



Strategies for Building Relationships with Providers



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You can use the following three strategies when interacting with providers:

- **Use a Strengths-based Approach**
- **Listen Actively**
- **Take Informed Action**

You can access more information on all three strategies in the Family Engagement Toolkit at qualitycountsca.net/FEtoolkit.

When you use a shared approach, you use the same strategies to build relationships with families that you use with other providers.* How you build relationships with your colleagues and with other providers influences how you and other providers build relationships with families. Using a shared approach to practice these strategies gives you an opportunity to build and strengthen your relationships with other providers and professionals as well as with families.

*The term “providers” used here refers to all early learning and care professionals. This includes, but is not limited to, supervisors, coaches, co-workers, higher education faculty, teachers, home visitors, and family child care providers.



Use a Strengths-based Approach

The **Use a Strengths-based Approach** strategy helps you focus on a provider's strengths. It also helps you consider the perspective of the provider as well as your own, which can be especially useful for addressing challenges or differing views between you and the provider. You can use the tools associated with this strategy to work through challenges, partner to resolve them, and come to a common understanding together. This strategy can help you strengthen existing relationships and build new ones. You can use the following tools to help you take a strengths-based approach: **Reflect and Inquire** and **Apply the Strengths-based Attitudes**.

Reflect and Inquire

Reflect

Reflect on your personal and cultural perspectives. Stop and think about the ideas, assumptions, judgments, and expectations that you bring to an interaction with a provider and how they influence your personal and professional interactions.

Reflect on the provider's individual and cultural perspectives. Think about what you know about the provider and what the provider has shared about their personal and professional values, beliefs, and approaches to their work.

You can use these reflections to guide what you choose to do or say when interacting with other providers. After you take some time to reflect, the next step is to then inquire. Inquiring is simply asking yourself a few more questions or digging deeper. You can think about how what you learned may influence your relationship with a provider.

Inquire

- What came up for you, both positive and negative?
- How might these feelings or reactions influence your relationship with the provider? Apply the Strengths-based Attitudes

Apply the Strengths-based Attitudes

Apply

The **Apply a Strengths-based Attitude** tool helps you focus on a provider's strengths. You can use the following **Strengths-based Attitudes** to remind you to begin relationships with providers by thinking about their strengths. Choose a **Strengths-based Attitude** and determine how you will use it to focus on the provider's strengths:

All providers have strengths. Be aware of uncomfortable feelings or judgments you might have about the other provider. Hold the idea that the other provider has strengths and notice their strengths.

Providers deserve the same support and respect we are asking them to give families. Recognize and honor what providers share with you about their personal and cultural perspectives and what matters most to them. Reflect on how these perspectives might influence your relationships with other providers.

Providers have expertise about their own fields of practice. Listen to understand and recognize the provider's knowledge about their work and experiences.

Providers' contributions are valuable and important. Be open to providers' suggestions and requests. Adopting an open mind will help you learn from providers about what is happening.



Listen Actively

The **Listen Actively** strategy allows you to understand what is said and to engage in meaningful conversations. When you listen to understand, you can discover what matters most to providers. You can use this strategy to help you shift from immediately reacting to understanding and then responding. Three tools help you listen actively: **Being Present**, **Paraphrasing**, and **Engaging Questions and Statements**.

Being Present

By being fully present, you use nonverbal and verbal techniques to help you understand what a provider or a family is saying. This approach helps you show interest, sincerity, and respect. The following table outlines different types of communication that you can use to be present.

Communication	Includes
Limit distractions	Cell phones turned off Private spot for communicating Focusing your attention
Use nonverbal methods	Facial expressions Posture/body language Gestures
Use verbal methods	Tone of voice Pace of talking Amount of talking versus listening Interrupting or not Word choices

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing helps you confirm and clarify what a provider says. It conveys that you are listening and that you want to understand what a provider has said. The following table outlines five communication techniques you can use when paraphrasing.

Technique	How
Restate	Repeat what you heard the provider say. For example, you can pause after you restate what you heard or ask if what you heard is correct. This technique gives the other person a chance to confirm or clarify.
Reframe	Propose another way of thinking about what the provider did or said. For example, you might think of a positive way to think about something a provider did or said instead of a negative way.
Summarize	Review and organize or sort the main points of what you hear into a sequence or into categories. Be sure to let the other person know you want to see if you got everything, and ask them to tell you if anything is missing.
Clarify	Make a comment that confirms what the provider has told you and that helps enhance and deepen your understanding.
Validate	Recognize and acknowledge what is important to providers, including their emotions.

Engaging Questions and Statements

Engaging Questions and Statements can help you have meaningful conversations with providers. Based on the outcome you are seeking, choose an open-ended question, a declarative statement, or a closed-ended question when actively listening and communicating. Here are some examples:

Question/Statement Type	Example
Open-ended <ul style="list-style-type: none">Used to engage in meaningful conversations with providersOpens up the dialog and allows for a variety of responses, instead of just “yes” or “no”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">“When you host family events, what types of activities do you enjoy doing with children and families?”“What do you find happens when you use the daily folder to communicate with families?”
Declarative <ul style="list-style-type: none">A way of learning what the other person thinks about something without directly asking a question	<ul style="list-style-type: none">“I noticed that you put a lot of time and detail into preparing for your visit with the family.”“Kyle’s grandmother told me how much she appreciated you calling her about our upcoming event.”
Closed-ended <ul style="list-style-type: none">Used when you want a short or quick answerLimited and requires specific answers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">“Do you communicate with your families by sending information home or by calling them on the phone?”“What time do you want me to come to your family meeting?”

Take Informed Action

Using the **Take Informed Action** strategy can help you decide what to do or how to respond when interacting with other providers. You can use what you learned about yourself and a provider to help you choose a **Relationship-based Practice**. Once you choose a **Relationship-based Practice** and use it to guide what you say or do, you can observe how things go and then choose another practice to support your next interaction. This process is ongoing.

Relationship-based Practices

- Focus on the family-provider relationship. Think about what you can do or how you can respond to show the provider you value their relationships with the families they work with.
- Notice and describe the provider’s behavior. Describe what the provider does without interpreting what it means. Then ask the provider what it means. When discussing a child with another provider, remember to use this practice: Observe and describe the child’s behavior to open communication with the provider about the child.
- Support the provider’s competence. Recognize and comment on the provider’s successes, growth, and efforts.
- Value the provider’s passion (working with both their positive and negative feelings). Notice and respond in a way that values the provider’s passion. Recognize that providers’ expression of strong emotions indicates how much they care.



To learn more about family engagement, check out the Family Engagement Online Toolkit: www.qualitycountsca.net/FEtoolkit

References for this resource can be found in the [Module 5 Reference List](#).

Adapted from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement. (2018). *Strategies for Family Engagement: Attitudes and Practices*.