and are intended to help communicate the rationale for the Rules and policies. (pp.75 and 78)
- The “Medical & Religious/Cultural Food Restrictions” form must be filled out in order to make any substitutions in the meal pattern for children with special dietary needs. (pp.77 and 80)
- “Trying New Foods/Foods Sent Home” is a template to communicate with parents about new foods their children are trying or learning about. It also has a space for foods that are being sent home because they do not comply with regulations. (p. 81)

[READ slide for remaining toolkit resources.]

TIP

You can also show the sections on the computer screen if internet access is available.

II. Activity (18 minutes)

Self-Assessment Activity (slide 20)

[Instruct participants to take out the “Engagement Self-Assessment” Activity Sheet.]

SAY:

- This assessment was created to help you gauge how you are partnering with children, staff, families and your community to support healthy habits.
- Read each statement and check “yes” or “no” based on the activities you have been participating in over time. For each “no,” or practices to improve upon, think about next steps you can take.
- We will take about 10 minutes to complete the activity and then we will discuss.

[After 10 minutes, bring the group back together and discuss some of the ideas they have to partner with families, staff and their community. Engage them in sharing the steps they are going to take to accomplish these goals. Remind them to make small changes first and build to larger ones.]

Summary (slide 21)

[READ slide.]

Engagement Self-Assessment

MODULE 7 – ACTIVITY SHEET

PRACTICE	YES (describe how)	NO	ACTION STEPS FOR IMPROVEMENT	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	DUE DATE
CHILDREN					
Children are involved in menu planning, meal preparation and/or serving themselves food.					
Children are given opportunities to engage in unstructured physical activity throughout the day.					
FAMILIES					
Families are informed of all Rules regarding nutrition and physical activity.					
Families are given suggestions to support nutrition and physical activity at home.					
Families are given monthly opportunities to be involved in center/home activities.					
Families are engaged in planning and improving center/home activities.					
COMMUNITIES					
My center/home has worked with a community partner to support nutrition or physical activity in the past six months.					
STAFF <i>(Skip if not applicable)</i>					
Staff is encouraged to provide suggestions for improving nutrition and physical activity at your center/home.					
Staff is made aware of free and existing resources to supplement lesson plans.					

