

Communicating with Families



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GETTING STARTED

Your program can use the information in this guide regardless of the communication method(s) you choose; newsletters, daily notes, social media, a communication app, text and more.

Whether you're using print or social media, be sure to use a recognizable logo/profile picture and keep it the same or similar across platforms. If you haven't sent newsletters, there are a many print and electronic ideas/templates to get started. Simply search for preschool newsletters.

If you're just starting out with social media, become familiar with the functions of different platforms - privacy settings, character limits, image size requirements, sharing, reacting, tagging, and analytics (track the number of people who see your media) to see how your outreach is performing and when your audience is most active. Examples of social media most commonly used by families include; Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. As you consider developing your online presence, be sure to consider the differences between a *private* Facebook group for families you serve and a *public* Facebook page for the community at large. Facebook has a comprehensive help page, at <https://www.facebook.com/help/>

When setting up social media accounts, consider how they will be used and who will have access to passwords. Some early childhood programs have multiple, trusted people within the agency that have access to a secure list of one central account information, while others choose to have individual user accounts, usernames and passwords. You may also choose to investigate a social media management software (such as Hootsuite or Loomy). They have a fee, but depending on your needs may help to systematize your engagement efforts.

Begin by liking/following other organizations in whichever platform(s) you choose. With social media, you'll be able to instantly share information, or sign up for other organizational newsletters to share in your social media account(s).

Either way, you'll stay up-to-date on related news and opportunities to easily share information with staff or families, and others can see what information/resources you follow and connect with those resources directly.

Some organizations to start with include:



<http://bit.ly/iSocialNH>



[NH Pyramid Model \(Facebook\)](#)



[National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations](#)



[Zero to Three](#)



[Vroom](#)

Remember, one size does not fit all when it comes to family engagement. Relationships benefit when programs share information in a variety of ways; social media platforms, email, web sites/pages, text, print and electronic newsletters, direct mail, etc.

PROMOTE YOUR OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

Be sure new and interested families are aware that you are committed to communicating with all families using multiple approaches. Add information about the variety of ways families can access information in your program's orientation packet. Ensure they know these are ways you share information about happenings at your program, opportunities for home/school connection ideas, upcoming events/opportunities, and local and national resources. Encourage families to give you feedback on the information you share, and ask about the most effective way to share information.

If you use social media, include information about which types and how to access it in staff and family materials, in newsletters, on your website, in the footer of emails...basically everywhere and anywhere. Ask staff members and families to use and share your communications.

Talk it up! Post interesting information about your program, share success stories, share information about professional development and family education opportunities, and of course share any early childhood, social-emotional and/or family engagement related events you're hosting or that are being offered in your community.

ENGAGE WITH FAMILIES: LET FAMILIES KNOW YOU'RE INTERESTED IN (AND PAYING ATTENTION TO) THEIR THOUGHTS

- ✓ Make a statement, share a picture and ask questions - (ex.: what's your favorite...? name a time when...? fill in the blank, what works for you?)
- ✓ Ask for likes/reactions on social media on posts (ex: If you're the kind of person who likes/does/knows? Like this post/retweet!)
- ✓ Ask questions, and respond to or like responses. (Who doesn't like it when someone takes time to read their thoughts?)
- ✓ Use photos- Visual content has pretty much become a requirement of any online presence. It's 40X more likely to get shared on social media than other types of content **Remember to receive signed releases for any photos posted of families, staff or children.*
- ✓ Link videos or provide links and ask families what they see, think or feel.
- ✓ If there's a survey/listening session/focus group etc. share what you heard, learned and what the next steps/plan is and post updates regularly (as necessary). Refer to the survey repeatedly when you act on a survey related item. Remind them that you're using the results and their voices matter.
- ✓ Thank families for their contributions to the program. If there's a donation drive, family event, volunteer recognition, thank families for participating.
- ✓ Don't get discouraged if families do not respond or engage. Families may not initially respond, no matter the method, keep it going. Building trust and consistency is key.

SHARE YOUR ROLL OUT INFORMATION!

It's never too early to share with families that your center is rolling out the Pyramid Model. Whether you're just starting out, or have been implementing for a while, consider these points to get started.

Rolling out Pyramid Model	Behavior Expectations	Center Changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share what you're doing! • Talk about why social emotional development is important. • Support families to understand what supportive environments and responsive relationships look like. • Explain social emotional development using language from the NH Pyramid Model Tip Card: Families Want to Know. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the program's behavior expectations and how are they different from rules? • How did the program develop the behavior expectations? How do they align with social emotional development? • How are behavior expectations implemented? What do they LOOK like at school? • How can program expectations relate to developing expectations at home? • Explain how you support families who have other or different expectations at home? • Bi-monthly/quarterly/seasonal updates on behavior expectations with new activity ideas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is on the Leadership Team for Pyramid Model implementation and what are their roles? • Is Pyramid Model part of staff hiring or PD plans? • Are there new routines (and routines within routines?) • Have you updated or created any new policies? • Does your program have a new vision statement? • Does the program collect and share data related to implementation? • Are there any new family materials? Resources?

COPY, PASTE AND POST!

At first, it might feel time consuming and difficult to think about what social-emotional development information to share. Below are samples of posts to get started. It's as simple as Copy, Paste, and Post! There are multiple tips on a variety of subjects related to how families can support their child's social emotional development and address challenging behavior. These tips can be used with any form of communication you have with families. Keep in mind, *images speak volumes*; try to add images to the posts you create. When possible, use pictures from your program (after ensuring you have a photo release).

Positive Relationships

☞ Think back to an important person in your life growing up. What did that person do to make you feel special? Chances are that relationship wasn't based on gaining material items, but someone who was reliable and had time. Spending time with your child develops positive secure relationships and creates a strong bond.

☞ We all know positive encouragement promotes positive behavior. Here are some ideas about how to make that encouragement meaningful.

Tip 1: Get your child's attention.

Tip 2: Be specific!

Tip 3: Keep it simple (try to avoid combining encouragement with criticism).

Tip 4: Encourage your child with enthusiasm!

Tip 5: Double the impact with physical warmth.

Tip 6: Trifecta! Use positive comments and encouragement with your child in front of others.



Playing

- “ Playing with your child strengthens your relationship, increases your child’s creativity, and helps to develop social skills. Resist the temptation to jump right in and play. Let your child take the lead. Wait, watch, and then ask to join in. Let us know what you spy your little one doing!
- “ Many children love to be the center of attention. When you’re in the middle of playing, take notice and give a sports announcer play-by-play to describe what your child is doing while you are playing together. Don’t ask a lot of questions, simply narrate to help your child stay engaged while you strengthen your relationship and build language skills.
- “ Sometimes it’s hard to let our children be creative when they’re playing. We want them to learn. Let go of expectations and encourage imagination. If the fish and elephants are friends wonderful, if snakes fly and purple birds snort so what? Have fun with together! There’ll be plenty of time for your child to learn colors, labels, sounds.
- “ Give children space to play and explore independently. The amount of space and time that’s appropriate depends on a child’s age. Even sitting back several feet from young infants will give them more freedom to make their own decisions. Alone play can build creativity, confidence and independence.



- “ Playing provides opportunities for you to model social skills, sharing and turn-taking. What are some of your child’s favorite things to play?
- “ Your child might lose interest when you’re playing (even if you have a goal to ‘finish something’). The length of play and attention changes with your child’s age and physical and emotional states. Watch for cues such that your child is losing interest, such as looking away. The attention span of a 3 or 4-year-old is 8-10 minutes. Finish the activity another time.

Friendship Skills

- ☞☞ It's not always easy making friends, here are steps to talk about and practice with your child to engage when others are playing.
1. Getting a friend's attention in a positive way
 2. Share a toy
 3. Request a toy
 4. Offer a play idea
 5. Give compliments!
- ☞☞ Learning how to make friends doesn't always come easy for young children. As a parent you can help by talking with your child about how to be a good friend. If friends are visiting, have plenty of activities/toys to prevent sharing problems (put away special toys), and stay within earshot so you can help them interact if needed. If you're not sure who your child's friends are during their time here, ask us!
- ☞☞ Initial playdates can cause anxiety for parents and children! A few things to keep in mind - stay nearby to help, keep playtimes short, and remind children to use their words. If all goes well, set another playtime!
- ☞☞ After a playdate, make sure your child knows what he/she did well - be specific about what they did during playtime. Ask how they thought it went and if they want to do it again. If it didn't go well, talk about what you might do differently next time. What has worked for you in encouraging friendships?



Behavior

- ☞☞ Challenging behavior is a form of communication and most often it's because they want to avoid or obtain something. If you have the same challenge day after day, see if you can be a detective. Watch what happens before the behavior (Are they asked to do something? Is something out of reach? Do they want attention?) and what happens after the behavior. (Where they ignored, punished, given help, threatened?). Watch for clues and stay tuned for strategies that help!
- ☞☞ Are you frustrated and feeling like your child ALWAYS_____ (fill in the blank: jumps on the furniture, whines, fights to put on shoes, etc.). See if you can catch your child when they're NOT showing that behavior! Give positive reinforcement for positive behavior when its least expected. It helps to remind ourselves that challenging behavior doesn't ALWAYS happen.
- ☞☞ Most children are not born with the built-in ability to make decisions and then accept the consequences. Learning to take responsibility requires support and practice. One good way to help is to offer your child limited, reasonable choices throughout the day. Asking "What do you want to wear today?" might be too big. Offer two or three limited choices to make it easier (for everyone!).

““ Even when you’re certain your child understands and is able, there’s still the matter of probability. What’s the history when it comes to this task and your child? Do you have to remind your child to get started? More than once? More than twice? Do you find yourself getting frustrated occasionally? More than occasionally? Reasonable expectations include not only what the child can do, but also how likely the child is to actually do it.

““ First/then can feel like a lifesaving strategy for challenging behavior! Sometimes called “Grandma’s Rule”. First/then is a simple instruction that tells your child what he/she must do first in order to do something he wants to do. “First, put on your shoes, then you may go outside” is a contingency statement. When using a contingency statement remember

- Have a positive focus
- Set reasonable time limits
- Follow through

Be prepared for your child's response; it may be “No!” If the response is “No,” it is important to be consistent and not allow the “then” to happen. This simple strategy can be a lifesaver. Let us know how it works!

““ When we’re feeling frustrated with challenging behavior it’s important to take a breath and remain calm. Teaching new skills is NOT easy when we’re already ready to flip our lid. Wait until another time – a neutral time when everyone is calm. That’s a time to patiently teach (and children are more open to learning).

““ Offering logical consequences in a calm voice can be effective to stop challenging behavior. They work because the consequence is closely tied to the behavior, and gives the child a chance to learn what happens when he doesn't behave in the way you expect him to behave. It also separates the deed from the doer, it does not shame or punish the child. It lets children make a choice. If your child is older than three, consider offering a choice and a logical consequence if the behavior continues.

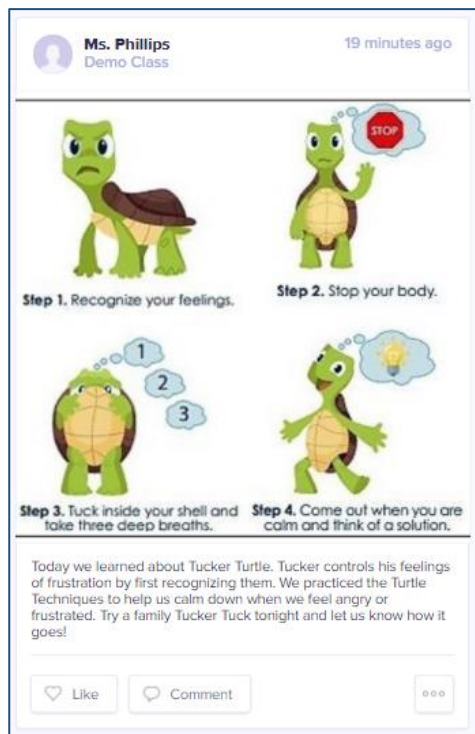
““ Physical redirection can be a handy tool for interrupting challenging behavior. An example of physical redirection is if your child is playing with water in the sink on a teetering chair, you may move them to a safer play space and engage them with other toys. Sometimes you might need to physically move your child to a safer space and reengage them in a more appropriate activity. Spend a minute or two getting their interest in something else.

““ One way to avoid power struggles when making a request during activities, is to end the conflict before it even begins. If you ask your child to put the blocks away and your child yells “no!” and keeps playing, calmly walk over and say, “It’s time to put them away. I can help. I’ll put away the blue blocks. Which color will you start with?” Stepping in right away and making it clear that “no” is not a choice, you take away the power of the refusal. It’s so much easier to be lighthearted and helpful if things don’t escalate to the point where you feel angry.



Feelings

- ☞ Sometimes serious subjects are more fun when we're silly! Grabbing a mirror and taking turns with little ones making faces – then exaggerating them for fun, is a way to talk about how little feelings can grow into big feelings and what to do with them. Let us know how it goes in the comments!
- ☞ Helping our children recognize and regulate their emotions is key to helping them understand themselves and others! Increase your child's vocabulary by expanding feelings beyond mad, sad and glad. Are you glad or are you agreeable, affectionate, cheerful, generous, peaceful, proud, relaxed, thrilled? Talk about specific situations, discuss your feelings.
- ☞ Feelings affect more than just our faces and moods. We can actually feel the 'weight lift from our shoulders', 'knot in our stomach' and 'adrenalin pumping.' Talk to your child about what feelings feel like and how you can tell one from another.
- ☞ Playing with puppets, stuffed animals and looking at pictures in books are creative ways to help your child learn and talk about feelings. Pick up a toy or book and see what they're feeling (and why!)



- ☞ Tucker Turtle controls his feelings of frustration by first recognizing them. When he notices he's angry or frustrated he: 1. Recognizes the feelings. 2. Reminds himself to stop. 3. Tucks inside his shell to take three deep breaths. 4. Comes out when he has calmed down and can think of a solution. Try a family Tucker Tuck and let us know how it goes!
- ☞ Deep breathing can be a great way to calm yourself. Spend some quiet time with your child breathing in and out slowly and deeply several times. Breath deep into your belly (maybe give a stuffed animal a ride if you're lying down), and exhale out slowly, as if you're blowing a pinwheel. Counting slowly helps too. Take a couple minutes to talk about how you felt before and after breathing. [Check out some other ideas to help calm down here!](#)

Problem Solving

☞ Children don't simply know what 'fair' is, and it's an important concept to teach. For a basic understanding of fairness, begin by taking turns playing a game. Look to opportunities in books or other activities to question and talk about if something is fair or unfair and provide positive reinforcement when you see fairness in action.

☞ Most of us don't intuitively know how to successfully solve problems. Like our children, we need to be taught to think of multiple solutions and then choose the right one. Even if you have a solution off the top of your head, it can be interesting to think of other ways to solve it too.

☞ When your child has a problem first brainstorm with them all of the possible solutions. Encourage your child to come up with as many as possible - then go through each solution - Is it safe? Is it fair? What could happen/would everybody be okay with it? Then give it a try! [Download a handy flyer!](#)

☞ When you're brainstorming with your child about ways to solve problems, consider adding these to the list: get an adult, ask nicely, ignore, say please (or please stop), share, trade, take turns? Which ones might your child try?



☞ One way to teach children about problem solving is to let them help you to solve your problems. Create opportunities - "I keep forgetting to feed the cat and it's a problem. What do you think would be a good solution?" Encourage your child to come up with as many as possible - then go through each solution - Is it safe? Is it fair? What could happen/would everybody be okay with it? Then give it a try!

☞ Whether you're aware of it or not, children are always watching you. They observe how you deal with problems as examples of ways they might solve problems themselves. Talk to your child about problem solving. When problems arise, talk about your thought processes as you work through the problem.

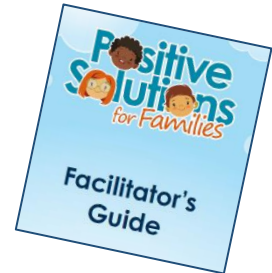
☞ Emphasize the vocabulary of problem solving. As you speak with your child, use the words problem, think, ideas, and solve. Children will begin to use them to define and describe their own thinking.

OTHER RESOURCES

Sharing information about how the strategies are used in *your* program, with specific examples is powerful. Help families support social emotional skill building by creating posts using some of the resources below.

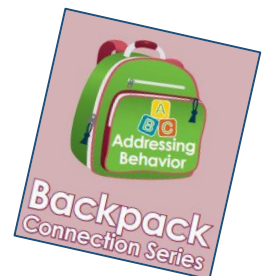
[Positive Solutions for Families \(PSF\)](#)

Family-friendly curriculum on how to promote children’s social and emotional skills, understand their problem behavior, and use positive approaches to help children learn appropriate behavior. Material is designed to give family members general information on key strategies that may be used with all children between the ages of birth to early elementary.



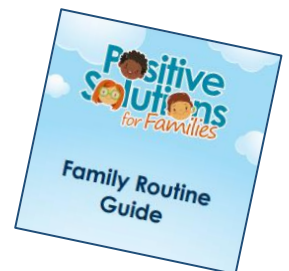
[Making Life Easier and Backpack Connection Series](#)

Both *Making Life Easier* and *Backpack Connection* are a series of tip sheets designed specifically for families and caregivers. With valuable information on how to make often challenging events easier to navigate, and even enjoyable, for both caregivers and children. Excerpts can be used to support families with challenging behaviors at home.



[The Family Routine Guide](#)

Distributed to families who complete PSF, the Family Routine Guide includes strategies for the common routines and activities that occur during a family’s week. A family can look for a particular routine, determine why the child might be having trouble with the routine and has suggested ideas to determine what will work for a family. Follow up with a question for example “What works for you?” or “What routines do find challenging?”



[Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

Share information with families about developmental milestones. What are the typical behaviors or skills seen in infants and young children as they grow and develop? Milestones are different for each age range and families welcome ideas on how to support their achievement.



For more information about engaging families visit

<http://bit.ly/iSocialNH>