

Fostering cohesive co-caring relationships between caregivers and families of Infant-toddler aged children

Author

Abigail M. Feener

Advisor

Megan Schumaker Murphy, EDD

Introduction

In the field of early education, in order to be a successful early childhood educator, there are many qualities one must possess. These attributes consist of patience, kindness, flexibility, empathy, and many others. Working with children is only a fraction of what the job responsibilities of being an infant and toddler educator entail. One of the aspects of working in early education that one may not consider prior to working in the field is the insistent need to be able to have cohesive relationships with the families of the children in your classroom. Developing and Maintaining in-depth relationships with the families is an integral aspect of early education, and the extent to which relationships must be fostered is an important and overlooked aspect of working in early education. To work alongside families, you must have an understanding of the family, whether that is in relation to the dynamics of that family or the identities of that family and what that means in relation to your teaching as well as the interactions educators have with them.

As an educator who is providing care to the child, the family's wishes need to be respected. If there are certain aspects of their own schedule that the family deems to be best practices for that child, early educators must follow the guidelines that are put in place by the child. There are many factors that need to be discussed in order for educators to effectively provide co-caring relationships. These consist of understanding what a family is, understanding the different ways families function and the cultural differences between that, and the best methods in order to communicate with families.



Co-caring

The definition of co-caring relates to "how parents and teachers work together in their caregiving roles to coordinate childrearing." (Maras, 2018, p. 2). The concept of co-caring relationships is slowly becoming more prevalent in the field of early education educational research, discusses the relationships between children infant and toddler aged and the relationships they have with others, as well as the relationships between all of the individuals in their care team. The concept of co-caring, is something that is new in the field and stems along the ideas of co-parenting, which relates to working together in order to help relate to the well being of the child. The significance of this strong partnership between families and educators directly correlates to the quality care and education, and for supporting young children's development. (Lang, 2014)

Family

A major aspect in creating a positive relationship with a family, is having a clear understanding on what a family is and what a family may look like for the children in your care. Not all children have what is seen as the stereotypical family, spearheaded by the heterosexual couple with 2.5 children. There are differences based on how people identify themselves and the dynamics of the caretaking team of any given child. In building co-caring relationships with families, it is important to build an inclusive definition of families. If we limit our definition of family, we may exclude some important people who are present within the life of any given child in terms of child rearing responsibilities.

Many organizations and scholars, such as the United States Census Bureau, Turnbull et. al (2015), Shumaker- Murphy (2017), and others have a say on what family means. Based on their work, I defined family as a family consists of two or more people who collaborate and fulfill family functions and provide a mutual understanding and respect for those who consist within the family.

Family Functions

Turnbull et. al (2015) also outlines the concept of family functions. These functions relate to different domains that a family navigates through together. These domains consist of affection, spirituality, economics, daily care, socialization, recreation, and education. These domains all have a specific impact to a given family. These functions all are fulfilled differently depending on the context of the family itself. (Turnbull, 2015). There needs to be an understanding that not all families fulfill the functions within the same manner. Some family units have varying ways of the way the functions are completed. In some families, different adults within that family may cook, clean, or be the primary earner for a family, and these dynamics shift between each family and even throughout time within the same familial unit. All families are not carbon copies of each other. This concept is important to note in being culturally responsive.

Cultural Responsiveness

Part of the educators pedagogical methods that would aid in the factors that benefit in early education would consist of the educator being culturally responsive. We have discussed the importance of understanding cultural responsiveness in regards to family functions, but the educator seems engaged in conversation with the families of the students in your class, than there are opportunity for relationships to flourish. Educators do not always reflect the cultures of the families. Educators need to have an understanding of that they may not have the same values or beliefs that families have based on their cultures, and that individuals of the same culture are all not the same. Their culture is a piece of their identity, and everyone represents that differently. There are tips that are present in order to be responsive such as asking families questions about their cultures, having educators being aware of their own biases and how they may impact students. (DeFur, 2012) There are also other situations, such as homelessness, the age of the parents, their educational background, and disabilities in the family unit. (Turnbull et. al, 2015). Another barrier between educators and families may be language. Not everyone you encounter may speak the same language. There are many aspects of this that would impact the co-caring relationship, but the most critical aspect of accepting families of multilingual children is to show that the educators respect and value the language. This would look like supporting the use of both languages at home, providing adequate training to the staff members of the school community as well as guidance to answer questions. (Breiseth, Robertson, Lafond, 2015).

Communication Methods

In today's climate, there are numerous digital methods for communicating with families. As educators, there are certain ways to use these applications to effectively engage families. Educators need to make sure that the technology that is being presented is something that is accessible to the parent within the home. Families should feel comfortable as well by using the given applications that are presented to them, and the educators and center facilities should help in any way possible to eliminate confusion in using these apps. Educators have the responsibility to document and share what is going on in the lives of the child while at school, whether that be activities throughout the day, diaper changes, feeding times, and amounts fed to the child. The technology should be used in a meaningful way to fulfill the function that it is supposed to, which is communication, and if it is not accessible for the family to use then other methods should be used in order to convey these messages to families. (Blagojevic, 2016)

Conclusion

In order to have effective co-caring relationships, Both educators and families have a responsibility in fostering effective co-caring relationships. These relationships ultimately support the wellbeing of the child. In working alongside each other, the care needs and development of an infant and toddler aged child would be benefited. Both families and educators need to be open to this concept of co-caring with each other to be able to work effectively with one another. Both families and caregivers care about the child at hand, and all of the efforts that are made are done within the best interest of the child. Families and early childhood educators need to be able to work together in a cohesive method. Educators must understand what a family is, what functions are present within a family and that different families may fulfill the functions in a various manner, how to be respectful and inclusive of all of the different cultures within a classroom community, and communicate with the families in methods that work best for that family. Families must remember that educators are working to help support them in whatever needs they may have and they try to understand the family dynamic that occurs within a given household, and that educators are working alongside them, not against them, in order to care for their young child.



include a short caption to describe an image.

Citation

Blagojevic, A. (2016, September). 10x: Using technology to engage families. NAEYC. Retrieved February 10, 2022, from <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/tyc/aug2016/10x-using-technology-engage-families>

Breiseth, K. M. Robertson, K., & Lafond, K. (2015). Connecting with ELL families: Strategies for success. Retrieved from <https://www.coloradolorado.org/article/connecting-ell-families-strategies-success#comment-form>

DeFur, S. (2012). Parents as Collaborators: Building Partnerships with School and Community-Based Providers. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 44(3), 58-67

Maras, E. Q., Lang, S. N., & Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J. (2018). An observational assessment of parent-teacher co-caring relationships in infant-toddler classrooms. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 26(2), 212-228.

Turnbull, A., Turnbull, R., Erwin, E., Soodak, L., & Shogren, K. (2015). Families, professionals, and exceptionalities: Positive outcomes through partnerships and trust (7th ed). Pearson

United State Census Bureau. (2021, October 8). Subject definitions. Census.gov. Retrieved April 23, 2022, from <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/technical-documentation/subject-definitions.html#family>

Photos;
10 ways to survive daycare drop-off. Mom365. (n.d.). Retrieved April 29, 2022, from <https://www.mom365.com/mom/money-and-work/how-to-survive-daycare-drop-off>

Sunil Bhopal Academic Clinical Lecturer in Paediatrics, & Pasco Fearon Chair in Developmental Psychopathology. (2021, October 14). Pandemic babies: How covid-19 has affected child development. *The Conversation*. Retrieved April 29, 2022, from <https://theconversation.com/pandemic-babies-how-covid-19-has-affected-child-development-155903>