

Chapter 12

Partnering With Families

What's In This Chapter?

By the end of this chapter, child care providers will be able to:

- 1 Connect with families.
- 2 Create a comfortable environment for families.
- 3 Talk to parents about solid foods when the child is developmentally ready.

Think of parents as partners in the work you do. Communicating regularly with parents and forming a strong relationship with families benefits everyone—the baby, the family, and you.

When building partnerships with parents, keep in mind that people come from a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. These differences can influence communication styles, languages spoken, food beliefs and preferences, and parenting practices. The best way to learn about these differences is through regular communication with parents.



Provider talking to a parent about their baby.

To Help Build a Successful Partnership With Parents, You Can:

Make parents feel welcome at your child care site.

- Have a “Welcome” sign at the front of your child care site in all of the languages spoken by the parents.
- Post images and pictures around your child care site of mothers from diverse backgrounds.
- Display posters or pictures of foods from various cultures throughout your child care site.

Get to know the baby's family.

- Ask parents to bring in family pictures to display throughout your child care site.
- Show interest in different holidays celebrated by families, and ask about family members near and far.

Communicate with and engage families.

- Ask regularly and often about the baby's eating habits at home. Consider using some of the parent handouts provided in this guide as part of the conversation.
- Keep a daily activity chart of the baby's activities and share it with parents.
- Use a phone app, email, or text message, with the parent's permission, to provide an update on what the baby is enjoying that day or week at your child care site.

Successful partnerships must include two-way communication. This means that both the child care provider and the parent(s) feel comfortable sharing and receiving information. This exchange of information allows both parties to talk about important topics such as breastfeeding after returning to work or school and introducing solid foods when the child is developmentally ready.

When Communicating With Parents It Is Important To:

-  **Encourage parents to talk.** Some people are more comfortable sharing than others. Ask open-ended questions such as, “Tell me what you think about...?”, “Can you tell me one or two things I can do to...”
- **Observe body language.** Body language is a form of nonverbal communication. It tells people how you feel without using words. It may include facial expressions, body movements such as crossing arms, or the way a person sits or stands. However, keep in mind that this may vary based upon cultural backgrounds. For example, many people are taught to make eye contact when speaking with people. However, for some cultures it is viewed as an insult or a sign of disrespect.
- **Be patient and open minded.** Some people may need additional time to respond to or ask questions. Always try to understand the other person’s point of view or opinion, even if you do not agree.
- **Practice active listening.** Give the person talking your full attention. Repeat what you heard to make sure you understand what the parent is saying.
- **Provide praise.** Share what is going well for the child. Highlight what the parents are doing well to support their child.



A child care provider talking to a parent in the morning at drop off.

Talk to Parents About Feeding Their Baby



Child care provider distributing "Breastfed Babies Welcome Here! A Mother's Guide" to a visiting mother.

- Let them know that babies are great at knowing how much they need to eat to be full. Parents as well as child care providers can provide the food. However, the baby will decide when, if, and how much he or she wants to eat.
- Post the food menu in the main areas in the child care site where parents can easily see it when they drop off or pick up their baby.
- Allow parents to give feedback on the food menu. This can be done by asking them at pick up or drop off times what they would like to see on the food menu.
- Use the handouts parents may have filled out on their baby's eating habits such as the "**For Parents: What Is Your Baby Eating? Let Us Know!**" handout on **page 63** and ask the parents questions to get a good understanding of any foods the baby cannot eat. This may be due to **food allergies** or **intolerances** or for religious reasons.
- Share the "For Parents" handouts in this guide with parents (see Handouts and Tables in the front of this guide for a full list). Consider ordering them from the USDA Team Nutrition website at <https://teamnutrition.usda.gov>. Or, you can print them and have them out in common areas for parents to look at when they are in the child care site.
- Review the daily activity chart with the baby's parents at pick up to talk about what foods and how much their baby ate that day.



Ask what foods they typically eat at home.

You can also consider adding a suggestion box in your child care site so that parents can provide feedback anonymously.

Hear From Mothers and Other Providers



Talking with parents often can make it easier to care for the babies at your child care site. But sometimes it can be hard to start those conversations. You may be thinking, “Do parents even want information about feeding their baby?” We spoke to child care providers, current mothers, and pregnant mothers about meals and snacks at child care. Below are some quotes from these interviews:

When asked how they feel about a poster of a breastfeeding mom displayed at a child care site, child care providers and mothers said:

“Many times, and I've heard it with my sisters, my aunts, my cousins, it's something we do not often talk about, and sometimes we're ashamed to ask. If you have something that says, ‘Tell us how we can help you,’ you already get that invitation, maybe if you have any questions. Because with our daycare providers you start having that relationship and that trust.” – Mother

“It's like we're here for you, not just you can come here and chill. We're here for you.” – Mother

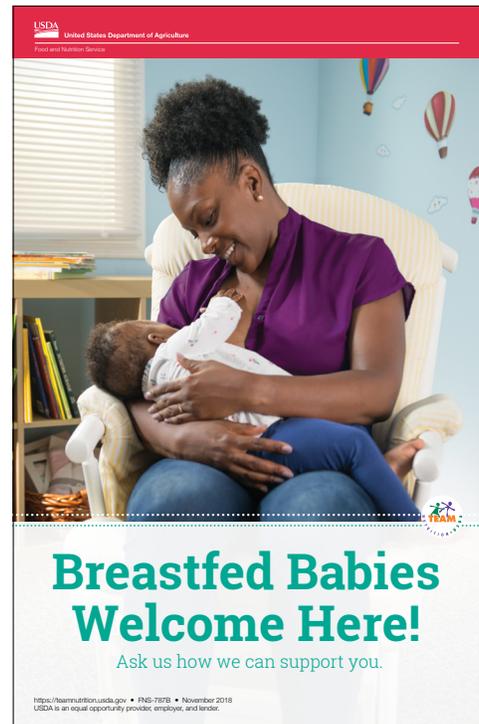
“It gives moms comfort to know that the teachers will use the mom's breastmilk.” – Director of a Child Care Center

“I like it, it lets moms know that we have a space for them to breastfeed. We support moms here who want to breastfeed.” – Director of a Child Care Center

“Moms would want to know about whether it was ok to breastfeed but might be afraid to ask. The poster would break the ice, get moms asking questions about it. Plain and simple.” – Director of a Family Child Care Home

When asked about a handout to provide information to their child care provider or receive information from mothers on their baby's eating, child care providers and mothers said:

“It's things that you may overlook when you're dropping your child off with somebody. You already have anxiety about leaving your baby in the care of somebody else, and you don't think to share all of these things that you're doing with them.” – Pregnant Mother



Display this poster to show moms that you support breastfeeding.

Handout: Breastfeeding? Tell Us About Your Breastfed Baby!

“I liked [this handout] because I was already doing some things that they mentioned there. But sometimes there is not communication, and that is very important between the mother and the provider.” – Mother

“This facilitates communication between parents and staff to avoid health issues.” – Director of a Child Care Center

When asked about a handout to provide information to parents on how to know when a baby is ready for solid foods, a child care provider said:

“A lot of parents may not know what developmental readiness is, but this breaks it down. Just because they are 4 months old, it does not mean that they are ready to eat.” – Director of a Child Care Center

Eli Is Ready for Solid Foods!

Eli began to sit up on his own with little support and with good head control. He even started reaching for food when it was near him. His child care provider, Betty, noticed this and decided she should talk to his parents about starting solid foods but she did not know how. She used the **“For Parents: Is Your Baby Ready for Solid Foods?”** handout on **page 12** to start the conversation. The parents read the handout, checked in with their baby’s health care provider, and ended up starting Eli on solid foods. As Eli tried new foods and textures, Betty checked in with his parents using the **“For Parents: What Is Your Baby Eating? Let Us Know!”** handout on **page 63** to gather information on all of the foods Eli had eaten. This helped Betty plan her menu and offer foods in child care that Eli had already tried at home.

USDA United States Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition Service

Dear Child Care Provider: Here Is Information About My Breastfed Baby!

Today's Date _____ Baby's Name (First and Last) _____

Baby's Birth Date _____ Parent's Name (First and Last) _____

When my baby is hungry, he or she (check all that apply):

- Sucks hands and other objects
- Smacks lips
- Cries
- Roots or turns his or her head and opens his or her mouth
- Bobs head or mouth against your upper body
- Other _____

My baby usually drinks _____ fluid ounces when I feed him or her.

My baby usually drinks the bottle cold or warm.

If my baby runs out of breastmilk, I would like you to:

- Use my back-up supply of frozen breastmilk.
- Call me, so I can bring more breastmilk.
- Give my baby formula.

I will bring a back-up supply of breastmilk when possible. Please store it in the refrigerator or freezer!

If you have a space for me to breastfeed at your child care site, I would be interested in using it.

Yes No

I plan to breastfeed my baby at pick-up. Please make sure my baby is ready!

Yes No

Tip
When I bring in breastmilk, I will label the bottles with my baby's full name and the date I pumped the breastmilk.

Parent's Signature: _____

A handout from *Breastfed Babies Welcome Here! A Mother's Guide*
<https://teamnutrition.usda.gov> • FNS-787A • November 2018
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23

Handout: Dear Child Care Provider: Here Is Information About My Breastfed Baby! from “Breastfed Babies Welcome Here! A Mother’s Guide.”

USDA United States Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition Service

For Parents: Is Your Baby Ready for Solid Foods?

Feeding your baby the right foods at the right time helps him or her get the nutrition needed for good health. Your baby will grow to enjoy many types and textures (smooth, lumpy, and so on) of food during his or her first year.

How Can You Tell When Your Baby Is Ready To Eat Solid Foods?
Your baby is ready to start solid foods if he or she:

- Opens his or her mouth when foods come his or her way or reaches for food.
- Sits in a high chair with good head control.
- Uses his or her tongue to move food from the spoon into his or her mouth. The tongue does not automatically push the food out of his or her mouth.

Why Does Your Baby Need To Try Solid Foods?
Starting solid foods when your child is developmentally ready is important because:

- Your baby is getting bigger and needs more calories and nutrients that can come from solid foods.
- It gives your baby a chance to try different foods so he or she will like them at an early age and will continue to eat them as he or she gets older.

Tip: Many, but not all, babies show signs that they are developmentally ready for solid foods at around 6 months.

12 | Chapter 1 • Giving Babies a Healthy Start With the CACFP

Handout: For Parents: Is Your Baby Ready for Solid Foods?

Table 12 Sharing Information With Parents

Scenario	Communication Tools
<p>Jana is pregnant with her first baby and is visiting a few child care sites. She plans on breastfeeding her baby and wants to find a child care site that will support her. Jana felt welcomed at your child care site when she saw a poster on the front door that said, “Breastfed Babies Welcome Here! Ask Us How We Can Support You!” How else can you support Jana's breastfeeding?</p>	<p>You could give Jana a copy of “Breastfed Babies Welcome Here! A Mother’s Guide.” It will help Jana get started in learning who can support her in the hospital and in the community. You can let her know that your child care site can store her bottles of breastmilk. Also, you can make sure she has a quiet, private space to breastfeed her baby at the child care site. With all of this support, Jana is more likely to breastfeed her child longer. She may also be more likely to choose your child care site since it supports her desire to breastfeed.</p>
<p>Baby Kim still needs help holding her head up and cannot sit on her own. She doesn’t seem interested when food is around her. Her parents want her to start solid foods, but you do not think Baby Kim is ready. What can you do?</p>	<p>You can use the “For Parents: Is Your Baby Ready for Solid Foods?” handout on page 12 to talk to Baby Kim’s parents. The handout offers information on how Baby Kim’s parents can tell when she is developmentally ready for solid foods. If the parents still decide to start solid foods, you should offer solid foods to the baby at your child care site.</p>
<p>Baby Talia is 2 months old and is new to your family child care home. You want to get to know Baby Talia and what her usual eating habits are throughout the day. You want to gather information from Baby Talia’s parents, but are worried you will not remember everything you need to ask them. What can you use?</p>	<p>You can use the “For Parents: Breastfeeding? Tell Us About Your Breastfed Baby!” handout on page 26. Baby Talia’s parents can share information on the handout, like how they know when their baby is hungry and how much breastmilk Baby Talia usually drinks during each feeding. This handout also lets Baby Talia’s mom know there is a space where she can breastfeed her baby at your child care site. It includes a reminder to label bottles of breastmilk with Baby Talia’s full name and the date mom pumped the breastmilk for safe storage.</p>

Baby Michael drinks infant formula at home and his mom brought it in on his first day at child care. You are happy to give Baby Michael the infant formula his mom brought in, but you also want to let her know you have some at the center. How can you have this conversation with Baby Michael's mom?

You can use the “**For Parents: Feeding Your Baby Infant Formula? Tell Us More!**” handout on **page 34**. Baby Michael's mom can fill out the handout to let you know if she would like to provide her own infant formula, breastmilk and infant formula, or if she would like you to give Baby Michael the **iron-fortified infant formula** you have at the child care center. The handout also helps you share that if mom brings in infant formula for Baby Michael, it must contain iron.

Baby Mia was just enrolled at your child care center. You know Baby Mia is eating solid foods, but aren't sure what her parents have given to her at home. How can you gather this information?

You can use the “**For Parents: What Is Your Baby Eating? Let Us Know!**” handout on **page 63**. The handout allows Baby Mia's mom to share that her baby is eating **mashed foods** and has eaten many different iron-fortified **infant cereals**, meats, vegetables, and fruits.

Baby Joey's mom breastfeeds him in the morning and at night and gives you bottles of breastmilk to feed him throughout the day. Baby Joey has only had breastmilk but is eating solid foods as well. You know that breastfed babies around 4–6 months of age need iron. You want to make sure Baby Joey is getting enough iron from solid foods. What can you do?

You can share the “**For Parents: Making Sure Your Baby Gets Enough Iron**” handout on **page 76**. The handout gives Joey's mom a list of foods that are good sources of iron. She can also see that foods that have vitamin C in them can help Baby Joey's body better absorb the iron. You can even circle foods on the menu to show Joey's mom that Joey is getting good sources of iron while in child care.

Baby Ella's parents let you know that Baby Ella does not like vegetables. Baby Ella's parents tell you not to give her any vegetables during the day. You know Baby Ella may be making faces because she is just learning new tastes and textures. What can you do to encourage Baby Ella's parents to not give up on feeding her vegetables?

You can share the “**For Parents: Varying Your Baby's Veggies**” handout on **page 88** with Baby Ella's parents. The handout lets Baby Ella's parents know that they may need to offer Ella a food more than 10 times before she might like it. They can track all of Baby Ella's happy and sad faces after trying different vegetables on the handout. They can keep offering her different vegetables until that sad face becomes a happy one.

Bite-Size Nutrition Messages



Communicate regularly with parents about what their baby is eating at home.

As a busy child care provider, sometimes you want to make sure you are getting the same message out to parents at the same time. Short nutrition messages can be used to engage parents using bite-size information. Connect with parents through your child care site's social media posts, tweets, emails, or even on your food menu! Give these a try:

- “Feeding your baby breastmilk? Ask us how we can support you!”
- “Is your baby sitting up with good head control? Does he or she reach for food? If so, it might be time for solid foods! When your baby is ready, we can offer foods at meals and snacks!”
- “Does your baby eat solid foods? Let us know what he or she eats at home—we may be able to offer the same at child care!”

- Babies can't say, “I am hungry!”, but they do let us know in other ways when they are ready to eat. Tell us how you know when your baby is hungry and we will watch for those signs at child care!”
- “Breastfeeding? We have room in our fridge for your breastmilk. Bring in bottles labeled with your baby's first and last name and the date you pumped the breastmilk. We will take care of the rest!”
- “We know we may need to offer a food more than 10 times before a baby might like it. That's why we offer many different types of vegetables, fruits, meats, beans, grains, and more at mealtime in child care. Ask us what's on the menu this week!”



Talking with parents can often make it easier to care for babies at your child care site.

In This Chapter

In this chapter, you have learned about ways to regularly communicate with parents. Partnering with families can be a great resource for you in providing the best care possible to the babies in your care!



Parents can be your partner in providing the best care possible at your child care site.



People come from a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. These differences can influence things like communication styles and food beliefs and preferences.



Display the "Breastfed Babies Welcome Here!" poster and message graphic and distribute the guide to let parents know that you support breastfeeding. The "Breastfed Babies Welcome Here" guide, poster, and message graphic can be found online at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/breastfed-babies-welcome-here>.



Use handouts within this guide to share and gather information from parents. Parent handouts from this guide can be found here: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/feeding-infants-child-and-adult-care-food-program>.



Encourage parents to share their ideas and ask questions.

Check Your Knowledge

1. Select which items are important for parents and child care providers to share with each other:

- A** Baby's food allergies or intolerances.
- B** If the baby has eaten solid foods and if so, which ones.
- C** Baby's usual eating habits when fed breastmilk, iron-fortified infant formula, and solid foods when developmentally appropriate.
- D** Food preferences (cultural or other) that are important to the family.
- E** All of the above.

2. True or False? Using phone apps, email, or text messages are great ways to update parents about their baby throughout the day or week, if you have their permission.

3. You can communicate your support of breastfeeding to mothers by:

- A** Distributing the "Breastfed Babies Welcome Here! A Mother's Guide" to parents who visit your site.
- B** Displaying the "Breastfed Babies Welcome Here!" poster and message graphic to let parents know you support breastfeeding at your child care site.
- C** Using the "**For Parents:** Breastfeeding? Tell Us About Your Breastfed Baby!" handout on **page 26** to gather information on their breastfed baby.
- D** All of the above.

ANSWERS: 1. E • 2. True • 3. D