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Partnerships in Early Childhood Education Programs

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“It takes a village.” If you have raised a child, you have likely heard this phrase a time or two. The phrase reminds parents/guardians/caregivers that they cannot (and shouldn’t have to) do it all on their own. The work of raising children feels a bit lighter when there are folks around to help, offer advice, or just listen. The same is true for early childhood education programs. Partnering with organizations or individuals can provide needed support when working with little ones and their families.



Ecological Systems Theory

Psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner developed the ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner proposed that children are influenced socially by five different “ecosystems.” These five levels start with the microsystem; the things that are the most immediate influences on the child, such as their family, school, and neighborhood. The next levels branch out to larger systems which influence the child such as government agencies, school districts, family members, and workplaces. The last of the ecosystems are made up of influences such as culture and environmental changes. The interesting part is that all of these different ecosystems interact with each other along with influencing the development of the child. The ecological systems theory further illustrates the need for early childhood education programs and community organizations to work together to support children and families. Below is a graphic from Simply Psychology that details each ecosystem.

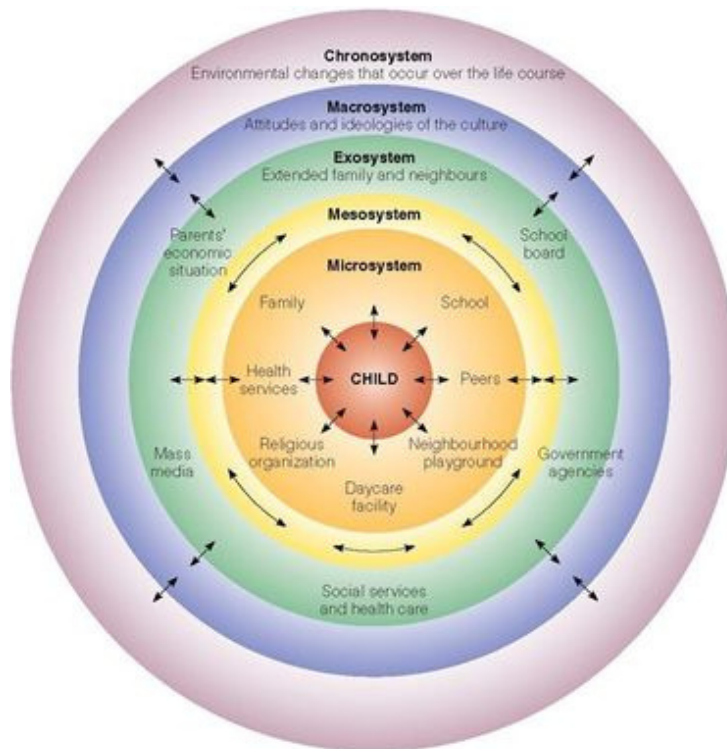


image: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory - Simply Psychology

Types of Partnerships

There are so many different options when it comes to partnerships in early childhood education. Consider the needs of the children and families in your program. In addition, research local organizations. What would be most beneficial?

School Partnerships

Developing relationships with local schools provides so many benefits. If your program accepts school-age children, this can be a way to boost enrollment. Another benefit of partnering with schools is for kindergarten readiness support. This relationship can aid programs in preparing families for the transition to kindergarten. Local schools may be able to provide resources, an opportunity to speak with a kindergarten teacher, or even a visit to the school. In addition, schools can provide general resources and information on events that may be happening in the school or district. Be sure to look into relationships with private and charter schools in addition to public schools.

Community Partnerships

Early childhood education programs are important components of any community. When we think about the WHOLE child and Bronfenbrenner's ecosystems, we can see how important it is to form partnerships with other organizations that support children and families. Take time to look into the different organizations in your community. Below are some examples of beneficial partnerships.

- Libraries- Get to know your local library! Many of them have lots of resources available for borrowing, including literacy kits. There are also lots of events to attend or to pass along to families.
- Community Centers- This is a great way to connect with people throughout the community. Community centers offer a variety of resources and support to families including, clothing and food drives, events, activities for children, and much more.
- Child and Adult Care Food Program- CACFP provides an opportunity to receive reimbursement for the food that programs serve to children each day. There are three organizations in Delaware that offer this program: Parents as Teachers, Children & Families First, and Catholic Charities.
- Early Childhood Mental Health- ECMH consultants provide social and emotional support for children via on-site training and coaching. These consultants can support educators by providing behavioral management strategies for the whole class.

No matter where your program is located, there are opportunities to form partnerships. Start small by choosing one organization to contact. Reach out to other educators to see what has been helpful for their programs. Before you know it, your program will have its own village of support!

Professional Learning Experiences

There are so many different options when it comes to partnerships in early childhood education. Consider the needs of the children and families in your program. In addition, research local organizations. What would be most beneficial?

- [Community Resources in Early Care \(Virtual, self-paced\)- DIEEC](#)
- [Teamwork Makes the Dream Work: Supporting Children's Goals in Childcare & at Home \(Virtual, live\)- DIEEC](#)
- [Authentic Community Engagement \(Virtual, live\)- DIEEC](#)

Resources

- [Building Reciprocal Relationships with Communities- NAEYC](#)
- [Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory- Simply Psychology](#)
- [Community Engagement Resources - ECLKC](#)