



Staying connected: Using a communication plan to stay connected with multilingual families and children



Sometimes staying connected with families participating in kindergarten services requires a planned approach. Particularly in recent times, Early Childhood Professionals are unable to rely on the informal face-to-face daily discussions they would utilise to communicate important information, check-in with families and engage in relationship-building discussions.

As Early Childhood Professionals move from the early learning environment to supporting children and families in the learning at home space, it is important that Early Childhood Professionals are also thinking about how they plan to continue engaging regularly with families. For many Victorian kindergarten services, building strong reciprocal relationships with multilingual families is vital in supporting children's learning and development. What Early Childhood Services were able to achieve through their multi-modal capacity, such as using a combination of verbal, visual and written communication must now be transformed to fit within this new online space.

Developing a communication plan

Developing a communication plan for each family will support Early Childhood Professionals in identifying what communication mode, or mixture of modes families require to stay connected to the service and the Early Childhood Professionals. Early Childhood Professionals will need to identify the communication tools they already have that can be transferred to the online space and the tools they require to ensure families have equitable opportunities to participate collaboratively.

Many kindergartens are finding that the simple transfer from face to face conversations to telephone conversations are not providing the results that were expected. Without the environmental input, families and Early Childhood Professionals are finding it difficult to find the shared communication they thought they once had. To continue to maintain and develop the collaborative partnerships Early Childhood Professionals hold with families, it is important for Early Childhood Professionals to consider:

- How did I best communicate with the family previously?
- What were the specific tools I relied on?
- What online or remote tools do I have available now?
- How can I continue to offer my communication in multi-modal ways?
- How would families like to engage in communication at this time?
- How will I gather this information from families?

It is important that Early Childhood Professionals engage in this investigative reflection process to develop their communication toolkit. What Early Childhood Professionals might find is that providing all communication in multi-modal ways will support all families' engagement while their children are learning at home.

Early Childhood Professionals may find that they need to develop unique communication plans or tools to engage families.

Communication tools you might include could be:

Email or SMS/Text Message

Regular, scheduled telephone or video meetings

Regular video meetings that allow families to connect and discuss their learning at home experiences.

Regularly scheduling telephone or video meetings with Interpreters or *fka*CS Community Language Support Workers.

Video messages (also including these messages in family languages where multilingual colleagues are available).

Short videos that show Teachers and Educators engaging in the learning at home activities identified by the service. Teachers and Educators can model the types of provocations they use to support children in engaging in conversations.

Social Stories that communicate learning at home and what learning from home looks like in the everyday home environment.

With an understanding of what communicative tools are available and what is needed, Early Childhood Professionals then need to consider the purpose of the conversation/interaction and the best way to engage in shared communication.

Early Childhood Professionals might consider using a planning template such as that below:

Communication	Things to Consider
What is the purpose of this communication?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is this a formal or informal conversation? – Are there important messages? – What am I trying to achieve through this communication?
What information am I trying to share?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Am I trying to communicate specific information to the family? – What are the messages? – How can I present messages clearly that invites reciprocal communication?
What information am I trying to gather?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Am I trying to gather specific information from the family? – How will I engage in reciprocal communication? – What will I need to achieve this?
What communication tools are the best equipped to support me in my communication with this family?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is an interpreter, Community Language Worker or multilingual colleague required to support shared understanding? – Does information have to be verbal or written to communicate the message? – What communication tool would best suit engaging the family?
Do I need to provide the family with supportive communication tools to ensure we can communicate collaboratively?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Do I have the tools to engage in shared communication with the family? – How am I expecting families to respond? Do I need to provide multi-modal communication tools to families to support shared communication?
How will I record and use the information I have gathered?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How am I planning to use this information? – How will families see their contributions as constructive? – Will information shared be used to offer additional learning at home activities? – How will I use this information to support my assessment of the child’s learning and development?

When Early childhood Professionals think critically about how and why they are communicating with families, they are better positioned to support positive outcomes in maintaining and strengthening the relationships and connections they have with the families participating in the early learning environment, and within the learning at home space.

For further support in engaging actively with multilingual families, contact *fkaCS*:

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