

HOW TO TALK TO PARENTS WHEN A CHILD NEEDS EXTRA SUPPORT



Newcomer families are experiencing the difficult transition of starting life in a new country after leaving friends, family and their support network behind. As one of the first points of contact, your program's support is vital to all newcomer families, but this can be especially true when a child needs extra support.

Some children come to our programs with a diagnosed special need, while others come into our care with unidentified needs that require additional support. And, sometimes, after spending time observing and interacting with a child, we have concerns about their development that we need to discuss with parents.

It can be difficult to know how to approach parents when you have a concern.

TAKE THE TIME TO DEVELOP A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FAMILY.

Remember that no one knows the child better than the family. By making an effort to get to know the family, you'll learn about the child's individual needs and behaviours and will be able to create a more supportive environment for them.

Here are some tips for developing strong relationships with families:

- Show respect for the family's choices and opinions.
- Always make time for the family's questions and listen carefully to their responses.
- Share knowledge and obtain feedback, but don't make assumptions.
- Provide choices to empower the family.
- Recognize that the family needs to have the final word on their child's care.
- Encourage family members to participate in your program by helping with an activity or sharing a story, game or song.

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- Provide parents with information about resources available in the community, then offer to help and be sure to follow up.
- Ask parents about the child's favourite toys, foods and games. Use this information to create a welcoming environment that includes the child's interests.
- Make sure that you ask how you can help.
- Tell the parents how much you enjoy working with their child.
- Share examples of the child's daily activities with parents (perhaps by using pictures) as a way to connect with them.
- Tell the parents what their child excels at and what's going well.
- Encourage parents to visit your program at any time.

APPROACH THE TOPIC OF A CHILD'S DEVELOPMENT AND POTENTIAL NEED FOR EXTRA SUPPORT CAREFULLY AND RESPECTFULLY.

Newcomer families may or may not seem open to communication about their child's special need or need for extra support for a variety of reasons. For example, they may or may not be aware that a special need exists, or they may not feel comfortable discussing their concerns about their child's development. They may also consider their child's development to be a private family matter, or the need may not have been an issue in their home culture.

In order to ensure that children get the support they need, it's important to note and communicate any observations about a suspected special need or need for additional support as early as possible. However, the way you approach the parent could affect how they respond, and you'll want to approach the subject in a sensitive and respectful way.

- Before you speak with the parents, reflect on your own values, attitudes, perceptions and culture. How are they affecting your interaction with the family?
- Try to arrange a translator if you feel this will be helpful.
- Find a time to discuss your observations without the child present.
- Be positive, supportive and honest. Share examples of the child's strengths and improvements with the parents.
- Demonstrate respect for the family member and their culture and listen carefully to their responses.
- Keep in mind that what you identify as a problem may not be viewed this way by the family.
- Provide parents with concrete examples of your observations and be prepared with a list of community support services. Offer to give them referrals, if necessary.
- Reassure parents that information and issues related to their child's special need will be kept confidential.
- Help the family to develop an action plan. Consider their suggestions even if they differ from yours.
- Reassure the family that you're happy to work with them to achieve the best outcome for their child.

KEEP THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN.

It's important to develop a support and communication strategy for each child and family to meet their individual needs. Talk to the parents on a regular basis and, when possible, arrange to meet and sort out any issues or concerns. Also, be sure to ask the parents to share their observations about their child's progress.

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A daily communications book can be a useful tool to develop two-way, individualized communication with the child's family. It is a record of the child's day. It includes information about their activities, progress and moods as well as upcoming events, issues and observations.

Talk to the family about how they would like to set up their child's communication book. You can also involve the child by having them paste pictures into the book to show different activities they've done or experiences they've had in the program. However, when there are serious concerns regarding the child's care, emotional or physical well-being, always arrange a meeting to discuss them in person.

REACH OUT FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT.

The CMAS special needs consultant is always available to help. Contact your CMAS consultant if you have a question or would like to request individualized special needs support!

For more information, see [*Early Identification of Special Needs is Important!*](#) and [*How to Connect Families with Special Needs Support*](#)

Visit cmascanada.ca for more resources to support your work with newcomer families



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