

# Principles of Family-Centered Care

Principle 1: Recognize and respect one another's knowledge and expertise.

Principle 2: Share information through two-way communication.

Principle 3: Share power and decision making.

Principle 4: Acknowledge and respect diversity.

Principle 5: Create networks of support.

## **1. Recognize and respect one another's knowledge and expertise.**

- Families and educators each hold unique and essential sets of knowledge about children.
- Families and educators are more effective and more confident when they experience recognition and respect for the knowledge they hold.
- Recognizing a family's knowledge and expertise and interacting with them with that in mind is called taking a "strengths-based approach."

## **2. Share information through two-way communication.**

- Two-way communication can happen in all interactions: written and verbal, group and individual, formal and informal. Many one-way interactions can be transformed into two-way communication.
- Two-way communication offers both participants
  - access to more information
  - a common body of information
  - the idea of partnership and collaboration
  - respect for each partner's expertise, experience, and knowledge
- Authentic two-way communication can transform the power dynamic of some traditional parent-educator relationships into a more collaborative one.

## **3. Share power and decision making.**

- Many decisions have implications for the child at home and in the program and are best made with the input of both educators and families.
- When parents and educators are sharing the care and education of a child, sharing power and decision making are essential.
- Sharing power does not mean that families will make all the decisions about what happens in the program, just as educators don't make decisions about what happens with children in the home.
- Child outcomes are better when parents and educators work together.

#### 4. Acknowledge and respect diversity.

- Culture is
  - dynamic (always evolving or changing)
  - “an integrated pattern of human behavior, which includes but is not limited to—thought, communication, languages, beliefs, values, practices, customs, courtesies, rituals, manners of interacting, roles, relationships and expected behaviors of a racial, ethnic, religious, social or political group” (National Center for Cultural Competence, Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development, 2001)
  - transmitted to succeeding generations
- Culture influences every aspect of how we care for and educate children. Families and educators often have different assumptions, beliefs, perspectives, and styles of nurturing and teaching.
- Understanding each other’s perspective allows families and educators to negotiate differences more effectively. There are many “right” ways to care for and educate children.
- Culture influences how we communicate. Communication strategies and skills are learned in relationship, family, culture, communities, and schools. Understanding and accepting that what we have learned comes from a number of influences helps us consciously expand on what we know by learning new strategies and skills.
- People interpret communication differently depending on their cultures, experience, and temperament. Understanding and accepting other people’s communication styles is as important as understanding and accepting our own.
- Some cultures are valued more by their own society than they are by others. All cultures are not treated equally. This difference is not based on inherent worth, but on power, history, and myth.

#### 5. Create networks of support.

Having people and institutions they can depend on can help protect families from a host of negative outcomes. Networks of support include:

- **Family to program:** Parents can provide educators and programs with many resources, including creative ideas, cultural information, language skills, time and energy, community resources and connections, and more.
- **Program to family:** As educators, we may be more accustomed to providing resources to families than to helping families build and participate in networks of support.
- **Family to family:** Families benefit both from offering resources and from receiving resources, from being nurtured and from offering nurturance.
- **Community to family:** Most families already have some community support in place. We can work with them to identify additional resources and share the information with other families.

We can create structures and opportunities for families, programs, and communities to participate in networks of support.