

# LEAPS

learning eating active play sleep

## Communicating with Families



Often the hardest part about promoting healthy eating and physical activity to families is

overcoming the many barriers to enable confident and effective communication between educators and parents.

### Step 1 – Identify the strengths that support effective communication:

There are many different strengths to effectively communicating with families. Identifying these is the first step to successful communication. Some common strengths may include:

- Support from other staff and management
- Self-confidence for educators
- Having time available
- Communicating messages at an appropriate literacy level
- Resolving and minimising conflict
- Negotiation skills
- Motivation

### Step 2 – Depending on the problem and the strengths you have identified this will help decide which strategy to use for communication

- Foundational (structural/operational) – Used for preventing problems
  - o These strategies create a shared understanding and respect between staff and families. They provide staff with structural/operational support when communicating with families to solve a problem.
    - For example staff can refer back to specific food and nutrition policies, or what was discussed at orientation.
  - o Examples of Structural Strategies:
    - Food and Nutrition policies
    - Training and staff orientation
    - Food and nutrition learning activities
    - Orientation for parents
  - o Examples of Operational Strategies:
    - Staff modelling – eating with children and enjoying healthy food
    - Food displays
    - Newsletter items on nutrition
    - Handouts
    - Family days
    - Communicating about foods eaten by their child and what is being taught re: food and nutrition
    - Informal discussions at drop off/pickup times

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- Dealing with common problems or queries
  - o Strategies to address problems or queries on a broader scale (amongst large groups of parents/staff/both). These strategies aim to reinforce the views and values of a setting to large groups or all parents.
  - o Examples of strategies to deal with common problems:
    - Distribute information in parent pockets
    - Articles in newsletters
    - Discussion at parent committees – get parents to suggest some solutions
    - Healthy food displays/celebrations
    - Reminders re food and nutrition policy
    - Promoting community nutrition services/events supporting healthy eating
    - Utilise 'Pester Power' through activities with children that promote healthy eating
    - Positive peer pressure
- Problem solving with individual parents/carers
  - o Strategies to intervene when there is a consistent problem/issue with an individual parent/carer. These strategies need to connect with an individual and demonstrate respect for that individual.
  - o Examples of strategies to deal with individual parents/carers:
    - Seek common ground
    - Find out why parents do what they do
    - Create shared solutions
    - Develop strategies that influence demand and supply at the same time
    - Think BIG picture - Would this strategy be useful for other parents?

### Step 3 – Ensure families know that you are available for them and that you value their opinions or concerns.

- Be a good listener
- Put yourself in their shoes
- Give them your full attention
- Let them know you are listening and interested
- Let them finish talking then summarise what they said, and check that you understood correctly
- Ask open-ended questions to gain additional information if you need it
- Be clear, specific and considerate when speaking
- Always talk to family members with the goal of strengthening your relationship
- Be considerate of the other person's feelings
- If you're not confident about saying something sensitive, arrange a time when you can talk together with less pressure and seek advice from other educators or executive staff or seek expert advice to help provide advice to the parent
- If you don't know an answer to a question, say so, and get back to them or refer them to an expert in the area

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- Keep your comments in the present; do not bring up issues from the past. If an issue keeps happening, then move on to finding a solution
- Be open and honest with families, and talk about problems when they come up
- Give families accurate information on what you observe
- Explain exactly what the issue is and why it might be a concern
- Offer a range of solutions; ask for the family's opinion. Brainstorm as many solutions as possible, then jointly evaluate the pros and cons of each solution

