



Engagement with families: Supporting the community through change

All children influence and are affected by the environments that surround them... Local community, cultural events, spaces and their accessibility, reinforce a sense of belonging and wellbeing for a child and their family - VEYLDF, p5

Effective implementation of two years of funded kindergarten is enhanced when educators engage with the **Practice Principles of the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework (VEYLDF)**:

- Reflective practice
- Partnerships with families
- High expectations for every child
- Respectful relationships and responsive engagement
- Equity and diversity
- Assessment for learning and development
- Integrated teaching and learning approaches
- Partnerships with professionals.

It is recommended that educators refer to the **VEYLDF** and the Practice Guides for further suggestions and ideas about continuous improvement.

Two years of funded kindergarten represents a significant change to the way the community and many families understand the provision of early childhood education and care.

For some families, the opportunity for their three-year-old child to attend a kindergarten program may be very new, and they may have concerns about how their child will manage this new environment. Other families in our community are already seeing the benefits of their children's extended participation in quality early childhood education and care.

Supporting families and communities to understand the changes to funded kindergarten programs has benefits for educators, services and, most importantly, for children. Research and practice evidence confirm that when families and the community understand and support the intentions behind reforms, such as the introduction of two years of funded kindergarten, children's learning and development are enhanced.

Educators play a critical role in both supporting families to understand the implementation of funded three-year-old kindergarten and what this means for them, but also in addressing any questions or concerns families may have.

Why it matters

Early childhood educators who understand their professional and ethical responsibilities to support families to understand the benefits of two years of funded kindergarten programs help to uphold children's right to quality education. In practice, this means communicating with families about what the reform means for them and how these changes will positively impact their child's learning and development. The guiding principles of all engagement with families is using clear, plain language, and to make children's learning as visible as possible by using practical examples of what a child is experiencing as part of the kindergarten program.

Clear communication that emphasises how children's learning is enhanced by two years of funded kindergarten supports engagement with families. Likewise, a clear communication strategy ensures educators are best placed to address families' questions and concerns as they arise, while ensuring families' expectations are shaped by contemporary understandings of early childhood education and care.



Practical tips to support engagement

When designing a parent communication and engagement strategy, teachers and educators might consider the following actions:

- There is a range of ways to engage and communicate with families and the wider community about the changes to funded kindergarten programs. This could include social media or online platforms, which have come to higher prominence during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. If nobody at your service has expertise or experience in online communications, consider looking into professional development opportunities in this area, asking the parent community to share their expertise, or engaging a specialist.
- Catalogue families' most asked questions or areas of concern, and communicate how the service responds to and manages these issues. In doing this, educators can proactively offer contextualised support to their families. Research evidence suggests that successful parental engagement often involves educators 'predicting' families' queries or proactively responding to their questions. For example, publishing information about how your service supports children's participation in routines on the service website, in the family handbook, on social media, or simply sharing ideas at orientation meetings.
- Use translated materials, translator services, and the skills of bilingual educators if available to communicate key messages about the reform; this will help to share key messages with culturally and linguistically diverse families.
- Communicate with families using plain and accessible language, avoiding acronyms, jargon or referring to learning using technical terms or academic references. Instead use stories about children's learning experiences in clear, meaningful ways that focus on what matters to families in local contexts.
- Highlight the ideas that underpin early childhood education to families using real examples. Children's learning in their early years is fluid and interconnected, so using real-life practical or practice examples of children's experiences in conversations with families can make learning more visible.
- Share family testimonials about the benefits of kindergarten programs at information nights or open days. It is especially important for other families to hear from culturally and linguistically diverse communities or from parents/carers of children with additional needs.
- Communicate information in a timely way. Avoid bombarding families with too much information. Consider the frequency of communication activities and interactions you have with your community and tailor your communication strategy accordingly, remembering that quality is better than quantity.

Questions for reflective discussion:

The VEYLDF Practice Principles support educators to engage with families and the community. In particular, **Reflective Practice** invites educators to stop, think, challenge and change their practices.

- How can we plan for our communications with families across the year?
- What are our key messages on specific topics and milestones that might be relevant to families?
- What are the best platforms for communicating with our community?
- Which platforms have the greatest engagement already?
- What are the main concerns or questions that families might have?
- How do we address these?
- Who is the best person to lead this communication?

- Taking part in a quality kindergarten program at an earlier age has positive effects on children's development, wellbeing and learning. It has even more benefits for children who need extra support or who are in vulnerable circumstances.
- In a kindergarten program, children enjoy play-based learning. Teachers support children to develop curiosity, concentration, resilience and creativity. Through play children learn language skills, maths concepts, how to regulate their behaviour and how to get along with others.

References and further reading

Communicating with families about children's learning

<https://www.acecqa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-12/CommunicatingWithFamiliesAboutChildrensLearning.pdf>

Building partnerships between families and early childhood staff

https://www.startingblocks.gov.au/media/1105/kmec_c4_201205_03_building-partnerships.pdf

Effective communication with parents for professionals

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/for-professionals/working-with-parents/communicating-with-parents/communication-with-parents>

Strategic communication tools

https://www.rch.org.au/ccch/publications-resources/Strategic_communication_tools/

Practice Principle Guide | Partnerships with Families

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/providers/edcare/pracguidepartnershipswfamilies2017.pdf>

Engaging with families:

Sharing positive messages with families about key changes to early childhood education is an essential professional responsibility. The following key messages might help your service explain these changes to families and the community. These can be amended and enhanced by using local practice examples and including images that bring these ideas to life.

The following messages are examples of simple explanations for families about two years of funded kindergarten:

- When it comes to early learning, evidence shows that two years of kindergarten are better than one.
- An extra year of funded kinder will mean another year of learning, growing, playing and making friends for Victorian children. At our service [insert example of how Three-Year-Old kindergarten is being provided].

