

## Introduction & Purpose

As policymakers and program administrators work to enhance the quality of early care and education settings, there is renewed emphasis on examining specific domains of quality that align with sought-after outcomes for children and families. One quality domain of interest to both Head Start program administrators and state Quality Rating and Improvement System developers focuses on the relationships between families and providers.

In response to this interest, the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), in collaboration with the Office of Head Start and Office of Child Care (which are all part of the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), sponsored the *Family-Sensitive Caregiving and Family Engagement Working Meeting: Identifying and Measuring Common Core Elements*. This two-day meeting, held in June 2010, brought together researchers and federal staff to work towards identifying essential elements of two perspectives on family-provider relationships: family-sensitive caregiving, which aims to facilitate both child and family well-being through sensitive family-provider interactions, and family engagement in children's learning.

This poster outlines the findings from a multi-disciplinary literature review prepared for this meeting that aimed to:

- Identify common practices in successful family-provider relationships;
- Explore associations between these relational practices and child, family, and provider outcomes;
- Provide a framework and evidence to support the development of measures.

## Methodology

- Reviewed literature from various fields: health, mental health, social work, family systems, early care and education, and K-12 education.
- Screened 120 articles; 45 included in the review.
- Selection Criteria:
  - Date of publication (2000-2010, with exceptions made for select seminal work)
  - Relevance of content
  - Representativeness of the various disciplines
- Prioritized literature detailing specific family-provider relational practices, and/or the association between positive relational practices and child, family, or provider outcomes.

## Characteristics of Literature Reviewed

- Includes conceptual articles, literature reviews, and empirical studies from peer-reviewed journal publications, book chapters, reports, and briefs.
- Samples represent parents (mostly mothers), home visitors, child care providers (center-based, family child care, and family/friend/neighbor), teachers, child protection service workers, and children.
- Samples range in size from 7 to over 1,000, with the majority being between 25 and 200.
- Multiple methodologies represented (see Table 1).

Table 1

Methodology Used	Number of Articles
Experimental designs or quasi-experimental designs	14
Analyses of quantitative data (includes descriptive, correlational, multivariable, and latent variable analyses)	13
Qualitative studies (includes interviews, focus groups, or observations)	10

## Findings

### Successful Practices in Family-Provider Relationships

- **Respect**
  - Value the family; non-judgmental; courteous; non-discriminatory
- **Commitment**
  - Devotion and loyalty; work as "more than a job"; encouraging; accessible; consistent; sensitive
- **Empowerment**
  - Focus on family's strengths and family's ability to make decisions; including family members as equal partners
- **Openness**
  - Readiness to change; flexible; responsive practices
- **Appreciation for contexts and systems**
  - Particularly those that can influence family's decisions and children's development

- **Theoretical knowledge**
  - Understanding of family systems
  - Understanding of the ecological approach
  - How to be sensitive to and inclusive of all family members and responsive to families' cultures

- **Substantive knowledge**
  - Knowledge of child development
  - Strategies for fostering positive development
  - Knowledge of effective parenting skills
  - Specific knowledge about the child and family
    - o Children's interests and abilities
    - o Family strengths
    - o Family members' work schedules and child care needs
    - o Family's cultural practices
    - o Situations in child's home life that may affect his/her development or wellbeing

- **Relational skills**
  - Build upon family strengths
  - Warmly support families
  - Flexible/responsive to children and families' needs, preferences, and culture; provide individualized services where appropriate
  - Conscientious and persistent in interactions with families
  - Engage in positive, two-way communication
- **Goal-oriented skills**
  - Provide information
  - Advocate for and connect families to peer and community supports
  - Collaborate and engage families in joint goal-setting and decision-making
  - Create family-friendly facilities and events

Attitudes

Knowledge

Behaviors

### Associations between Successful Practices and Child, Family, and Provider Outcomes

#### CHILD OUTCOMES

- **Children's health and well-being**
  - Decreased length of hospital stays and fewer re-hospitalizations
  - Improved attachment
  - Reduced anxiety
- **Cognitive/academic skills**
  - Positive language and literacy outcomes
  - Higher scores on mathematical assessments
- **Social skills**
  - Improved social competence and emotional regulation
- **Problem Behaviors**
  - Reduction in incidence and severity of problem behaviors

#### FAMILY OUTCOMES

- **Parental engagement in services/school-based settings**
- **Parental satisfaction with services**
- **Improved self-efficacy among parents**
- **Improved mental health among parents**
- **Enhanced parent-child relationship**
  - Improved parental perceptions of children and parent-child interactions
  - Reductions in abuse/neglect of children
  - Improved parenting skills
  - Improved home learning environment
  - Decreases in lax/permissive parenting
  - Increases in responsiveness to child
  - Increases in parental reading with children

#### PROVIDER OUTCOMES

- **Positively altering provider's perceptions/interactions with children**
- **More positive feelings towards role as a provider**
  - Improved confidence and self-efficacy
- **Improved relationships with families**

## Discussion

The purpose of this literature review was to build a foundation for future measurement development work by identifying promising relational practices that promote positive family-provider relationships. Providers' attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors commonly identified as being central to developing and maintaining positive family-provider relationships, and associations between these practices and child, family, and provider outcomes were identified.

Next steps in development of measures of family-provider relationships include narrowing down the key constructs to be included in future assessments and operationalizing these constructs into measures that are easily administered, applicable across diverse early care and education settings, sensitive to cultural and linguistic diversity, reflective of the full range of parents' and providers' experiences, and accurate enough to be used for multiple purposes (e.g., program evaluation, Quality Rating and Improvement System ratings, basic research).