

COACH'S CORNER

Coach's Corner is a monthly DIEEC blog dedicated to providing fresh ideas for all early childhood education professionals.



Meghan Pallante
DIEEC quality improvement specialist
and ECE blogger

Community in Early Childhood Education

By Meghan Pallante

We often talk about the “village” that we look towards when raising children. Parenting young children is much easier with support and comradery. While having these conversations, it is important to remember that early childhood educators need a village too!

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), “The role of the community is to provide a physical, emotional, and cognitive environment conducive to development and learning for each child.” The same is true for our educators. Networking and collaborating with other educators and professionals in related fields, helps to broaden perspective and expand their knowledge.



Benefits of Collaborating Between Early Childhood Educators

Collaborating with other educators is a great way to create a learning community. For center-based programs, one thing administrators can do is to find ways to encourage educators to work together towards goals or projects within their classrooms. For family child care (FCC) programs, networking with other educators can be a great way to create the feeling of “having coworkers.” Many FCC educators deal with feelings of isolation. Building a community with other FCC educators can help them feel more connected.

Below are some examples of ways to build community with fellow educators in both FCC and center-based settings.

- **Sharing ideas**- One of the best ways to collaborate with other educators is to share ideas. These could be new activities, book recommendations, transition strategies, etc. It can be easy to get stuck in a routine; getting some “tried and true” recommendations from fellow educators can help spruce things up a bit!
- **Talking through challenges**- We all know that working with young children comes with its share of challenges. It can be helpful to chat with other educators and problem-solve together. You may encounter someone who has dealt with a similar situation and has some effective strategies. Do be careful to keep the conversation focused on problem-solving. While venting has its place, it rarely leads to a solution.
- **Professional learning groups**- It can be helpful to register for professional learning experiences with a group of fellow educators. In addition to participating in professional development together, educators can support each other with using what they have learned in their practice.

Building Community Beyond Early Childhood Educators

In addition to building community with fellow educators, it is important to connect with people and organizations outside of the early childhood education (ECE) community. Connecting with outside agencies is a great way to provide additional support for families in your program and also establish your program as an integral member of the community. Think about your city or town. Are there organizations that your program could partner with? Below are a few examples of community organizations.

- **Libraries**- Local libraries are a great resource! In addition to borrowing materials, there are many events and programs to pass along to families.
- **Community centers**- Many community centers host various events and activities which may be an opportunity for your program to get involved. In addition, if your program is interested in volunteer work, clothing/food drives, etc., local community centers could be a great partner.
- **Local schools**- Partnering with local schools is a great connection for early childhood education programs. This partnership can help ease the transition for families and children.
- **Mental health organizations**- This may seem like an unlikely partnership but it can be an important one. Many times families have connections with doctors and pediatricians for physical health. Mental health is just as important for children and families, and having resources and connections can make a world of difference if someone is struggling.
- **Human service agencies**- If your program is interested in volunteer work, clothing/food drives, etc., these types of agencies could be a great partner!
- **Other local businesses**- Consider other local businesses- stores, gyms, museums, etc. Getting to know other businesses helps to get your program name out to the community and you never know what could stem from the partnership! Some businesses could be interested in referral programs or sponsoring a program event!

Promoting Community in Early Childhood Education in Delaware

There are many ways to be in community with other early childhood educators in Delaware. Below are just a few of the state-funded opportunities that are available. Keep in mind that you can always work to build your own community of educators!

- **Communities of Practice (CoPs)**- Community of Practice members gather regularly to network with one another, share and problem-solve around common 'dilemmas,' and reflect and grow in their teaching and business practices. Visit the DIEEC [Communities of Practice for Family Child Care page](#) or the DIEEC [Communities of Practice for Leaders and Administrators page](#) for more information!
- **Child Development Associate (CDA) cohorts**- The Early Childhood Innovation Center (ECIC) offers a cohort option for educators to work together throughout the CDA process. Visit the [Early Childhood Innovation Center website](#) for more information.
- **Family Child Care Networks**- Networks are an additional, voluntary way for family child care educators and a DIEEC staff member to work together to enhance a program's quality and operations collectively. The focus of these networks is to assist FCC providers who are interested in participating in publicly sponsored programs such as state-funded programs and Early Head Start. Visit the [DIEEC Family Child Care landing page](#) for more information.
- **First State Family Child Care Conference**- This conference provides an opportunity for FCC educators to gather together to learn and grow with their colleagues through FCC specific professional learning experiences. Visit the [DIEEC Family Child Care landing page](#) for more information.

The importance of community cannot be overstated. We are social beings who thrive when lifted up and supported by others. What can you do to encourage community in your program?

Professional Learning Experiences & Resources:

- Authentic Community Engagement (Virtual; Live)-DIEEC
- School Age: Building Community with Partner Schools (Virtual; Self-paced)-DIEEC
- Community Resources in Early Care (Virtual; Self-paced)-DIEEC

These Professional Learning Experiences and more can be found on the [DIEEC calendar!](#)

Resources

[Embracing Your Community](#)– Penn State Extension: Better Kid Care

[Building Reciprocal Relationships with Communities](#)– NAEYC