

Caring for Your Community – Family Engagement

When the need for social distancing requires that early care and education centers close their doors, nurturing family connections and maintaining a sense of community is critically important. There are many options for promoting family engagement. And, much like families will vary in their needs and in their ability to or interest in engaging with your center, teachers and programs also have different resources for outreach. Below is a range of ideas for how to stay connected and to provide support to families from a distance – pick the ones that will work best for you and the families in your community.

COLLABORATE WITH FAMILIES ABOUT WHAT THEY WANT AND NEED. BE HELPFUL YET NOT OVERWHELMING – EACH FAMILY WILL BE DIFFERENT.

- Conduct a survey to find out what types of support families are most interested in.
- Make sure families know where to find information from/about your program and provide details about how information will be distributed (e.g., by email, on your program's website, Google classroom).

LET EACH FAMILY KNOW YOU ARE THINKING ABOUT THEM AND LOVE HEARING FROM THEM.

- Give families a call or send a personalized note.
- Invite each family to schedule check-ins (using whatever method works best for them).
- Encourage families to send pictures and stories about what they have been doing at home.
- With permission, post children's work so others can see what their friends are up to.
- Mail or drop off care packages with books, craft supplies, recipes for homemade craft materials, etc. Or just a card/note!

BE A RESOURCE FOR RESOURCES.

- Be selective in what you share. Too much information can be overwhelming.
- Individualize resources for each family.
- Some things that you may consider sharing with families:
 - Ways to get basic needs met.
 - Links to crisis and emergency services, including Rhode Island Coalition Against Domestic Violence (RICADV), Department of Children, Youth, & Families (DCYF), homeless hotlines and shelters, Kids' Link for children's mental/behavioral health needs.
 - Simple parenting tip sheets or ideas for activities.

CREATE A VIRTUAL CLASSROOM FOR CAREGIVERS AND/OR CHILDREN TO COME TOGETHER, CHECK IN, AND CONNECT WITH PROGRAM STAFF AND EACH OTHER. THIS CAN TAKE MANY FORMS.

- Post a daily message – a family conversation starter, a joke, or an intention for the day.
- Provide 'office hours' when staff can help address caregivers' questions and concerns.
- Offer drop-in times when children can check in with their teacher.
- Schedule 'coffee hours' for caregivers to give and get support from each other.
- Schedule circle times for small groups of children to see their teacher and friends
- Post recordings of teachers reading books, sharing social stories, etc.