

Module 1: Valuing Each Child and Family

Handout 4

How Do You Talk with Families?

- ☆ *Sam tries to boss other children and throws toys.*
- ☆ *Emily sits by herself and doesn't play with other children.*
- ☆ *Michael's family is upset that he doesn't paint a picture that looks "real."*
- ☆ *Cameron won't touch his food.*

How do you share information with families about their child in a way that is respectful and supportive?

First think about the families' perspective. Ask yourself if the information will be important to the child's family in the same way it is important to you. If you're not sure, you could say something like: *"I wanted to tell you about Sam's progress in learning to get along with the other kids, but first I wanted to know if this is something you've been wondering about."*

Be positive and specific. Families are usually more open to staff's concerns about a child's behavior when the child's strengths are acknowledged too. Point out the child's unique qualities: *"Emily is always the first one to comfort a child who's crying,"* instead of making a generic comment like *"Emily is so sweet."* Children's challenges can often be overcome by building on their strengths.

Be descriptive without being judgmental. Describe the child's behavior without interpretation or judgment. Instead of *"Cameron doesn't like our food and then complains that he's hungry,"* say *"Cameron sometimes eats crackers but doesn't eat fruit. He often asks for something else."* Then, ask the family for their interpretation. Respond by appreciating the families' perspectives. Brainstorm different options for things Cameron can eat.

If staff observations are very different from families', acknowledge the differences: *"You know, I think you and I are looking at Michael's painting a bit differently. We both would like to have him learn how to make pictures that look like something real. And I totally agree that we have to figure out how to keep him from getting paint all over his clothes! But I think he is also showing enthusiasm and hard work. Maybe you and I see his painting differently, but I think we both want to help him work toward the same goal."*

Support parental competence: Parental competence can be supported in a variety of ways. For example, a child's success can often be credited to families' efforts, so point out these successes to families as you see them.

Open up to families' emotions: When families' emotions are difficult for program staff to face and to understand, it may help to remember that both staff and parents almost always "want to do well by the child." Staff members can build strong partnerships with families by validating these emotions.