

How to Communicate Cross-Culturally with Parents...



During times of stress, such as that which accompanies grief and loss, be aware of the way your culture (and that of parents), affects your ability to communicate effectively and with sensitivity. The expression of grief and loss will look very different within every family. Culturally diverse rituals and traditions may create mixed signals and inappropriate assumptions.

- As with all communication, building a relationship sets the stage for improved collaboration on behalf of the child shared by a family and their child care provider.
- Become aware of differences between your worldviews (cultural influences) and those of the parents. Be open to different perspectives and assess your position on childrearing, parenting styles, family structures, etc. as you enter dialogue with parents.
- Be willing to release the “expert” hat. Embrace and practice the collaborative approach when including parents in conversations about their child/children. Embrace family centered approaches (valuing the diversity).
- Support parents as they learn your concerns by providing complete explanations. Be sure to assess appropriate reading levels and use terms and phrases that parents can understand and process.
- Actively consider/seek the family values. Ask families to share their cultural influences, rituals, and traditions (honoring diversity). Share attitudes about your own beliefs and learn about a particular family’s beliefs from a reliable source, preferably this family.
- Familiarize yourself with diverse family structures and roles. Know the family members and their responsibilities and level of influence within the family unit. Ask directly for advice about how to interact in a courteous manner.
- Listen and comprehend the feedback and messages parents are giving you. Be prepared to digest and address the real meaning of parents’ verbal cues.
- Be prepared to use translators if needed (reduces unnecessary barriers).
- When possible, send messages and information about the child in the parent’s native language.
- Research, understand, and respect various individual family issues. This may include:
 - Space – which cultures value closeness during verbal exchange and which cultures value distance (sharing of space)
 - Touch – determine which cultures place emphasis on physical gestures and personal contact (hugs, pats on the back, etc.) and which cultures prefer a stoic stance (handshake only)
 - Eye contact – understand why some cultures value direct eye contact during conversations and other cultures look away while conversing
 - Social interactions – determine which cultures prefer small talk, lengthy greetings, formal interactions, direct conversations, etc.
- Practice flexibility, accessibility, and responsiveness (child/family driven)

Adapted from R. Allen, 2005 Understanding Diverse Families

Promoting Healthy Social Behaviors in Child Care Centers