Hi, my name is Eva. This training will focus on how you can develop positive relationships with child care providers who care for your child. We will talk about many ways those caregivers can support you and your child. Parenting is full of challenges and rewards. One task that many parents find challenging is the process of selecting and placing their children in child care. However, this experience can also be very rewarding for parents and children alike. Whether you have chosen in-home care or a center-based program for your child, developing a trusting and respectful relationship with caregivers who work with your family allows you and your child to get the most out of the child care experience.

Learning Objectives
By the end of this course, we hope you will be able to identify the three types of relationships created when your child is enrolled in child care. You will learn ways to build and maintain effective communication with your provider. You will learn how to develop trust, respect, and cooperation, and effectively handle conflicts and difficult conversations with your child care provider. You will also learn about ways to become more involved in your child care program. The information in this course can help make the child care experience more personal for your child and family.

Relationships
Let’s explore the relationships that exist when parents enroll their children in child care. Three relationships are created when you select a child care setting for your child. First, there is a relationship between you and your child. Second, there is a relationship between your child and the caregiver. Third, there is a relationship between you and the caregiver. Each of these relationships is individually important. Strong connections between all three will help you and your child have a positive experience with your provider.

Parent-Child Relationship
The relationship between parent and child is the most important because it lays the foundation for all future relationships and experiences in a child’s life. You know your child better than anyone else. You know what her cries mean. You understand her first attempts at language. In the same way, your child knows you better than she knows anyone else. Your baby turned to your voice moments after birth. She recognized your face within a few months. She recognizes and finds comfort in your smell. She knows that you will be there to comfort her when she cries. You are your child’s first and most important teacher. The relationship you are building with your child is the beginning of her education about the world.

[Caregiver-Child Relationship]

The relationship between child and caregiver is also critical. Children often spend a large portion of their waking time in child care. This means that caregivers have a strong influence on how and what a child learns in his early years. Young children need to have strong relationship with their caregivers to have a comfortable and meaningful experience in child care. Over time, caregivers and children learn to trust one another. They learn each other’s emotional cues. Your child’s caregiver will challenge him to learn new things. She will support him when he struggles with a new developmental task. This relationship can help your child experience the world in new and exciting ways.

Parent-Caregiver Relationship

The last relationship is between parent and caregiver. Parents and caregivers both want to provide the best care possible to help children grow up healthy and happy. It is important that parents and caregivers communicate respectfully on a regular basis so that children’s needs are met. This type of communication helps show your child that he is important and loved.

Children need consistency. You may see this in your child through requests to read a favorite book over and over. Or maybe through his cries over losing a toy that he takes to bed every night. This need for consistency can make it difficult for children to go from one setting to another. This is especially true if the expectations and routines in the settings are different.

For example, imagine that you allow your toddler to use plastic utensils when eating at home. Now imagine that your child is required to use her fingers to eat in child care. This might cause her have problems during feeding times in one or both places. This happens because the expectations are confusing. Talking to your provider about your child’s preferences and schedule will help your child feel more comfortable in his child care setting.

Share information about your child’s experiences and needs with your provider. By doing this you can make it easier for each of you to meet your child’s needs in the best way possible. There may be times that your child’s caregiver will come to you for answers to questions or help resolving issues related to your child.
On the other hand, you may sometimes find yourself seeking answers to questions about situations you face as a parent. Your caregiver has probably worked with many children and families. With a bank of experience to draw from, she may be able to offer suggestions.

Remember that you both have a common desire to do what is best for your child.

Placing your child in child care can be challenging in many ways. This may be the first time you have been apart from your child for any length of time. Most parents want their child to develop strong, loving relationships with her caregivers. Still, it can be hard at first to see your child run to the caregiver’s arms at drop-off and cry when you arrive for pick-up. These behaviors are normal. They are signs that your child is developing a healthy attachment to her caregiver.

Building a positive relationship with your caregiver can help put your mind at ease. It can also allow for greater emotional growth in your child. When you are happy and comfortable with your child care arrangement, your child will be happier and more comfortable too. Feeling at ease will allow him to confidently explore and learn in child care.

**Strategies for Creating Positive Relationships with Caregivers**

We have discussed the importance of creating and maintaining positive relationships with your child’s caregivers. Now we will discuss some specific strategies for building these relationships. These strategies include using effective communication, identifying your family’s values and culture, recognizing the skills and strengths that parents and caregivers bring to the table, sharing decision making, celebrating differences, how to become more involved in your child’s care, and how to resolve conflicts.

**Communication**

Communication is critical in any relationship. It lies at the heart of a strong parent-caregiver relationship. Effective communication is the most important strategy for creating positive relationships with your child’s caregivers. It allows you to share key information with your child’s caregivers. It allows you to learn to support them as partners in your child’s education and development. It allows caregivers to inform and support parents as well.

Effective communication can be difficult sometimes. Caregivers often plan time for communication with parents during drop-off and pick-up times. This approach works well for many parents. However, it may be not work for parents who are rushed during pick-up and drop-off. Remember this: effective communication has to meet the needs of both the parent and the caregiver.

Begin by finding out what kinds of communication your child care provider already uses. There may be a classroom newsletter or parent bulletin board that is used to keep parents informed.

If none of the forms of communication already in place meet your needs, ask for communication in a different form. For example, a child whose parents live in separate homes may need two copies of daily progress sheets so that both parents can be updated on their child’s day. Or, a
parent who has poor cell phone reception in the office may prefer to receive communication via email.

Your child’s caregiver will most likely be willing to make changes to meet your needs for communication. She may even offer some ideas of her own. This could include such changes as using email for communication about certain topics so there is a written record of what was said.

Tell your caregiver what your needs are regarding communication. Also, find out about her needs. It may take some discussion and creativity to identify means of communication that work for both of you. The resulting cooperation is well worth the effort.

You need to be sure you exchange the right types of information with your child’s caregivers. This gives you each the best possible view of your child’s development. You can communicate to your child’s caregiver about your child’s eating, sleeping, behavior, signs of illness, and much more vital information. Your child’s caregiver does not have access to this information without your input. Your child’s caregivers can keep you informed about your child’s activities, behavior, eating, sleeping, and mood while your child is in care. Each of you will gain a fuller idea of what’s really going on with your child when you put your observations together.

**Family Culture & Values**

Your family is the classroom where your child will learn culture, language, religion, and values. You will be most satisfied with your child care providers if they are able to provide care that is consistent with your family’s expectations and needs. In order to choose a child care program that can do this, you first have to identify those needs and expectations. This is the first step towards building strong relationships with your child’s caregivers.

Ask yourself these questions. What is important to you as a parent? What are your priorities for your child’s growth and development? Are there particular areas of learning that are important to your family?

Then find a child care provider that provides the kind of experience and values you want for your child. If spending time outside is an important part of your culture and your style of parenting, you might want a program that allows infants and toddlers to spend time outside. If you want your child to be exposed to more than one language, you will probably feel most comfortable with a child care program that offers bilingual instruction. If your main priority is keeping your child healthy, you may look for a program that goes above and beyond in cleaning and sanitizing the facility.

Child care providers usually have experience with a lot of different types of families. They can often adapt to meet your family’s needs. Be aware of your values and communicate them to your child’s caregivers. Then you can work through differences together. Hopefully, you can come to a mutual understanding about what is most beneficial to your child.

**Parent and Caregiver Expertise**
The next strategy for building positive relationships with caregivers calls parents and caregivers to recognize each other’s expertise. You are both experts in different ways. These two types of expertise can combine to best meet your child’s needs.

You are the expert on your own child. You know his needs, his likes and dislikes, and his verbal and non-verbal signals. You know how she responds to different situations. You can comfort her better than any other adult in her life. Your role is to advocate for the best interests of your child at all times.

Caregivers are experts on children in general. They are educated in child development. They can help families see how their children are developing compared to average levels for their age groups. Their experience sometimes allows them to spot potential problems before parents. They often have a wealth of knowledge about services and resources available to support families. The caregiver’s role is to objectively evaluate her practices to best meet the needs of all children in care, including your child.

Both types of expertise are important. There may be times when your child’s caregivers have a concern that they are unable to resolve without your input. There may also be times when the solution to a parenting problem lies outside your scope of experience. In this case, your child’s caregivers will probably be able to suggest strategies or resources to help resolve the issue.

When both parents and caregivers trust each other’s expertise, they can learn new ways to work with children. In this way, each can improve their own caregiving practices.

**Shared Decision Making**

The next strategy for creating positive relationships with your child’s caregivers is to share decision making when it comes to your child. You are faced with many decisions about how to raise your child. Some of these decisions are easy. Others are more difficult. Parents, especially first-time parents, sometimes feel overwhelmed by the number of decisions they are required to make regarding their children. The best approach is often to seek out a knowledgeable source of information before making the decision.

You have the ultimate authority over the decisions made for your child. However, your child care provider can provide a great amount of support in making those decisions. A trusted caregiver can take some of the pressure off of parents by providing a high level of expertise in child development. Your child care provider has probably taken care of dozens, and in some cases, hundreds of children. This wealth of experience brings knowledge and resources that many parents have trouble finding on their own.

Child care providers can help you make many decisions. They can help identify when your child is ready to start eating solid food. They might recognize when your child is ready to try drinking from a cup. They might even help you decide when your child is ready to begin potty training. Your child care provider usually has knowledge of professionals in your area who work with children in a number of ways. Whether you are looking for a pediatric dentist, or a child-friendly barber, your child’s caregivers can probably help.
Your child care provider may also be able to refer you to resources on more serious topics. If there is a serious event, like a death in your family, your child’s caregiver should be able to offer you names of people who can help. She might also offer you publications on how to work through the situation with your child. Your child care provider can help you decide if, when, where, and how to seek out assessments and services if you ever have concerns about your child’s development.

When you work as a team with your child’s caregiver, your child receives more consistency in his care across settings. This cooperation and consistency can make your child’s world a more secure and predictable place.

Respecting Differences

Sometimes the home and child care settings will be different even when you work with your provider to build consistency. Respecting differences is a strategy for creating positive relationships with your child’s caregivers. Differences often stem from our diversity of cultures and values. You can teach your child to respect differences of all kinds by viewing differences in setting as a learning opportunity.

For instance, what if your child’s caregiver comes from a different cultural background than your family? Embrace the idea that your child can learn a number of new things from interacting with this caregiver. Your child might learn to appreciate a new type of food. He might learn to sing a song in another language. He might have the chance to play a game that he would never have been exposed to at home. These experiences allow him to appreciate more of the world than a child who never has these opportunities.

Differences between settings can make the transition from one setting to another challenging for some children. Take the time to talk to your child about how enjoyable new and different experiences can be. Let her see and hear you act in ways that show you value all kinds of people. If you do, she will be more comfortable exploring and delighting in the diversity available in her world.

Family Involvement

Working with your child’s caregiver to create common expectations and discipline techniques can lead to your child having fewer behavioral problems and stronger language and social skills. This cooperation works best when parents intentionally seek out ways to be involved with the child care program.

There are a number of ways you can become involved in your child’s child care program. Some parents make regular visits to the child care environment to lead activities for the children. These activities could include reading, singing, playing instruments, telling stories, creating artwork, gardening, cooking, or many other activities.
You child care provider can suggest suitable activities if you are not sure how to lead an age-appropriate activity for a group of children. If you don’t feel comfortable leading an activity, you can still ask to volunteer in your child’s classroom. You can be an extra set of hands for your child’s caregiver. Talk to your child care director to find out more about the process of classroom volunteering.

Another way you can become involved is to participate in special events hosted by your child care program. Events, such as birthday or holiday parties, parent/teacher work days, and parent appreciation days are all designed to allow you to get to know your child care program better. Participating in these events can help you feel more connected with your child care providers.

You can also get involved in your child care program by contributing your opinions and becoming informed about the practices used by your child’s caregivers. Many child care programs offer opportunities for parents to participate in the same training offered for providers. These joint trainings can go a long way toward creating consistency between the care you provide at home and the care your child receives in child care. Some centers also give out surveys for parents to determine how families feel about the care their child is receiving. Surveys are a chance to speak your mind about concerns you might have or if feel your provider is doing an excellent job.

Spending time in the child care environment may not be a practical option for you. If this is the case, there are other ways to stay involved. For instance, you might create a poster with several family photos to help your child feel comforted when she misses you during the day. Or, you could ask your child’s caregiver to create a “wish list” of items that are used in child care that you could provide. Some examples of common wish list items include: toilet paper or paper towel tubes, boxes of tissues, liquid hand soap, paper towels, coffee cans, scraps of fabric for craft projects, and so forth.

**Difficult Conversations**

There may be times when you or your child’s caregivers feel the need to have difficult conversations. One of you might want to address concerns about the progress your child is making. Or, one of you might have concerns about how your child is cared for in either at home or in child care. These conversations are important, but they can be difficult.

Emotions can run high when parents and caregivers sit down to discuss challenging topics. Try to talk about difficult issues calmly and respectfully. Keeping yourself calm allows your child’s needs to be the main topic of the discussion.

Being respectful and constructive during these conversations can be challenging for many reasons. Parents may feel that their child’s development is a reflection of their abilities as a parent. They might feel that a caregiver’s concerns about their children are an attack on their parenting skills. Caregivers sometimes forget that parents know their children better than anyone else. They may approach the situation from the role of a teacher, rather than a partner.

Both sides may struggle with biases affecting their views of certain types of people or certain types of care. Remember that you both have the best interest of your child at heart. Recognize
the value of seeing your child from another perspective. This can allow you to develop a more complete view of her growth.

You can work as a team with your child care provider to resolve any concerns. Tough conversations might never become easy for you. However, you can make them less challenging by building positive relationships with your child’s caregivers before there is a need for a difficult conversation.

**Bringing it All Together**

This course has talked about a number of strategies for building strong relationships with your child care provider. Your child needs to see you working in partnership with the other adults he knows and trusts. Through your positive example, he will learn to work cooperatively, to show respect, and trust in others. Your child will feel more secure when he sees all of his caregivers working together to provide the best possible care.

Here are the major messages we’d like you to “take home.”

- There are three primary relationships formed when you enroll your child in child care: the parent-child relationship, the child-caregiver relationship, and the parent-caregiver relationship. Each relationship plays a part in creating a successful child care experience for your child,

- Communication is essential in the parent-caregiver relationship and exists in many forms, such as face-to-face, email, handwritten reports, surveys, and telephone calls,

- You can start build positive relationships with your child’s caregivers by examining your family’s culture and values and identifying your priorities for your child’s growth. Using this information when selecting a child care program will allow you and your child to feel more comfortable with your child care provider from the beginning,

- There are several strategies you can use to create and maintain strong relationships with your child’s caregivers. The ones we discussed here were: recognizing that you and your child care provider have complementary expertise, using effective communication, sharing in decision making regarding your child’s care, and respecting differences,

- There are many ways to become involved in your child care program. Involvement creates important consistency between the home and child care environments,

- Difficult conversations are unavoidable. By creating a strong relationship with your child’s caregivers and continually focusing on your child’s best interests, discussing difficult topics can become more productive and less challenging.

Thank you for your attention and for your commitment to creating the best possible child care experience for your child.
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