

Thoughtful and strategic communication with parents and caregivers is critical to providing information and resources to help them as they make the best choices to support the children in their care. Based on research, the practical tips and guidelines below will help you reach and connect with the parents and caregivers in your community.

These guidelines are intended to be used by early childhood professionals who are creating communication efforts such as messaging campaigns or public awareness directed toward parents and caregivers.

Engaging with Parents & Caregivers Checklist

1 DEFINE GOALS & PURPOSE

- Determine the specific action and outcome you want to achieve. 🎯

2 DETERMINE HOW TO MEASURE SUCCESS

- Plan for evaluation in messaging strategies from the beginning. 🎯💬
- Develop a two-way feedback loop allowing parents and caregivers to continue to give feedback and shape ongoing messages. 💬

3 DETERMINE THE TARGET AUDIENCE

- Identify the specific audience at the start and tailor messages to them. 🎯

4 FORMULATE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

- Use resources already created, and build onto pre-existing campaigns, such as awareness months. 🎯👤
- Connect parents and caregivers to activities that are happening locally. 👤💬
- Be sensitive to disparities in digital skills and connectivity. 🎯
- Use trusted messengers such as child care providers and teachers, school staff, pediatricians, and libraries to deliver messages. 🎯
- Take advantage of teachable moments as opportunities to communicate information. 🎯💬
- Create opportunities for parents and caregivers to share information with each other. 💬
- Create content designed or accessible for mobile use (such as phones and tablets). 💬
- Create regular two-way calls, texts and emails. 💬
- Use social media to amplify your message. 💬

5 DEVELOP MESSAGES

- Use research-based, evaluated, quality messages before creating new content. 🧑🏽🧠
- Build on existing metaphors and slogans rather than creating new structures. 🧑🏽🧠
- Include benefits to parents and caregivers upfront; involve them in understanding why this information is beneficial to children. 🧠
- Use the general public reading level of 5th grade to create appropriate language for messages. 🧠
- Avoid using jargon and acronyms. If using acronyms, spell out the acronym the first time it's used in a communication. 🧠
- Include actionable steps for parents and caregivers. 🧠
- Develop proactive and strength-based messaging that empowers parents and caregivers – provide guidance on what to do, not what *not* to do. 🧠💬
- Develop messages for caregivers that are representative of various family structures like fathers, kinship caregivers, foster parents, and others that provide care for children. 🧠
- Include messages that are culturally appropriate and inclusive. 🧠
- Provide materials in multiple languages that are appropriate for the community. 🧠
- Include pictures that are representative of diverse family structures. 🧠
- Consistently include parents and caregivers in testing or developing messages before creating materials to ensure cultural relevancy and accessibility. 💬🧠

6 IMPLEMENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGY & ANALYZE RESULTS

- Evaluate messaging strategies identified in the beginning; continuously improve on feedback. 🧠💬
- Use two-way feedback loops allowing parents and caregivers to continue to shape ongoing messages. 💬

This checklist is composed of tips and guidelines based on three recommended strategies from the [Early Childhood Communication Efforts in Colorado](#) report, and endorsed by the Early Childhood Leadership Commission:



Reduce communication “noise” resulting from inconsistencies or duplicate efforts that are unevenly targeted to families and caregivers in regions with different communication needs.



Increase the quality of communication, including the use of effective content, enhanced communication training for trusted messengers that connect with parents and caregivers, and a heightened focus on effective tactics.



Provide greater emphasis on the two-way, responsive engagement of parents and caregivers that will generate more positive outcomes for children’s cognitive and social development.

For examples, toolkits and research on these Communication Guidelines, please visit EarlyChildhoodFramework.org