# Partnerships with families

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| Anne Stonehouse: | My name is Anne Stonehouse. Welcome to the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework Practice Principle Video Series. The Framework is for all professionals and services working with children from birth to eight years. In the videos you see each Practice Principle in action. It's important to remember that all the Principles intersect and overlap. Combined, they guide professional practice. This video should be used in conjunction with the Practice Principle Guide on Partnerships with families. The Guide is on the Department of Education and Training website. |
| [00:01:00] | Today, we'll be visiting several services. The professionals, families, and children at these sites will help you consider partnerships with families and how this relates to your service. Partnerships with families involves establishing respectful relationships with children and their families. It means working in partnership with all families, accepting and welcoming diversity. Families are children's first teachers. They have a longstanding relationship with, and a unique perspective on, their child. They have valuable information about their child's strengths, abilities, interests, and challenges. |
|  | Partnerships between early childhood professionals and families have not always been the norm, and may not be an expectation of families. Professionals may need to persist in establishing and strengthening partnerships, including, with extended family members. |
| Joanna Richmond:  [00:02:00] | For many of our families, particularly the new arrival families, the link to the school is their first link with the community. Sometimes we get people that just get off a plane, and then they come to school to enrol their child. So they don't really know anything about the community. They don't know what facilities that there are. They don't know what they can access. You can support them in that we're working together for the benefit of the children, we're trying to focus on the parent as the child's first teacher, so we can solve problems by working together. |
| Liz Suda:  [00:03:00] | Engagement, interaction with families, is about the role that the customer service officers play in making families feel welcome. We are about relationships. It isn't just the exhibit. It's the whole interaction that you have with the people in the space, the Autism Friendly Museum. This is something that we are I think heading towards in that idea of being responsive to the needs of people. The customer service officer thought, "This parent looks really stressed." The customer service person says, "Can I help you in some way?" Those magic words, which can be said very emptily, in this case were the exact words that person wanted to hear. If we can embed that in our practice all the time, which is to ask, "Can I help you? Can I be of assistance? What's happening here?" then the people are going to have a much better experience, and that parent will come back with their child, and that child will benefit. |
| Simone Timmins: | There are families that will need up to a couple of months of visiting the service so that the family overall feel comfortable, and it's not just about the child feeling comfortable. Because generally the child will feel comfortable if the family as a whole have made those connections with the educators and decided that this is a place that they feel safe for their child. |
| Anne:  [00:04:00] | The foundations of partnerships are laid by respecting the role of families in children's lives. Professionals use their skills in communication, negotiation, and shared decision-making, as well as their cultural competence, to build links between the home and early childhood settings. They listen to families' desires for the child and accommodate their wishes and requests where it is in the child's best interests. When they can't, they negotiate to find a solution satisfactory to everyone. |
| Marlene Fox:  [00:05:00] | At Biala Peninsula, we work really closely with families, and one of the things that comes out of that close relationship that we develop is to be able to be flexible about how we offer services. For example, we have a family that has four young boys, all of them now on the autism spectrum with a diagnosis. And so we looked at how it was going to be possible and best met that family's needs to be able to provide both individual services, but also services in a way that was physically possible for parents to be able to access services. So we've developed new programs and continue to do so to look at ways we can offer services that are going to meet the needs of some very diverse families. |
| Joanne Richmond: | I know Lizzie in the office is very friendly and welcoming to parents, and she's very good with families who English is limited, you need to take more time, and I think having interpreters for people that have limited English is respectful of their language and their culture, and also allows them to effectively communicate to you their needs. |
| Wendy Jarvis: | Unfortunately, we've had a family where the little girl suddenly lost her father unexpectedly. So we've worked very closely with the mother and the social worker and the psychologist to make sure that that little girl's coping as best she possibly can. |
| Anne Stonehouse: | When no compromise is possible, professionals respectfully provide explanations. They are non-judgmental and aim to build confidence in the family's child-rearing, and to convey an image of children as capable and competent. |
| Denise:  [00:06:00] | Throughout the year, we hold information sessions about a variety of things. We have meetings to ask parents what they would like to learn about. We will find some way of presenting an information session or a workshop to suit their needs. We don't expect them to accept our schooling totally. They are free to ask in sessions that run in the Community Hub about our education system. |
| Helen Walter:  [00:07:00] | We very much work on a strength-based model and articulate what it is that we can see that is working well, not in a patronising way, but in a way that will support their parenting and improve their confidence, and being respectful of parents' views. We're not familiar with their experience of how they were parented themselves or any sort of trauma that they've had in their lives, so there might be particular things that might trigger their emotions and what they think about parenting and how to support their children. So, I think it's important to be respectful of their viewpoint. Perhaps at times it's necessary to point out research that might indicate something to the contrary, but then also, at the end of the day it's their decision. |
| Linda Davison:  [00:08:00] | We are aiming for a deeper connection with families, but that always has to be negotiated with each individual family. I think there are times when our view of what is best for a child is not necessarily the same as the parent's view. And, of course, we want to respect parents as a child's first educator and as the child's parents, but we also have an ethical and moral duty of care to children. Sometimes when those difficult questions arise, our conversation goes along the lines of, "If we put the child at the top of this decision-making pyramid, if you like, how does the answer look to us then?" |
| Anne: | Professionals appreciate that many families face substantial challenges, relating to, for example, language, cultural or socio-economic background, family violence, trauma, health, or disability. Professionals use multiple ways to communicate with families to overcome barriers to ensure inclusion and engagement. |
| Denise: | In the Community Hub, we have lots of people from the community come in. Doesn't necessarily have to be a member of our school community. It can be anyone who comes to programs that we run. We advertise them throughout the community. |
| Silvija: | A lot of people are struggling financially with our economy, so it is very encouraging in that the school does have support with food banks and organisations that come together so no child comes to school hungry. |
| [00:09:00]  Tadros: | We have a community room. It connects all the people together and the kids, they find the support of the family. When the kids are in the school and they find that the family are behind them, they feel a lot of support. I wish that all families can have this. It's my family. The school is a part now of my family. |
| Paula: | I like to take the time to really listen to what the families are telling me what their needs might be, and I guess during that conversation, if something came up that I couldn't deal with, I might reflect upon it or find a referral source for that family. It's not to tell people what to do. It's to, perhaps, use opportunities that happen in the room as a point of discussion. If you've got a relationship with the parent, and you've talked about something that's really positive, they then might, if you're offering some advice, if you've got a bit of a relationship, then it's more likely to work for everybody. |
| Anne Stonehouse:  [00:10:00] | Regardless of circumstances, it is in the child's best interests for there to be effective, sustained, collaborative partnerships between families and all professionals. |
| Amy: | I didn't know if it was going to be inflammatory, or if she was going to feel a bit threatened by the fact that I was saying, "Well, you know, what are you? Are you Montessori? What's this, Steiner? All these different ways”, and "How do you guys stack up against that?" The next day when I went to pick up Ed, Natalie had a whole stack of literature for me, showing the different ... and she was like, "You can either read this, or we can have a chat about it. Linda's more than happy to have a chat." They basically walked me through what the philosophy of the Centre is, and how it might tap into the different sort of schools of teaching. |
| Natalie Peters:  [00:11:00] | To develop stronger relationships with parents and to work out different ways of building relationships with them. What we found was that going beyond just one form of communicating with parents and developing many ways of communicating with parents, we were able to get a lot more parents involved. By the blog, by emails, via the Floorbook, all these different forms drew parents in via different ways. |
| Anne Stonehouse: | Professionals work to strengthen relationships with and between children and their families, and build family capacity. |