



# Building Family Engagement and Leadership: *Strategies, Ideas, and Resources for Community Health Centers*

## Overview

During a learning network session, community health center presenters and attendees discussed best practices on engaging families and aligning processes to ensure they meet families' needs. Integrating family feedback and leadership into standard processes within the practice helps the care team identify challenges families may face. Addressing these challenges builds a trusting relationship with families and leads to improved early childhood development (ECD) outcomes, including increased well-child visit attendance, screening rates, and access to follow-up services.

## Practical Strategies

- **Prioritize trust-building efforts with families to improve ECD outcomes and promote transparent communication.** Establishing a relationship grounded in trust has been shown to improve family and caregiver engagement and improve outcomes for a health center's youngest patients. This empowers caregivers to have transparent conversations regarding their child's well-being and personal challenges, uncovering needs for additional ECD services and care coordination.
  - **Garner family feedback and ideas for solutions to address needs and reduce challenges.** Continuous family feedback loops can inform health centers' current workflows by identifying challenges and potential blind spots. By addressing challenges and co-developing solutions with families, health centers can further improve patient outcomes and provide aligned additional services.
  - **Establish community partnerships and prioritize a coordinated approach to establish trust-based relationships and increase access to patient and family services.** Health centers can partner with community agencies (e.g., food pantries, ambulance services, early intervention) that provide specialized services to address family needs and challenges. This effort can lessen the burden on care teams while prioritizing the specific needs of families. When making referrals, fostering trust between families and referral partners is essential, and trust-building strategies, like warm hand-offs, will reassure families and promote improved health outcomes.
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## Actionable Ideas

- **Attend community meetings to engage families and build community partnerships.** Participating in local events allows health centers to connect with new families, highlight available ECD services, and identify partners to help address care access challenges, such as lack of transportation and language barriers.
- **Assign a single team member as a family's primary point of contact.** Consistent contact fosters trust, strengthens relationships, and simplifies care coordination by streamlining communication with families.
- **Integrate family leaders as essential team members of the health center to support family-centered care.** Co-developing roles and involving family leaders in care team activities ensures services are informed by individuals' experiences and supports continuous quality improvement of ECD processes and care.

## Resources

- Family Voices' Model for Meaningful Family Engagement
- Nurture Connections' Guide for Transforming Care of Young Children in Community Health Centers

If you have questions, please email us at [ECDHSCenter@zerotothree.org](mailto:ECDHSCenter@zerotothree.org).



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*The Early Childhood Developmental Health Systems (ECDHS): Evidence to Impact Center was made possible through the support of the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$5,300,000 with 0% financed from non-governmental sources. The contents are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by, HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit [HRSA.gov](http://HRSA.gov).*