



Family Communications Plan

REFLECTIONS IN PRACTICE FOR EARLY LEARNING & CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

Regulated early learning and child care programs (including approved family child-care homes) in Nova Scotia are required to develop a family communications plan to support them in building collaborative partnerships with families. A family communications plan is an overview of how programs will communicate and engage with families, as specified in the Ministerial Requirements for a Family Communications Plan, as well as information that the licensee and care provider deem pertinent to share with families. This document will support and encourage licensees, child care staff, and care providers to reflect and build upon their current communications and practices with families.

Introduction

Capable, Confident, and Curious: Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework recognizes the critical importance of family relationships for child development. It explains that children's lives are shaped by their families, communities, and culture and that their earliest development and learning takes place through these relationships. Families are the children's most influential teachers and building genuine and respectful partnerships with children's families helps educators build diversity and familiarity into children's learning environments.

Early learning and child care programs have an opportunity to promote effective engagement and participation by families and the greater community within their organization.

"Children's learning and development are enhanced when educators value families as children's first and most influential teachers. An important part of the educator's role is to establish respectful relationships with parents or guardians and work in partnership with families."

*—Capable Confident, and Curious:
Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework, p.28*

What Families Bring To Programs

Children are part of a family, a culture, a neighbourhood/geographic location, and a community. In early childhood and throughout life, relationships are crucial to a child's developing sense of self; they shape who children are and who they become. Family communication and engagement allows programs to have a better understanding of children's relationships and family dynamics. Families bring a wealth of information on how their child interacts with the world and people around them. It is important to provide opportunities for families to talk about their child. Collaborating with educators allows families to provide insight on each child's uniqueness and provides an appreciation of the whole child.

Families entering early learning and child care programs want to know that their child's well-being is a priority. Early learning and child care programs and families must establish a sense of mutual trust, and value each other's knowledge and contributions in each child's life. Communication should come freely and respectfully with each other while sharing insights and perspectives, including information about child development. The partnership engages in shared decision making about their child's program and development.



Reflective practice informs how educators approach their communication with families and promotes meaningful interactions and authentic relationship building. Respect for families, communities, and diversity requires educators to act ethically and professionally. This requires each early learning and child care professional to think about their values and beliefs, and attitudes related to diversity and difference.

Educators view culture and the context of family as central to children's sense of being and belonging, and to success in lifelong learning. Educators also seek to promote children's cultural responsiveness. Cultural responsiveness is much more than being aware of cultural differences. It is the ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. The Nova Scotia Early Learning Curriculum Framework: Capable, Confident, Curious, defines culturally responsive practice as being aware of one's own world view; gaining knowledge of different cultural practices, historical perspectives and world views; developing positive attitudes toward and appreciation of cultural differences; and developing skills for communication and interaction across cultures and languages¹. Consideration and understanding of the following are essential for programs to reflect on so that they can create an environment where families feel valued and supported:

- linguistic diversity
- developmental considerations
- traditions and lived experiences
- identity
- family structure
- lifestyles and parenting practices
- socio-economic barriers
- exposure to systemic racism



1 *Capable, Confident and Curious, NS Early Learning Curriculum Framework, p 40*

REFLECTIONS IN PRACTICE

- How do we share decision making with families? What are we willing to share decision making about? What more could be considered?
- How do we share knowledge with families about our program?
- How do we make learning visible to families?
- What are the specific things we do to welcome each child's family and support their confidence to work in partnership with us for their child's learning?
- How do we acknowledge our value for all families in our program?
- How do we reflect back the cultural knowledge of each child and their family in their daily experience in our program?

Establishing Relationships Through Communication With Families

Child care staff and care providers can create programs where all families and children feel a sense of belonging and well-being. When developing partnerships, programs need to have established practices for communicating and involving families. These practices would promote ongoing open dialogue and positive relationships that build a climate of trust between educators and families. Also, programs should establish policies that provide clear expectations on program practices and involvement that will support in building a bridge between the family and the program. Developing inclusive and positive communications can help families begin to feel safe and provide a sense of belonging as they enter the program.

In addition to receiving ongoing input from families through daily interaction, early learning and child care programs communicate information with families in a variety of ways. Some examples are:

- daily conversations—
e.g., in person, by telephone,
email, or virtual meeting apps
- parent committee meetings and other
program related committee meetings
- newsletters
- events and open houses
- daily reports
- children’s progress reports, portfolios
- websites and social media
- enrolment and orientation
- parent information boards
- daily journals and log books
- collaborative team meetings

Child care programs can further communicate information about their service by developing authentic relationships with cultural and community leaders to help inform family engagement and by connecting with other service providers who hold cultural knowledge for a range of community members to support communication planning.

REFLECTIONS IN PRACTICE

Does my program work together with parents and families by

- valuing a range of cultural knowledge in the context of child development and learning?
- valuing each other’s contributions to and roles in each child’s life?
- communicating freely and respectfully with each other?
- sharing insights and perspectives, through consulting with community stakeholders and extended family to further engage in children’s learning?



Components of Your Family Communications Plan

Parent Handbook

A parent handbook outlines your philosophy and provides essential information on program policies, procedures, and practices. Parent handbooks should be thoughtful and thorough, respecting diverse perspectives, and encouraging collaboration. Through the parent handbook, families and programs can develop a shared understanding on collaborative approaches to supporting children. Applications/enrollment forms will include a space for parents to indicate that a copy of the handbook has been provided to them. Information related to your organization should be provided in appropriate sections. Below are sample sections that would be included in a parent handbook:

- Mission Statement
- Philosophy Statement
- Administrative Structure (with contact information)
- Document Requirements for New Enrollment (health questionnaire, immunizations, consent forms, contact information, etc.)
- Parent Fees (fees for age groups, methods of payment, schedules, late payments, returned cheques)
- Planned Absences (policies for sick days, vacation days, holidays, storm days, etc.)
- Pick Up and Drop Off (policies and procedures for late pick up, request for identification for non-parental pick ups, school-age-specific procedures for transporting children and walking)
- Program Information and Requirements (curriculum approach—including the *Nova Scotia Early Learning Framework*, program planning, and policies supporting the program):
 - Ministerial Requirements for daily program
 - Family Communications Plan
 - Inclusion Policy
 - Withdrawal Policy
 - rest time

- daily routines and schedules (transitions within the program)
- staffing information
- Behaviour Guidance Policy
(including requirements for Positive Behaviour Support Plans)
- Code of Conduct (harassment, substance use, addressing complaints, etc.)
- Communication Policy (including digital communication and social media, use of images)
- Food and Nutrition Standards (including information on feeding practices, the menu, policies around nutrition, breastfeeding)
- Health and safety (Guidelines for Communicable Disease Prevention and Control for Child Care Settings, Child Abuse Protocol and Duty to Report, exclusion criteria for illness, mandated closures, sun safety, outing/field trip guidelines, transportation, procedures on serious incidents, notable incidents, etc.)
- Emergency closing procedures (including advance notification and closures when children are present)
- orientation process for new families
- children's needs (items required for daily attendance, resting, seasonal clothing, provision of diapers, wipes, etc.)
- outdoor play information

REFLECTIONS IN PRACTICE

Is my parent handbook

- reflective of our organization's collective values and beliefs?
- written in inclusive language that reflects diversity and representation of all families?
- reflective of our beliefs about children's learning?
- available in a variety of methods (paper, electronic, multiple languages, etc.)?
- clear and detailed so parents and families know expectations?

Parent Committee

Building relationships is at the centre of everything we do. Parents and families are the experts in their child and provide valuable information to early learning and child care programs. The parent committee provides parents and families with the opportunity to contribute to the child care program and receive important information regarding their children's child care experience.

Encouraging parents and families to participate and become involved in their child's program can positively impact the relationship between staff/providers. Over time, through ongoing connections, partnerships are built. Partnerships with families develop through a shared understanding of each other's expectations and attitudes.

The Parent Committee established by early learning and child care programs provide an opportunity for programs to involve parents and families. It can be a starting point to begin building meaningful partnerships, and it can enhance the relationships currently established. Programs can involve the Parent Committee in a variety of ways. Some examples are:

- Provide updates to other families on information discussed at Parent Committee meetings
- Contributing to newsletters, notices, and planning parent/family gatherings
- Supporting programs in the continuous quality improvement process through Quality Matters
- Provide valuable input to help educators build diverse and equitable programs
- Share insights and perspectives, including information about child development, community and culture
- Engage in shared decision-making
- Provide perspective in discussions around connecting with families



REFLECTIONS IN PRACTICE

- What was the most successful parent committee meeting we have had? What made it successful?
- Are families and parents provided with the opportunity to join or contribute at the time of their child's enrolment?
- Are there other methods we could try using technology to hold our parent committee meetings?
- Are all families aware of the parent committee?
- Do the members of the parent committee understand their role and its purpose?

Partnerships with families are based on understanding each other's expectations and attitudes. They build on the strength and trust of each other's knowledge.

*—Capable Confident, and Curious:
Nova Scotia's Early Learning Curriculum Framework, p.29*

Infant and Toddler Daily Records

While we know that effective communication between parents and child care staff or care providers is crucial for all children, it is particularly crucial for parents of infants and toddlers who have limited verbal communication. Enrolling an infant or toddler into a child care program is quite possibly the first time that parents have been separated from their child for an extended period of time. Child care staff and providers have an opportunity to support young children entering into care for the first time by building secure relationships that will help children develop confidence and feel respected and valued. Very young children's first attachments occur within their families and other trusting relationships and form the foundation for emotional development and provide them with a secure base for exploration and learning.

Communicating with new parents takes special care and understanding that is supportive and culturally responsive. For some families, their child's cultural knowledge may be different from that of the adults and children they are going to be engaging with. Communicating with families about how their child's needs will be supported in the context of their cultural knowledge is an important component of cultural responsiveness.



Staff and care providers should strive to verbally communicate information to parents at the time of drop off and pick up as this is an opportunity to build trusting relationships. Daily records are intended to further enhance communication between parents and staff/care providers.

A primary caregiver system, where one educator is responsible for the majority of the personal care and routines of a particular infant/toddler, can be used to further build relationships with children, parents, and families.



REFLECTIONS IN PRACTICE

- What methods have been successful in communicating with parents of infants and toddlers?
- How does our program share the experiences children have daily with parents, outside of the daily records?
- Do we actively seek feedback from parents in our infant and toddler programs?
- How do we make parents and families aware of children's learning and development?
- What are some successful methods of communicating children's learning and development to parents? Are there new ways we can do this?
- How do our staff and care providers utilize cultural responsiveness to communicate with parents whose cultural knowledge may be different from their own?
- Do staff and care providers feel supported in their practice and abilities to develop strong communications and relationships with families?

Promoting Engagement with Families

Family engagement encompasses more than family involvement and daily communication; it goes beyond newsletters and information nights. Family engagement means that families are invited to give their opinions about the program's policies, participate and engage with other families in learning about how young children learn, and provide feedback about their child's experiences at the program. When child care staff and care providers engage with families, it creates a partnership where they are invited to be a part of children's learning communities. Meaningful family engagement can take place in multiple formats, through a range of activities that align with the skills and interest of families. For example, collectively building an outdoor play area could also involve additional consultation to better understand opinions and ideas that families might have related to the policies and practices within the program.

Early learning and child care programs must work together with families to develop a shared understanding of their child. Working in partnership with families will allow programs to understand and value different perspectives where families and children are included. This will promote a trusting relationship that will enhance well-being and a sense of belonging.



When child care staff and care providers engage with families, they will develop a deeper understanding of children's relationships and family dynamics. The relationships developed through daily interactions can be both rewarding and helpful in allowing programs to build family friendly, collaborative policies and communication practices. Developing a family communications plan will support child care staff and care providers as they continue to develop authentic and respectful relationships with parents and families.

REFLECTIONS IN PRACTICE

- Are our policies inclusive and supportive of all families?
- How can I involve families in making collaborative decisions about their child's early learning and care?
- Does the whole team understand the value of building partnerships with families?
- How does our program promote and share information with families?
- Is our environment reflective of all families and children who are part of our program?

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