

# How to Incorporate Family Support into Your Work and Why it's Important: Lessons from Family Resource Programs

## Background

Nurturing, supportive relationships with adults are essential for a child's healthy development and long-term outcomes. Family support programming aims to foster child development by enhancing the capacity of adult caregivers and fostering nurturing parent-child relationships; they are family-centred. Because of their effectiveness, these programs have been called a vaccine against future drug abuse and mental illness.

Family Resource Programs are community based not-for-profits that support families through engagement, education and empowerment. Each agency is unique, although they all share key program elements and a shared commitment to best practices in family resource programming. While many early years programs are child-centred and not explicitly focused on outcomes of parents and families, these programs may still benefit from an understanding of family support principles. Incorporating strategies to build the capacity of parents will help programs achieve even greater child development outcomes.

## Workshop Format

In this workshop Family Resource Program practitioners demonstrate practical programming strategies to create a welcoming and supportive environment for parents and families as well as children. It will include activities designed to show practitioners and early years professionals why family support is important, how it supports healthy child development, and how to incorporate family support principles into their own work.

The workshop is interactive in nature—participants will engage in several activities, each of which will be designed to illustrate an aspect of family support and simultaneously demonstrate how it can be done. A key component of this session is personal agency to explore and experience the session the way the participant chooses. Elements include:

- Personal welcome and orientation to the workshop similar to the way a program participant would be oriented to an FRP
- Choice of “stations” that reflect the open choice format of a family drop-in, and convey important information about the purpose and practice of FRPs.
- A simulated “family time” during which each activity and program component will be debriefed to provide a better understanding of its purpose and intention.

## Learning Objectives

This workshop is designed to answer the following questions:

1. **Why support families?** Participants will leave with an understanding of why supporting parents, care-givers, and families does more than simply support families, but it also fosters healthy child and adult development.
2. **How do I support families?** Participants will leave with strategies that can be incorporated in their programs and work—from daycare, to nursing, to StrongStart—to make them more supportive for families.
3. **What role do early years practitioners play in supporting reconciliation?** This workshop will provide a space for early years practitioners to consider their role in supporting reconciliation and reflect on what other early years and family support programs have done to further reconciliation.

These questions will be explored through a life course lens using the Social Determinants of Health suggested by Dr. Dennis Raphael, professor of health policy at the School of Health Policy and Management at York University. These determinants are:

**Aboriginal status** - FRPs respect the unique strengths and struggles Indigenous families may have. FRP-BC offers a Statement of Reconciliation to be used as a guide and meaningful component in an effort towards love and respect. Our desire is to develop true and lasting relationships with Indigenous peoples and organizations in the spirit of community and support for children and families everywhere.

**Gender** - We support families experiencing poverty and abuse so that all women and girls have the opportunity to achieve their full potential. We work to create safe and inclusive spaces for these women to learn about a new culture and community and to share their personal stories. We respect and embrace all gender expressions.

**Disability** - In addition to the services we provide directly to the community, we work to help reassure and inform parents about developmental milestones, and when necessary, refer families to other services in the community including childcare and children's programs, health and reproductive care, postpartum support and mental health services.

**Housing** – FRPs offer information about community resources and work with elected officials at the provincial and municipal level to communicate the need for more affordable housing.

**Early life** - Our programs provide opportunities for parents to develop appropriate ways to guide and support children's behaviour, especially with challenging behaviours. Parenting programs provide knowledge and understanding of the developmental stages of young children; the importance of the parents' role in helping their children acquire a strong foundation in language, and the importance of the parents' role in the development of their children's psychosocial and emotional development.

**Income and income distribution** –Programs are offered for little or no cost so as to remove barriers to participation. FRPs support the \$10 a day childcare initiative as part of the spectrum of family support.

**Education** - FRPs provide children with enriched learning through a play-based program that stimulates cognitive, social, physical, emotional, creative and early literacy development. Each centre provides both

an indoor and outdoor play space for young children. Activities that focus on physical literacy build gross motor skills and healthy development of babies and toddlers. Our programs support strong family relationship and help ensure that children are emotionally, physically and intellectually ready for school. As well, FRPs offer Parent Education in formal and informal (shoulder to shoulder) learning experiences.

**Race** - Family Place programs are offered in a stimulating environment that promotes, facilitates and fosters parenting confidence and skills, enhances healthy child development and builds community while respecting and reflecting the widely diverse cultural and socio-economic experiences of families.

**Employment and working conditions** - We honour the work done by the women in our sector, who provide caring professional support to the community despite significant institutionalized and gender-based pay gaps. We would like to see this work compensated at a level that reflects its importance. Gender parity is held as a high value.

**Social exclusion** - Through Family Places, participants make life- long connections. These relationships strengthen families and build community networks. Parents come to rely on one another to share child care and/or form babysitting circles; families socialize in the park and at community events and often continue these relationships after the children start school. Parenting skills are shared and volunteer participation is encouraged.

**Food insecurity** - many of the Family Place offer food programs that range from the distribution of donated food, such as bread and locally grown organic produce, to parent and child gardening and cooking programs designed to teach families about nutrition and create positive and healthy relationships with food and mealtime. Other programs include monthly multicultural lunches and community potlucks.

**Social safety net** - Each of the Five Family Places originated in the 1970s as a grassroots response to the needs of parents, primarily mothers, for a safe, child and family-friendly space to meet for mutual support and connection. As a result, parents and caregivers experience less isolation and are better able to recognize and respond to their children's individual needs and stages of development. Participants and community members are invited to participate in a variety of volunteer roles, building self-efficacy.

**Health services** - The preventative nature of our programming helps reduce the societal contributors to many issues our communities are currently facing, including the fentanyl crisis, homelessness, domestic violence, neglect and youth in care.

**Unemployment and job security** - Each Family Place has a volunteer board of directors as well as community volunteers who support our programs and fundraising activities. These opportunities provide opportunities to develop useful employment skills and community contacts.

## Facilitating Agencies

The facilitators of this workshop represent the Family Place Partnership, based in Vancouver BC, as well as the BC Association of Family Resource Programs, a not-for-profit agency that promotes and supports Family Resource Programs in BC. For more information, please contact:



### **BC Association of Family Resource Programs**

20766 80 Avenue, Langley

[www.frpbc.ca](http://www.frpbc.ca)

Phone: 778-590-0045



### **Mount Pleasant Family Centre Society**

2910 Saint George Street, Vancouver

[www.mpfamilycentre.ca](http://www.mpfamilycentre.ca)

Phone: 604-872-6757



### **Marpole Oakridge Family Place Society**

8877 Selkirk Street, Vancouver

[www.mofp.org](http://www.mofp.org)

Phone: 604-263-1405



### **East Side Family Place**

1655 William Street, Vancouver

[www.eastsidefamilyplace.org](http://www.eastsidefamilyplace.org)

Phone: 604-255-9841



### **South Vancouver Family Place**

7710 Nanaimo Street, Vancouver

[www.southvancouverfamilyplace.org](http://www.southvancouverfamilyplace.org)

Phone: 604-325-5213



### **West Side Family Place**

2819 West 11th Avenue, Vancouver

[www.westsidefamilyplace.com](http://www.westsidefamilyplace.com)

Phone: 604-738-2819

## **Suggested Resources**

### **BC Association of Family Resource Programs Statement of Reconciliation:**

[http://www.frpbc.ca/media/uploads/files/FRP-BC\\_Statement\\_of\\_Reconciliation.pdf](http://www.frpbc.ca/media/uploads/files/FRP-BC_Statement_of_Reconciliation.pdf)

**Free 30-Hour Brain Story Certification:** <https://www.albertafamilywellness.org/training>

**Cultural competency video modules for Early Childhood Educators** created by the Musqueam Nation, BC Aboriginal Child Care Society, City of Vancouver, Collingwood Neighbourhood House, and other community partners:

<http://www.cnh.bc.ca/childcare/indigenous-cultural-competency/>

### **The Future of Early Childhood Education:**

<https://vimeo.com/219879682/216704960>

**Balancing Adverse Childhood (ACEs) with Hope: New Insights into the Role of Positive Experience on Child and Family Development:**

<https://www.cssp.org/publications/documents/Balancing-ACEs-with-HOPE-FINAL.pdf>

**FRP Map of BC (directory):** <http://www.frpbc.ca/dir/>

**Heart Mind Online:** <https://heartmindonline.org/>

**Dalai Lama Centre Heart Mind Challenge**

<http://dalailamacentre.org/heart-mind-challenge-0>

**Science to Policy and Practice – Three Principles to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families**

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/three-early-childhood-development-principles-improve-child-family-outcomes/>

**Theory of Unconditional Positive Regard, into practice at FRPs:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tkkL9w2pw8>

**Video: A Day in the Life at a Family Resource Program:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpvXQanI9OY>

**FRP-BC: Promising Practices and other Resources:**

<http://www.frpbc.ca/resources/>

**Parenting Matters: Supporting Parents of Children Ages 0-8:**

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK402024/>

**Video-Building Adult Capabilities to Improve Child Outcomes: A Theory of Change:**

<https://video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?fr=yhs-mozilla-102&hsimp=yhs-102&hspart=mozilla&p=a+theory+of+change+video#id=1&vid=4015029077f99d16ef98efa9cdea70ae&action=view>

**Zero to Three:** <https://www.zerotothree.org/>

**Center for the Study of Social Policy, Strengthening Families:**

<https://www.cssp.org/young-children-their-families/strengtheningfamilies>

**Five protective factors framework:**

<https://www.cssp.org/reform/strengtheningfamilies/2015/StrengtheningFamilies101.pdf>

**Book: When Baby Comes Home, Dr. Paul Roumeliotis:**

<http://www.drpaul.com/babycomeshome.php>



