

Engaging with families at Goodstart Early Learning Tuggerah

The following case study has been created by the [Goodstart Early Learning Tuggerah](#) team to demonstrate how they engage with families and the benefits of this interaction for children's education outcomes.

Summary

Family engagement is important for the early learning and development of children. It is well known that within the first 5 years of life relationships and experiences are crucial to shaping the development of a child's brain and lay the foundations for the development of lifelong skills. We found that implementing the practices of key educator relationships, collaboratively establishing meaningful 'learning journeys', and ensuring access to high quality literacy resources had a positive impact on the children's learning and development within the home and service environment.

Early Years Learning Framework – Principle 2: Partnerships

Educators, families and support professionals are working together to support the learning outcomes for each child and explore the learning potential in everyday events.

National Quality Standard – Quality Area 6

This quality area recognises (among other things) that service can support families in their parenting role by becoming a reliable source of practical information about resources and services within the local community.

Overview

Goodstart Early Learning Tuggerah is a 100-place service providing education and care for children birth–5 years of age. Our service is located within a local business hub on the Central Coast of NSW, and is accessed mainly by working families from across the Central Coast and Hunter region. Our team takes pride in developing and maintaining authentic partnerships with families and the wider community.



Recognising and supporting family engagement in learning at home

We have a strong philosophical stance of viewing both families and educators as equal trusted partners who have a significant influence on the child's learning and development. This has laid the foundations for the establishment of 'learning journeys' – a collection of pedagogical documentation that reflects a child's learning, development and achievements over a period of time. The learning journeys are developed using an online platform designed to share children's learning and communicate with families. This allows the learning journey to be easily accessed and contributed to as it develops.

In creating a learning journey, our educators work with families and children to develop three meaningful learning goals to work towards. For example, within our preschool room, there is generally a common interest from families in establishing goals around how to best support children that are transitioning to school. This could include emotional regulation, self-help skills, building an understanding of basic literacy and mathematical concepts and so much more. Our educators then plan intentional learning experiences, capture children's ideas and perspectives, and gather evidence of spontaneous learning that supports and shows a progression towards these goals. Families are encouraged to adopt these ideas, engaging with educators throughout the process by sharing photos and examples of how this learning has been adapted within the home environment.

We have noticed, through working in this way, a significant increase in engagement from our families and the implementation of ideas to support learning goals within the home environment. For example, one family had set a goal for their child to develop confidence in exploring various mathematical concepts. The educators suggested a dice game in which the child would roll the dice then point, count and progress to create the number using playdough. The family was encouraged to adapt this game and consider similar play-based experiences using the child's interests. The family continued to explore similar experiences such as visually recognising

letters in their family names and re-creating the shapes with playdough.

An educator meets with the family and child every 3 months to review progress. During this meeting, we discuss what has worked well, and what could be improved, considering the progression of the goals and whether any adaptations are needed. Our families love this way of working as it shows them what children are engaging with at the service, and what can be explored at home. Families feel more connected to their child's learning and supported to understand ways in which learning may be extended in fun and meaningful ways. This has been of particular benefit during COVID-19 isolation periods ensuring that their child's learning continued to progress and has been supported while isolating at home.

Supporting two-way, positive communication and providing light touch updates about learning and development

We see great value in fostering key educator relationships with children and families, as this promotes a nurturing relationship of continuity and consistency between educators and children. This way of working recognises the importance of having one or two people in the service who are deeply connected to the child. For families, it means that they have an educator that is there for them to discuss their child, ask questions of, or raise concerns with.

We host family nights, both at the beginning and halfway through the year, to discuss children's development and ways this may be supported further. These nights provide time for families and educators to connect on a personal level, building a deeper understanding of how each family wishes to be supported to enhance their child's development. These sessions also provide an opportunity to discuss any challenges or areas families may be concerned about. Implementing key educator relationships puts structural supports in place to ensure children and families can achieve the best outcomes possible.

After these meetings, educators reflect on common themes that have arisen among the families. Some common discussion points regularly identified include toilet training, sleep and rest, transition to school and social and emotional development. We use this information to prepare and host family nights that are based around emerging needs and areas of interest. Families are invited to attend these information sessions, both to connect with each other, and also with professionals in the areas of interest, such as teachers, speech therapists and sleep consultants. Our families and children appreciate this personalised way of working, as it allows them to develop a deep partnership with an educator who truly knows the family and child on an inclusive and personal level, making them feel valued, listened to and supported.

Promoting a literacy-rich environment at home

We have set up a community library located at the service. Children, families and the wider community are able to borrow a range of high-quality children's books for free to read at home and then return to swap for other titles. Rituals have been established for families where the family will select books each time they visit the service, and the children then share these stories that have been explored at home with their educators and peers during small group times at the service. Stories surrounding emotional regulation and understanding of feelings including, *Have You Filled a Bucket Today?*, *The Colour Monster* and Dr John Ervine's *WorryWoos* series, have been popular!

From these stories, learning experiences and rituals have been explored and developed at home, such as referring to *The Colour Monsters* to identify a feeling, creating gratitude buckets and borrowing WorryWoo puppets to explore more complex feelings, such as frustration, on a deeper level. The library ensures that all children and families in the community have access to high-quality reading materials and supporting resources, while establishing a love of literacy between both home and the service.



Collaboratively planning and problem-solving with families

Our service values the inclusion and involvement of all children within our program. We also understand the importance of collaborating and problem-solving with families to ensure that each family and child can participate to their full potential. With this understanding, we have established a unique support role – the Inclusion Lead – who works closely with our families and educators.

The Inclusion Lead actively seeks out opportunities to embed inclusive practices, along with identifying and supporting children's needs. These could be as small as extra support to assist with anxiety when settling into care or on a larger scale, such as identifying potential learning conditions or cultural considerations. A specific support plan is developed with consistent strategies, for both home and the service, to ensure that the environment is inclusive for the family and child encouraging full participation in the program. These plans are reviewed in collaboration with the family, educators and external support services, such as a speech therapist and occupational therapist. Health professionals are invited to visit our service to spend time with the child and family and share strategies and practices with educators.

The plans ensure that the support strategies being implemented are achievable at both home and the service, providing the child with a safe and encouraging learning environment in which they can be a successful learner. Our families really see the benefits of having access to the Inclusion Lead, bringing everyone who works with the child together.

Where next?

We aspire to strengthen our family engagement by developing ways to ensure our practices are culturally safe for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. We will achieve this through highlighting family partnerships for learning as an essential part of our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and reaching out to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families within the service and wider community for reflections and feedback on our ways of working.

The 'learning journeys' are based on the foundation of seeing both families and educators as equal trusted partners who both have an influence on the child's learning.

Our tip

We see great benefits in creating safe and welcoming spaces for children, families, and educators to connect and promote love of literacy and reading. This not only encourages children and families into the space, but highlights and places value on the importance of literacy and developing a love of reading from an early age.



Reflection questions

Educators and teachers

- What strategies do you have in place to ensure that all families feel connected with and contribute to their child's learning and development?
- In what ways can families be involved in the design of learning spaces and experiences?

Service leaders

- What does successful family engagement look like at your service? What areas can be improved?