



that special something

A message from the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC)

One of the qualities a parent looks for in a child care service is the way carers interact with children. It's that special 'something' which can be difficult to explain but completely noticeable when it occurs.

Maybe it's the way a carer comforts a child who is upset after separating from their parent or how they resolve a conflict between two children who want the same toy.

Maybe it's the way they patiently answer every 'but why?', and satisfy the child curious about the world.

Whatever that special quality is, families recognise it. When they see carers being genuinely interested in children and having respect for them, they feel confident in the decision they've made to use child care. And when these qualities are supported by safe and clean environments, it's often referred to as that 'light bulb' moment – when parents know that this carer will value, protect and encourage their child to grow into self-assured and capable individuals.

This confidence in their child's carer is also reflected in the parent-carer partnership. Effective partnerships are built on mutual trust, respect and rely on open and honest communication. When carers take the lead in building this partnership by modelling their quality child care practices, they empower families to become active participants in the care of their children. This also benefits children because when they observe respectful, fair and empathetic partnerships they begin to learn to display these qualities themselves towards their peers.

Why are partnerships with families important?

Positive family partnerships foster a sense of belonging and trust. It is heart-

It's the mornings when everything seems hurried. I'm making breakfast, dressing our two year old daughter, Grace, all the while getting ready for work which can lead to me feeling stressed by the time we arrive at family day care. When Lena opens the door, Grace immediately smiles and reaches out for her. Lena gives her a cuddle and suddenly everything is calm. Grace is happy, I'm relaxed and it's all because Lena knows our child, in fact she knows our family so well that she has become a part of our extended family.

Lisa, parent

breaking for a parent to walk away from their child who is upset, wondering, 'Did I make the right decision by placing my child in care?' Knowing that the scheme has a philosophy of building and maintaining supportive partnerships with families is one of the steps in helping a child and their family settle into the family day care home. It also means that a parent can feel safe having discussions with a carer about their child without being judged or feeling guilty about using child care.

While there may be an assumption that developing these partnerships should be easy, the reality is that no two partnerships are identical because no two families, just as no two carers, are alike. Each person has their own history which is diverse, intricate, and at times challenging. This is why carers need to understand the range of factors such as religion, culture, language and lifestyles, which can influence and guide how a family cares for their child, and ultimately, affects the way you work together to improve outcomes for children.

It is also important for schemes to know that partnerships with families should not be pigeon-holed into traditional models of parent participation such as weekend working bees or fundraising

committees. Effective partnerships between carers, staff and families are complex and unique, and not always a specific event. They should be considered a two way process of daily communication which builds mutual trust, encourages shared decision making, and which focuses on people's strengths through collaboration and inclusion. It's the simple acknowledgement of the family every time you see them – a smile and hello – and a genuine interest in what's happening in their lives, what the child's interests are and including parents in the decision making process; especially when it comes to learning about children's routines, programming experiences or developing behaviour guidance strategies.

When guided by these principles, carers and families can maintain partnerships which become some of the most rewarding experiences in family day care. A child will grow older and possibly forget who their carer was, but their parent will always remember how wonderful it was to see their child's smiling face when they collected them from care or hear their stories about what they did that day. Those memories are the result of the efforts of each person who has helped to build the healthy partnership.

Great news from the Quality Trends Report

In the most recent FDCQA Quality Trends Report, the Principles for which schemes most often achieved a Good to High Quality standard which relate to Quality Area 1: Interactions are:

- Principle 1.1 – Carers and coordination unit staff interact with all children in a warm, friendly and respectful way (97%)
- Principle 1.2 – Communication between coordination unit staff and families is effective and supports the child's placement in care (98%)



- Principle 1.3 – Communication between carers and families is effective and supports the family and child to settle into care (100%)
- Principle 1.4 – Carers' personal and family arrangements provide a positive home environment that supports the provision of family day care (96%)
- Principle 1.5 – Relationships within the scheme value diversity, teamwork, mutual respect, understanding and professionalism (99%)

These results are pleasing and family day carers and coordination unit staff should be proud of their efforts. These results also show that positive interactions between carers, staff, and children and their families are integral to the settling process and developing effective partnerships.

How can carers and staff continue the good work done so far?


Schemes can maintain the momentum

of their quality practices by fostering an ongoing cycle of reflection and evaluation, and promoting continuous improvement.

The following strategies may assist carers and staff to build and maintain positive partnerships with families:

- Listen to families and acknowledge their opinions and ideas. Remember, they are experts about their own children especially during the settling process.
- Discover new ways to communicate with families by gathering information about how they like to be involved. For example, consider how to use the information gained from parents through face-to-face conversations rather than relying on questionnaires or surveys.
- Draw upon the experience and skills of your colleagues. Identify the strengths and expertise of each carer and staff member, and provide

opportunities for them to model their skills and share knowledge with you.

- Network with other schemes. They may have developed strategies which are unique to their stakeholders but which can be transferred to your scheme's circumstances. This may include those schemes which have developed resources for non-English speaking families which may help in the sharing of information about children's lives at home.
- Browse the NCAC website (www.ncac.gov.au). There are links to NCAC's resources such as the *Putting Children First* magazine, *Service Factsheets* and *Family Factsheets*.
- Contact your state/territory Professional Support Coordinator for information about professional development opportunities in your area. 

Sources and further reading • Adams, J., & Owens, A. (2008). Supporting partnerships with families through parent committees. *Putting Children First*, 25, 12-14. • Boyle, L. (2008). Ask a child care adviser: Managing challenging issues with families. *Putting Children First*, 27, 3-5. • Hood, M. (2006). Family partnerships: Back to basics. *Every Child*, 12(1), 6-7. • Radlich, J. (2007). Everyday learning in families. *Everyday Learning Series*, 5(4). Watson, ACT: Early Childhood Australia. • Stonehouse, A. (1994). How does it feel? Child care from a parent's perspective. ACT: The Australian Early Childhood Association. • Stonehouse, A., & Gonzalez-Mena, J. (2006). Making links parent partner: A guide for parents about what matters in early childhood services. NSW: Pademelon Press. • Stonehouse, A. (2009). Helping families work through the challenges they may experiences using child care. *Putting Children First*, 29, 19-21. • Stonehouse, A. (2009). Supporting partnerships through family participation. *Putting Children First*, 31, 12-13.