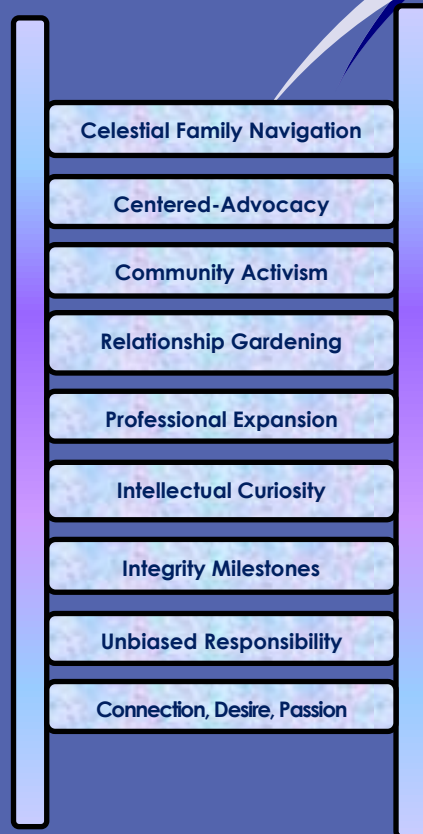
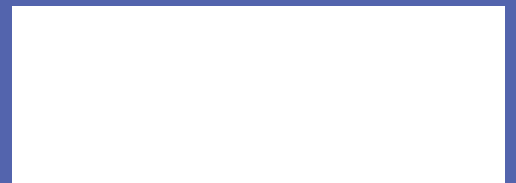


The Ladder of Family and Community Engagement



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The Ladder of Family & Community Engagement

- Connection, Desire, Passion
- Unbiased Responsibility
- Integrity Milestones
- Intellectual Curiosity
- Professional Expansion
- Relationship Gardening
- Community Activism
- Centered-Advocacy
- Celestial Family Navigation

Introduction

The intent behind creating The Ladder of Family & Community Engagement is to provide a tool to assist staff with providing effective services. In conversing with different early learning programs, it revealed one of their concerns are community resources have become inadvertently obsolete. Most early learning programs do not have a sustainable resource binder for their families. The binder used is either outdated or a personal connection between the program and the resources is not present. Community is broader than neighborhoods in which families live. Sometimes, you have to connect outside of your community to broaden your reach for viable resources. In order to help the families we serve in early childhood, we must be able to connect them with the services they need and prefer.

We need to ensure linguistically and culturally appropriate services embody our program's practices. This ladder model starts with a staff's ability to understand the concept and outcome of family and community engagement, their professional expansion, and their process to administer proper family and community engagement techniques. Family and community engagement (FCE) affects a family's livelihood. When we look at this subject, we need to see it as an area of extreme prominence. The outcome for administering quality services should surpass the child's kindergarten years.

Finding Solutions

It was our experience that staff in an early learning program staff should have ongoing enriched training to ensure the program's FCE foundation is concrete. First, start with their own personal growth. It may not matter how much professional training a program provides for staff if they do not have a genuine passion or desire to help the families they serve.

There are nine steps to the ladder. The first five steps deal directly with staff's assessment of their skills, ethics, and interpretations of family and community engagement. The last four steps deal with community and structure around administering direct services to parents. The focus of the ladder is a holistic approach to promoting astronomical family success. We created the Ladder of Family and Community Engagement as a tool that can be used to ascertain program practices that will support families through:

- Developing and implementing a program of family involvement
- Creating a directory of community resources
- Conducting a family-friendly audit of programs practices

1. Connection, Desire, Passion

Before creating a plan to cultivate meaningful resources for the families you serve, you must be able to understand and/or identify with their lives to some degree. We are not stating that you had to come from poverty-ridden neighborhoods. We are simply stating you must have an identifying link to the individuals you serve.

2. Unbiased Responsibility

As an early childhood professional, we inadvertently swear to the duty of providing fair treatment to all. It is our responsibility to ensure decisions we make for families are solely based on their needs and not our opinions or preferences. In order to ensure this occurs, we need to take a reflection test. With this data, we can learn how to remove personal filters that block our peripheral vision.

3. Integrity Milestones

Having an established code of ethics intermittently coinciding with case managing and early childhood services. An individual has to have compassion, morals, and values in order to successfully help the children and families they serve. This is not a stress-free field to work in so it is very important that the professionals encompass empathy, patience, and a commitment to perform their duties at the highest level possible.



4. Intellectual Curiosity

Taking the initiative for self-improvement coincides with intellectual curiosity. Initiative starts in your mind. It is a skill that can be learned and a muscle to be developed. There are a number of secondary components that contribute to taking the initiative such as intention, visualization, focus, commitment, and aspiration.

5. Professional Expansion

We like to think of professional development as professional expansion. To use the word development means to create something that has not been established. As a person, you already exist, thus you are expanding your capacity for learning. When assessing your expansion needs, include finding trainings that may encompass: Adult Learning Styles, Cultural Competency and Responsiveness, Family Dynamics 2015, Communication Strategies, Minimizing Power Differentials.

6. Relationship Gardening

Cultivating relationships is much like gardening. You have to find firm soil. Once you find it, you plant a seed. You ensure the seed is growing by providing sunlight, water, and food. This is how we network. You can not walk up to an individual and automatically acquire them as part of your team. You must prove to them your worthiness for their time, funding, or resources. When looking into developing a plan around enhancing your relationship gardening skills, keep these things in mind:

- Giving and receiving constructive criticism
- Sustaining relationships (retention and return)
- Refining your process for cultivation

7. Community Activism

Being a part of the community means more than attending the fair and providing games for the children to play. You must become a part of a local board or committee that makes direct decisions about your neighborhood activities. Do not look for rewards unseen. Your commitment means more than accolades and your families benefit most of all.

8. Centered-Advocacy

Families must be trained as leaders. It starts first with teaching them self-advocacy skills. Parents are their child's first teacher and it is imperative for them to work on behalf of their family's well-being. In return, they will teach their child how to be an advocate. Children learn by seeing and then doing. At all times, we must demonstrate the behavior we would like our children to mirror.

9. Celestial Family Navigation

A "life plan" is the steps aligned to assist the family for reaching their intended goals. Every goal established affects parts of a families' life and should be approached with care in mind. Any actions performed during this time will affect the family either positively or negatively.



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