Connecting with Parents

A **reflective tool**
to strengthen the partnership
between parents and ECEC settings,
with consideration
for parents of children
with special support needs

Co-funded by
the European Union

Connecting with parents was developed as part of a three years during Erasmus+ Be-In project (2022-2025), with partners from Iceland, Portugal and Belgium, under coordination of VBJK, Centre for Innovations in the Early Years. The tool was translated and adapted by the international Be-In partners in Flemish, Icelandic and Portuguese. Each adaptation brought small nuances, to reflect the reality and needs of each country.

MORE INFORMATION

www.vbjk.be/en/project/be-in

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Connecting with parents

A manual

The aim of this tool is to establish and maintain a relationship of trust with parents, by strengthening ECEC educators' skills and confidence.

Both research and practice demonstrate the importance for ECEC educators to reach out and involve parents in co-educating children. This partnership is all the more important for parents of a child with special needs. After all, the educator is the parent's ally, through daily contact with them and through the attachment relationship they develop with the child. Yet, educators and parents face challenges in translating this vision into small daily actions.

We know that there is no one-size-fits-all answer to the question: how do you build a partnership with parents? Nor is there a one-size-fits-all answer to how, as a coach, you can support an educator or the whole team in a meaningful way. However following aspects can help in this process: a series of small steps, having simple questions in our mind, small details in our attitude, a good preparation for a conversation, thinking about the way we introduce ourselves and ask questions. This is what the *Connecting with parents* tool aims to explore.

Experienced coaches know how to stimulate and deepen the reflections of educators on inclusive work and partnership with parents. But they also experience how helpful it can be to have a manual with small steps, simple reflection questions, tips and tools. It gives them extra support to accompany the educators and the ECEC teams in their journey.

As such, *Connecting with parents* is a tool for pedagogical supporters, coordinators and coaches who want to reflect and take action together with ECEC educators in building a strong partnership with parents in inclusive early years settings.

The development of the tool

From distance to proximity

During and shortly after the Corona pandemic, two inclusion coaches from Belgium, Hilde and Arlette, received many requests from ECEC centres for support in communicating with parents. They sketched then the basis of this reflection tool to stimulate and reconstruct a relationship between educators and parents, even in a context of social distancing. They quickly noticed many other organisations, both in Belgium and in other countries, were struggling with the same post-pandemic challenges and needs to bring back proximity in the contact with parents. In 2021-22, together with Icelandic and Portuguese partners, the Be-In international consortium was formed, that evolved into a three-year Erasmus+ KA2 project, with financial support from the European Commission. This project allowed us to further develop and deepen the tool, based on concrete experiences from each partner.

From a targeted to a universal approach

At first, the questions and needs were more specifically focused on the partnership with parents of children with special needs. Those often bring more situations that ask for more nuances and a careful approach. However, in the development process of the tool, it became quickly visible that the actions and questions are useful for all parents, as the fundaments of good quality alliances between educators and parents are in essence the same.

As such, it was decided to develop a universal tool for all children and parents instead of a targeted approach. The tool aims therefore to understand the needs of all children and connect with all parents, although maintaining a special attention to parents who have a child with special needs.

From a regional to an international tool

Belgium produced a first version of the tool, in Dutch, tailored to the reality in the Flemish Community of Belgium. It was then translated into English, for each Be-In partner country to work further on their own version. In each country, Be-In partners reflected on which dimensions were essential in their context. They selected the reflection frames, added specific cards when necessary and made links to local instruments. Those adaptations and suggestions were brought back into the international English version of the tool, and in each regional version. This version can be used for further translations and adaptations.

The content of the tool

28 cards in 6 dimensions

	**dimension 1** Building a relationship of trust	9 CARDS
	**dimension 2** A positive image of the child	3 CARDS
	**dimension 3** Shared care through an alliance with parents	4 CARDS
	**dimension 4** Connecting parents with each other	3 CARDS
	**dimension 5** Transition to school and out-of-school care	2 CARDS
	**dimension 6** Accessible communication with parents	6 CARDS

A well-considered sequence

The dimensions and cards follow a well-considered sequence: connecting with parents starts with the very first contact with the team. In the familiarisation period, you are building the foundation for the relationship, which continues to grow through daily contacts. By taking a focused and positive look at the individual child and sharing this with the parent, you express that you care for their child and that he or she matters and belongs in the group and in society. Together with the parent, you find out how the child can feel good and thus have maximal developing opportunities. In this way, we include the parents as valuable resources and experts to ensure the child's well-being and involvement. You will find these steps on each card of the first dimension 'Building a relationship of trust'. The first steps into an ECEC can be slightly different according to the context and as such, some cards may be added, of being brought together.

The second dimension focuses on observing the child from a positive perspective, often with the help of an observation instrument to map, together with the parent, a child's portrait.

This builds further up towards shared care for a child, explained in the third dimension of the tool. An alliance between educators and parents allows you as a professional to have conversations with parents that come from the heart.

In the fourth dimension, we focus on the support we can offer parents in building a social network and a sense of belonging. In the fifth dimension, we work on a warm transition to school and after-school care so that the child and parents can continue their path with confidence. Those two dimensions care for continuity in the trusting relationship.

The final dimension contributes to enabling accessible conversations with a wide diversity of families, including a focus on multilingual families. The cards from the sixth dimension can contribute to each step in this tool. Keep this in mind!

The structure of the tool

The tool consists of different cards, which can be selected and used in a flexible way, according to the context. Each card shares the same template, with four sections:

- **A quote**
  from a parent, educator, coordinator,... as an eye-opener and/or illustration of the different dimensions
- **Reflect**
  As a coach, you first get the person(s) involved in thinking for themselves. Here you will find a number of possible reflection questions to help you clarify the situation or initial question and start the search together, without quickly reaching for ready-made answers.
- **Inspire**
  ideas, tips and examples of practices to pick from
- **What else could be helpful?**
  The aim of this section is to first look at the tools the team is already using in its organisation. *Connecting with parents* builds on existing tools and methodologies. Some cards refer to specific examples (for example, a conversation guideline developed by Be-In partner De Bron, from Stad Gent in Belgium, a letter template for parents, developed by Suðaborg, in Iceland), or to give general ideas of instruments which you can use for support as coach (for example, the observation instrument to map a child's portrait used in your organisation).

All examples and links to partners' websites are quickly accessible with one click via the pdf version of the tool, but also collected on one website:

www.vbjk.be/en/project/BE-IN

Getting started with the tool

There are several possible paths (entry points) to get started with the tool:

- **From a case or situation presented by an educator**
  The pedagogical coach supports an ECEC educator in communication with parents, towards a better understanding of a child and/or finding a better inclusive approach for a child.
- **To support connection with all parents, increasing parent involvement and partnership with parents**
  To refine the vision on partnership with parents and to choose and introduce methodologies/tools to implement this vision in practice.
- **To complement a training**
  Deploying the tool to deepen partnership with parents and inclusion together with the team, to create ownership of the vision and approach in the team.
- **In professional learning communities**
  Using reflection questions of selected cards to exchange experiences as the starting point for discussions.

Together with the entire team

Of course, guidance in building a partnership with parents can't be separated from a strong team vision on partnership with parents and inclusion. During the Be-In project, various other tools and methodologies were also used to arrive at a supported vision and action together with the team. You can find these on the Be-In website,together with the inspiring stories of all Be-In partners:

www.vbjk.be/en/project/BE-IN

A well-considered lexicon

The vocabulary list in this manual clarifies the choices that were made in carefully choosing the words. Words can have a huge impact on how parents and ECEC educators are perceived. When adapting *Connecting with parents* in another context, this lexicon should be revised.

Care

The emotional and psychical care representing attention, being committed, and being connected in a caring community.

Child

Stands for boy/girl - 'the'.

Child's portrait

Various observations and follow-up systems can be used to describe the child's development in various domains, as well as his/her experience in the ECEC centre. Selected instrument(s) depends on the country, the region and on the setting itself. In *Connection with parents*, we decide to use the general term child's portrait to refer to an instrument/document that guides and brings together all observation of the child. It holds , for example, 'child follow-up system', 'child monitoring portfolio', 'child's profile'. The term 'portrait' emphasises the positive description of a child, in a holistic way, that prevails in this tool.

Concern

A worried feeling you have and want to share with others.

Conversation guidelines

A template, with steps and suggested questions to guide a verbal exchange, interview, dialogue or discussion. The term 'conversation' was chosen to highlight the reciprocity of the exchange with parents and the positive tone (because in some languages, discussion is associated with more tense exchanges).

Coordinator

Any person who provides leadership in an ECEC setting. It refers to leader, ECEC director, or pedagogical supervisor .

ECEC centre

Refer to all early childhood education and care (ECEC) services for children 0-6 years: family and group care, care for babies and toddlers, out-of-school care and all basic early childhood services, including preschool.

Educator (m/f/x)

Any person in an ECEC centre who works directly with the children and thus has an attachment relationship with the child and a trust relationship with the parents. In some contexts, it may include teachers, childcare workers, or assistants, irrespective of their initial qualification. We consider that all ECEC educators may (and should) have contact with parents and contribute to the partnership with them. As such, they can benefit from coaching and support.

Familiarisation

The first period of a child when entering an ECEC centre. The term 'familiarisation' derives from the French word and was selected to describe the reciprocity and gradualness of the process, more than the term 'settling in', often used.

Inclusion

To embrace, to include. Inclusion is the process in which both the person and the environment adapt together and co-construct an evolving community. This in contrary to assimilation (the 'special' child becomes like the dominant others) or integration (the 'special' child adjusts to the dominant environment without questioning the beliefs or practices of the environment).

Inclusion coach

Any person who provides support to childcare facilities in terms of achieving inclusive childcare.

Inclusive network

All individuals and organisations who work together to provide professional support to a child and family (for example, in-home resources, healthcare specialist, family doctor …)

Parents

By parents we mean a father, a mother, a single parent, two fathers, two mothers, foster parents and any other person who assumes the parental role.

Pedagogical coach

Any person who provides pedagogical support and guidance in ECEC settings.

Special needs

Each child has unique needs for support, but some children have extra support needs, in the context of (dis)abilities. By 'special' we mean that additional information, experience, time and resources may be needed to properly understand and/or meet the child's needs and allow inclusion and participation. In other languages such as Dutch and French, the term 'specific support needs' is preferred.

Connecting with Parents

DIMENSION 1

Building a relationship of trust

Co-funded by the European Union

1.1 First impression

1.2 First meeting

1.3 Guided tour of the centre

1.4 Mutual familiarisation process (parents – child - ECEC center)

1.5 Mutual familiarisation process (child - ECEC center)

1.6 Gradual entry in the ECEC center

1.7 Looking back on the first experiences in the ECEC centre

1.8 Arrival and departure moments

1.9 Restoring a clouded relationship with the parents

1.1
First impression

'Parents sometimes ring the doorbell directly. We are happy to help them, make time for a chat and show them around the building. In that way they can already feel the atmosphere. (...) We want to give parents a warm welcome right from the start, even though we know we may not have a place for their child. But it is important for parents to know that we will continue the search together.'

- Tineke, coordinator

REFLECT

- How do you leave a good first impression on new parents?
- How do you welcome (potential) new parents into your ECEC centre?
- Which atmosphere can be felt in the ECEC centre?
- In which way do you answer the phone?
- Are there any possible cultural sensitivities to consider when meeting parents?
- At what times are you/is the ECEC centre available?

INSPIRE

- Think about the image of your ECEC centre: how well-known are you, what do parents know before they apply (through poster, flyer, local newspapers, the web)?
- Do you take the time to answer with a customised mail or do you call parents? Be aware that a standard reply is something you can recognise immediately.
- Help ensure a user-friendly registration system: do parents know enough about your ECEC centre to purposefully choose you? Are the free places up to date? What do you do for parents who are less digitally literate?
- Greet parents (even if they are still sitting/standing while waiting to speak to you).
- Invite parents to enter, make the time and the space to listen to them.
- Smile.
- Take care of your (telephone) welcome: answer in a cheerful tone, show a willingness to listen and to help people.
- Bear in mind that there are certain cultural sensitivities which should be acknowledged (for example shaking hands or eye contact is not always appreciated).

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- all Cards of Dimension 6 - Accessibility in conversation with parents, in particular Card 6.2 - An accessible attitude;
- ...

1.2
First meeting

'It made us very happy to hear that the other children, the 'normally developing' children, also benefit from our son's care. That not only the burden and limitations were articulated, but also the benefits.'

- Leen, mother

REFLECT

- How would you like to be welcomed as a parent yourself?
- What vision and information do you want the parents to receive during this first meeting?
- What vision would you like to convey to parents of a child with special needs?
- How do you ensure that parents feel that you are primarily interested in their child's individuality (or uniqueness)?
- How do you ensure that parents see your interest in their own experience of bringing their child to their centre?
- In which way do you ask parents about their child's needs and strengths?
- How do you deal with parents' questions which you cannot immediately give a clear-cut answer to?
- How often do you say 'yes but ...' in a conversation with parents?
- If you have the impression that parents do not tell you everything (yet) at the first meeting, how do you deal with that?

INSPIRE

- Make time and space for this first conversation with parents.
- Listen first to parents' expectations regarding the ECEC centre (for example, attendance plan) and then discuss with them about whether and how you can meet those expectations.
- Let the parents tell you how they have experienced parenthood so far and how they got in touch with you as an ECEC centre.
- Ask parents how they have experienced raising their child and how they meet (special) care needs at home. Ask further questions to show that you are actively listening.
- Listen to parents' concerns. Take every concern seriously. Do not try to reassure the parents by minimising their concerns by telling them that ‘everything will be fine’.
- Give parents examples of what an average day look like in your centre.
- Be honest if, for certain support needs, you are not yet certain of how to meet them. Communicate to parents that the 'search for ...' will be a shared experience with them, in which you are ready to invest.
- Explain and promote the importance of the familiarisation period with the parents already, as well as the regular meeting moments that will shape the partnership between the parents and the ECEC centre.
- Adopt the words/terms parents use to name their child's (special) needs.
- Try replacing 'yes but...' with 'yes and...' in your communication.
- Communicate to parents that your ECEC centre is open-minded towards children with special needs (involved educator, inclusive vision of ECEC ...) and is willing to work with the parents' inclusive network.

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- conversation guidelines for a first meeting;
- the information sheet from your centre;
- ...

1.3
Guided tour of the centre

'Very warm though, they really did listen to our story and also really tried to find an appropriate approach. The welcome was definitely good.'

- Sabine, mother

REFLECT

- What would you appreciate being shown or told during the guided tour as a child or parent?
- What's important to point out to parents during the tour?
- In what way do you let parents know that you will pay sufficient attention to their child?
- Multilingual parents or parents in a vulnerable situation bring a family ally with them. How do you react to this?
- People tend to quickly form an image of someone when you see them for the first time. How do you cope with this?
- How do you deal with differences in values and norms between the ECEC centre, families and yourself?
- How do you notice whether parents are at ease?
- How do you illustrate most accurately to parents how your ECEC centre operates?
- At what time of the day, do parents have the best glimpse of the daily routines and activities in the centre?

INSPIRE

- Invite parents for a tour in person. Suggest bringing an ally or confidant. Always address the parents.
- Introduce yourself.
- Be open-minded towards what parents say.
- Be genuinely curious about:
  - the child (for example, by asking about the choice of their first name)
  - different aspects of their lifestyle (different home culture, neighborhood ...)
  - the perception of the parents and the child (how do they feel about this moment?)
- Ask what parents expect of an ECEC centre. Be aware that partners may think differently about this. That is okay.
- Try to hear if the parents have any concerns.
- Each person has their own values and norms. Be aware of this and respect any differences that might be present.
- Be open to other ideas about child upbringing and try to compromise on them.
- Pay attention to the parents' body language and other non-verbal cues. Observe and name what you see/feel/hear.
- Introduce child, parents and staff to each other during the tour. This builds trust.
- Use language that is accessible and easy understandable. Avoid technical jargon.
- Show and tell parents about the daily routines and activities at the centre (this is the best visual support), so: organise the tour during opening hours.
- At the end of the tour, schedule the familiarisation moments:
  - Emphasise the importance of familiarisation for the parent-child-educator triangle.
  - Talk about what parents should bring during those familiarisation moments (for example, nappy, midday meal, fruit puree, cuddly toy, sleeping bag, dummy...).
- Communicate that after 2 months you will sit together again to look back and reflect on the first steps of the transition process and that it will be an opportunity to listen to whether the parents' expectations were met.

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- conversation guidelines for registration/intake;
- the information sheet from your centre;
- a written agreement and by-laws;
- a familiarisation bundle;
- ...

1.4
Mutual familiarisation process (parents – child - ECEC centre)

'Getting familiar and at ease is very important to me, because a childcare centre is a second home. My daughter is there as much as at home. I could demonstrate them how I rock my child to sleep at home, how I comfort her and how I feed her. They took that into account as well.'

- Fatma, mother

REFLECT

- How do you greet parents and their child?
- How would you like to be welcomed yourself?
- How do you make sure the parents feel comfortable during the familiarisation moment?
- At what time do you let the familiarisation moment take place? Why do you prefer that moment?
- When parents have a different perspective on parenting than you, how do you react?
- How do you show parents that you are listening to them and that you want to learn from them?
- How do you make parents feel involved during the familiarisation process?
- How do you approach and express on the way parents are interacting with their child?

INSPIRE

- Welcome the parents and the child.
- Provide a climate where the child and parent are comfortable and feel safe. Reassure parents: 'Please sit down, make yourself comfortable'. Let them know a little bit about yourself. Take your time.
- Introduce parents and child to everyone present in the centre (children, staff, parents).
- Describe to the parents what the children and ECEC educators are doing (time of day, activity or free play, do the children get to choose ...). This already offers a glimpse into the pedagogical vision of your centre.
- Observe what the parents are focused on and identify where they may have questions.
- Parents and their children found themselves already on a long journey together. Ask parents what you need to know about the child to best provide the support they need. Give the following impression 'I want to learn from you' in relation to:
  - feeding, sleeping, playing, interests, feelings, interaction with other people, comforting, language, other support needs.
  - expectations towards the centre.
  - any other concern. Provide the necessary time for parents' questions.
- Actively listen to what parents are saying.
- Communicate as to how you will try to meet the child's support needs to the best of your abilities.
- Observe the interaction between child and parents. Respond accordingly (for example, you notice that the child explores but still has a good sense of where the parents are).
- Be aware of your own values and norms and show respect for other people's views.
- Communicate to parents what the arrival and departure times of the centre are.
- Suggest how you will handle further communication. Listen if this corresponds to what the parents need.
- Together, review the further familiarisation process:
  - Invite parents for at least two familiarisation sessions on different parts of the day (so they get to know some daily routines).
  - Offer the parents the chance to schedule additional familiarisation moments.
  - After the first weeks/months, schedule a time to reflect together about the first steps of the child in the ECEC centre.

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- a familiarisation bundle and conversation guidelines for a discussion about the familiarisation process;
- the information sheet from your centre and a written agreement;
- ...

1.5
Mutual familiarisation process
(child - ECEC centre)

''Starting with short childcare moments (without parents present) is good for parents and child. It means a warm and gradual transition from home to childcare. It is an initial exercise in 'letting go'.''

- Delphine, coordinator



REFLECT

- As a parent, how would you like to be received after this first moment of ‘letting your child go’?
- What do you tell parents after the child's first moments in the group?
- How do you encourage parents to express their questions and concerns?
- Why is it important to know how the parents’ experience 'letting go'? How would you approach the topic?

INSPIRE

- Make sure the educator who did the intake and guided tour with the parents is present.
- Provide enough time to engage in dialogue.
- Send a message or a photo to the parents during the first moment without the parents to reassure them. You can also invite the parents to give you a call.
- Ask how the parents experienced this first moment of 'letting go' of their child.
- Be honest about what the first moment has been like for the child:
  - What did you observe?
  - What happened in the group, in the meantime?
  - Did you undertake any action?
  - What was the child's reaction?
- Encourage parents to express their own questions and concerns. Give them time to verbalise their comments.
- Maybe you have questions of your own after this moment. Together, you should be able to find a solution.
- Agree on the next steps of this transition phase: when will the child visit again for a familiarisation moment? Or when does attendance start according to the agreed attendance plan?

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- the information sheet of your centre;
- a written agreement;
- a communication booklet;
- ...

1.6
Gradual entry in the ECEC centre

'The first goodbye was difficult. After the first week, they saw that I needed more and I stayed for a second week. It was nice that they followed my rhythm. I can still stay for half an hour now. I really feel welcome.'

- Larissa, mother

REFLECT

- To what do you pay particular attention during the first arrival and departure moments of children and parents?
- Do parents enter the group of their child? How does it feel for you? For your colleagues?
- What would you like to know from parents when they hand over the child to you?
- How do you let the child say goodbye to their parents?
- What do you think parents would like to know when they come to pick up their child?
- What do you want to tell parents yourself at pick-up?
- How do you react to (critical) questions and commentary from parents?
- How do you ensure that critical information is being transferred to the parents when someone else comes to pick up the child?

INSPIRE

- Invite parents to take a look in the group.
- Greet the child and the parents on arrival and say goodbye when they leave.
- Ask if there are any important facts you should be aware of.
  - An older child can also respond to your questions him- or herself
  - Did you forget to ask or say something that is important anyway? Give the parents a call.
- Invite parents to call the group during the day if they feel the need to or feel like it is necessary.
- Talk about the daily plans and give a brief summary of how the day went:
  - What did you guys do? What were you playing with?
  - How did the child react?
  - What went well? What went less well?
- Open dialogue with the parents in relation to:
  - How is the child behaving at home?
  - What kind of approach do they use at home?
  - What can we do differently in the centre?
- Provide visual materials of the first days in the centre, with photos or videos. Discuss with parents beforehand whether they would appreciate this.
- Schedule some extra time for the parents and the child during the pick-up moment.
- Ask how the parents experienced the first day(s) at the ECEC centre.
- Encourage parents to raise questions and concerns. Allow time for them to verbalise their experiences.
- Questions or concerns from parents are an opportunity. If you feel like certain questions have not yet been fully clarified, be sure to address them later on again.
- Always remain friendly and answer the parents' questions and concerns.

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- a communication booklet;
- ...

1.7
Looking back on the first experiences in the ECEC centre

'What's it called? The satisfaction interview? Oh, for myself I called it a kind of mid-term review (laughs). I think that's a good idea. Not with the pedagogical coach, but with the childcare worker. She knows my child best.'

- Gaby, mother

REFLECT

- Imagine being a parent, would you appreciate being able to look back at your experience in the ECEC centre in a conversation a few months after the start of it? Why?
- What would you want to talk about?
- For whom can it be beneficial to have this conversation a few months after the child's entry in the ECEC centre?
- Who is in the best position in the ECEC centre, to initiate this conversation with parents?
- What type of questions do you ask? What would you like to know from the parents?
- How do you deal with suggestions that are being given by the parents during this conversation?
- How do you communicate with multilingual parents who are still learning the official(s) language(s) of the centre?

INSPIRE

- The person who knows the child the best in the ECEC centre (for example, the educator) should have a conversation with parents in order to look back on the first experiences of the child.
- The purpose of this conversation is to reflect together and listen to whether the parents' expectations were met:
  - How did they and the child experience the ECEC centre?
  - Are agreements made during familiarisation moments adequately met?
  - How do they and the child feel about the level of interaction and welcoming? Take your time to have this conversation; schedule it. See if it can be done outside the children's group.
- Check whether parents and team are well attuned to each other. Try to get a good view of this, ask around. Examples are important to get a good understanding of what parents mean.
- Use conversation guidelines to support this discussion.
- In preparation, you can complete a child's portrait, from your observation of their wellbeing and involvement in the group. Ask if the parents recognise what you observed.
- Actively try to incorporate parents' suggestions, as this strengthens mutual trust.
- Repeat to parents that they can always ask you questions or address concerns, as that reinforces the trust.

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- conversation guidelines to have a discussion on the first experiences of the child and the parents in the ECEC centre;
- a familiarisation bundle;
- a completed child's portrait (with space for what parents may add);
- ...

1.8
Arrival and departure moments

'In the morning, I had told Martine that both of us (my child and I) had had a rough night and that it would be an exciting day for me as a result. In the evening at pick-up, Rita asked me if I had survived the day and that Mila had done extremely well. 'Wow, how well these two educators communicate with each other!'

- Lien, mother

REFLECT

- What can you achieve with warm-hearted arrival and departure moments?
- What is important to know from the parents when a child enters the room?
- What do you think is important to share with parents when they pick up the child?
- How do parents know: 'You really saw my child today"?
- How do you ensure that every parent gets to hear something special about their child every day?
- How do you communicate about something tricky or more difficult?

INSPIRE

- Invite parents proactively to enter the room. Take your time.
- Ask if there is any important information to know (e.g. did the child sleep well, how was the holiday or staying with grandma, did the child tell you anything about the previous day, who is coming to pick up the child, ...). Older children can also inform you on some of these aspects.
- Watch consciously how the parents enter the room. Ask how they are doing.
- Greet the child on arrival and say goodbye to the child when they leave.
  - The conversation is more than talking about how the day went. The emphasis here is more on the specifics: 'I really saw your child today'.
    Did you notice anything special during the time they were playing, a talent, a particular interest?
  - What went well? What went less well? How did you notice?
  - What was the child's reaction?
- Provide some quality time with each child during the day and talk about those moments with parents.
- Use visual material from the centre: a drawing or craft, photos, a video.
- Ask how the child is at home after having spent a day in the group (for example, what else do/did they do together?).
- Encourage parents to raise questions and concerns.
- Do not take questions or comments from parents as criticism, but as an opportunity to adjust your daily routine.
- Make sure each parent is being told something special about their child every day. With the very early bringers and late collectors think of a communication system between the early/late colleagues.

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- a bulletboard: birthdays, activities, menu, ...;
- a communication booklet;
- ...

1.9
Restoring a clouded relationship with the parents

'You get to know people well when you see how they react to a problem. My eldest took an unfortunate fall in the ECEC centre. I was in shock, how could that be? I was angry and lost all confidence. Children need to be safe, that is the first requirement for me. But after that initial anger, it ended up being a positive experience. They told me honestly what happened, and so the building of the trust relationship could begin again. That open, transparent communication ultimately gave me more trust than before. Even though it was done in broken English and in sign language, we could see that they were taking things seriously.'

- Simon, father

REFLECT

- How do you think parents feel when you are not on the same wavelength?
- What behaviour do you appreciate yourself when a relationship is clouded?
- How do you deal with the emotions of parents and yourself when having a difficult conversation?
- Who can break through a feeling of reluctance in a clouded relationship with parents?
- Is it always clear what parents wish to communicate to you during a difficult conversation? How do you find out what they really want to say?
- Is it necessary to apologise or to get apologies?
- How can you find out what went wrong? Do the parents and you share a similar view on the cause(s)?

INSPIRE

- Greet the child and parents anytime, anywhere.
- Continue to speak kindly to parents.
- Keep taking the initiative to speak to parents yourself. Put aside your own reluctance. Be available.
- Make time and space for a formal conversation.
- Invite the parents at an appropriate time for them. Briefly mention the reason for the conversation.
- Encourage the parent(s) to formulate their own reflections. Give them time.
- Make clear agreements with parents about the approach from now on and possible feedback.
- Show consideration for the parents' emotions.
- Be yourself, genuine and sincere.
- Name your own feelings/frustration in a calm manner, to show your involvement and care.
- Actively listen to what parents are really trying to tell you: is there an underlying message in what they are sharing with you?
- Find solutions together in order to avoid this situation in the future.

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- models/methodologies on ‘connecting communication’;
- conversation guidelines for an in-depth discussion;
- ...

Connecting with Parents

DIMENSION 2

A positive image of the child

Co-funded by the European Union

2.1 Starting from a positive image of the child

2.2 Formulating observations in a positive manner

2.3 Discussing with colleagues

2.1 Starting from a positive image of the child

'By discussing the child's experience in ECEC [here with the help of a tool that maps wellbeing and involvement], you show parents how you are trying to discover and understand their child. You give value to what the child can already do.'

- Thalia, ECEC educator

REFLECT

- Imagine you are a parent, how does it feel when someone else says positive things about your child? Moreover, how does it feel when this someone checks with you if you have a similar perception?
- How can you observe if a child is comfortable in the ECEC centre? How do you see if a child is highly involved in play and routines in the centre?
- How can you make sure you have an overall picture of the child?
- How do the parents experience the observations you share? Is it recognisable to them or not?
- Which instrument can you use to make children's portrait in your organisation? In which way does it map the child's whole experience in the centre?
- How regularly do you observe individual children?
- How do you adopt a child's perspective?

INSPIRE

- Try to put yourself in the shoes of the child. Fully imagine how the child sees and experiences the world.
- Start from wellbeing and involvement. Wellbeing concerns feeling good in your skin; involvement concerns being absorbed and preoccupied with the environment, materials and games.
- Your goal is to develop a complete and positive portrait of the child:
  - Look holistically: according to the different experiential and developmental domains (depending on the instrument you use to make the child's portrait).
  - Look positively: look for the child's strengths, interests and abilities. Remember that certain behaviours also have good sides and that children also have strengths in domains where they have special needs.
- Observe purposefully and attentively each child at different times of the day and week. Also try to capture the moments when the child has their highest wellbeing and involvement level. In which moments? In which conditions?
- Be aware of your own perception and perspective. The more people bring in their perspectives, the more complete portrait you will have.
- Make your observations as concrete and descriptive as possible (where, when, how, with whom, ...).
- Check the context of the observation moments aiming to give children a real voice. Older children can be actively involved (conversation, drawing).

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- an instrument to document and map a child's portrait (see for example the SICS child's portrait for group and family care 0 to 3 and all accompanying manuals);
- the pedagogical framework or curriculum you refer to in your centre;
- ...

2.2
Formulating observations in a positive manner

'My daughter likes to move around and explore, the educator said. That made me laugh, because I too have to keep a constant eye on her or she will run away. I was glad they formulated her 'running away behaviour' in such a powerful way.'

- Tess, mother

REFLECT

- Who preferably does the observation (and completes the child's portrait) and why?
- How do you formulate what you have observed?
- Imagine being a parent. How do you like professionals to talk about your child?
- Does the connection between the observed behaviour and the effect on wellbeing become clearer once it is written down?
- Why is it important to also describe the context in which you have observed the child?
- What is the danger in narrowing down a child to only his or her special needs?

INSPIRE

- The educator who knows the child the best should be the one to map the child's portrait, adding colleagues' observations when relevant, as everyone looks at a child through their own experience.
- Some 'negatively perceived behaviour' can be worded 'positively'. Some examples:
  - 'Sofie doesn't like to be alone.' ⇢ 'Sofie likes to be with other children.'
  - 'Sofie can't walk yet.' ⇢ 'Sofie slides on her back or crawls.'
  - 'Sofie can't stand losing.' ⇢ Sofie likes to win.'
- Expressing behaviour positively does not mean being exaggeratedly positive about all behaviours and neglecting possible concerns. When expressing a concern:
  - Explain the effect on the child's wellbeing.
  - Clearly describe the context of your observations (where, when, how, with whom, ... and where not, when not, ...).
  - Verbalise what you could learn from that event to support the child.
- We do not compare a child to other children, but to itself (you make several observations over time and fill in several portraits). So it is not necessary to mention what the child cannot do yet. Nor do you need lists of 'developmental milestones' to fill in this portrait.
- Do you have a concern about a child's developmental domain? Try to give your observations a place in a global overview of a child's developmental domains, as the child could possibly excel in other developmental domains. A child has more 'characteristics' than the description of his/her special needs.

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- an instrument to map the child's portrait, used in your organisation;
- ...

2.3
Discussing with colleagues

'I think it is important to discuss the child portrait at least with my close colleague. You are not always there yourself and so have not experienced or been able to observe everything yourself. We sometimes feel the child differently too.'

- Rose, educator

REFLECT

- Why would you like to talk with colleagues to complement a child's portrait?
- What role does the coordinator or the pedagogical coach play?
- What is the best way to facilitate discussion on the child's portrait with colleagues? How do you make sure everyone gets a say?
- How do you ensure that the child's image remains positive through those discussions?
- How do you help each other to use positive language when describing your observations?
- Are there any concerns important to remember and to address regarding communication with the parents and with their inclusive network?

INSPIRE

- During the discussion with colleagues, the profile of the child can be refined, clarified or supplemented by the other team members.
- At the start of the discussion, the educator who completed the portrait speaks first:
  - What do you think the child excels at most?
  - What is a strength according to you?
  - What are you more concerned about?
- Try to concretise your feedback together by asking each other questions. For example:
  - What behaviour does the child show?
  - When does the child show this behaviour?
  - Are there situations where this behaviour does not occur? How is the child's wellbeing at that time?
  - How often does the behaviour occur?
  - What are the consequences for the environment (the other children, educators, brother/sister, parents)?
  - Are there factors in the environment that trigger/reinforce the behaviour?
- Help each other to voice observations using positive language: how else can you verbalise this behaviour/item, from a positive point of view? (see also in Dimension 2, Card 2.1 and 2.2)
- Together, propose actions to increase the wellbeing and involvement of the child (or at least keep them at the present level).
- Review together who the most appropriate person is to review the profile with the parents (see also in Dimension 3, Card 3.1).
- Discuss what you would like to ask parents and share this with them.
- Schedule another observation/meeting.

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- a template for a team meeting;
- ...

Connecting with Parents

DIMENSION 3

Shared care through alliance with parents

Co-funded by the European Union

3.1 Discussing the child's portrait with the parents

3.2 Sharing a concern with parents

3.3 Meeting with external partners

3.4 Planning actions

3.1
Discussing the child's portrait with the parents

'During a discussion with the parents, the father mentioned that his son Timotej points at objects at home to communicate. In the centre, Timotej does not make yet such attempts. We will now take more time to work on the conditions that can enable those communication initiatives from Timotej, in continuity with what is observed at home.'

- Robin, educator

REFLECT

- Why is it important to discuss the child's portrait with the parents (vs only handing them over a paper document)?
- How do you invite parents for this discussion on the child's portrait?
- How do you attempt to be on the same wavelength with parents? What steps in this conversation do you have in mind?
- Who is the best person in the ECEC centre to lead this conversation? Why?
- How do you ensure equality, reciprocity and partnership during this conversation?
- How can you avoid parents entering resistance? How can you take care of parents' resistance if this would occur?
- Which guidelines would help you beforehand? What do you like to have with you during this conversation with parents?
- Do you need someone to reflect with you after the meeting with parents? Who is best placed in the ECEC centre to take up this role?

INSPIRE

- Mention to the parents when they start in your centre that you regularly observe the children (for example, in terms of wellbeing and involvement). Mention that you plan regular exchanges with the parents about the child's experience.
- Take time to be well prepared for this conversation with the parents.
- Think about whether you need 'eliciting material' to get the conversation going and running more smoothly.
- Make sure you are communicating in an accessible way to parents. Think of easily understandable words in advance (see all cards from Dimension 6).
- Use an instrument to map the child's portrait, from your observations. Use this it as conversation guidelines, to complete it together with the parents towards a complete portrait of the child. For each item, you can first ask the parents how they experience it with their child at home. You may recognise the child's behaviour and then complement this with your observations of the child in the group.
- Use a positive, appreciative tone when verbalising your observations in this conversation (Dimension 2, cards 2.1 and 2.2). Pay attention to strengths and name any possible concerns. Check regularly with the parents whether your observations are also relatable to them.
- Schedule a meeting for each child into the annual planning (for example, twice a year).
- Consciously consider the name you give to this type of conversation. What feeling do those terms give you: 'parental meeting', 'child's portrait discussion', 'conversation'?
- Make sure you organise this conversation outside the children's group (not during a arrival or departure moment). Ask when parents have a free moment for this.
- Avoid simply handing over a paper document on the child's experience in ECEC without any oral exchange. This is an ideal opportunity to have an in-depth conversation with parents about the child (which strengthens the partnership).
- This conversation is preferably done in person. If this is not possible in a short timespan or the parents prefer, the conversation can be done digitally.
- Discuss with your colleagues and coordinator who you can turn to as a sounding board after the conversation. Agree on how to document this conversation (in what way, who should have access to this information).

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- visual support as incentives to talk, but also to bring the child's voice in the conversation (e.g. a picture, pictures, a short movie clips …);
- tips and tools for digital consultations;
- ...

3.2
Sharing a concern with parents

'As a coach, I started with the reflection questions. This made the topic very accessible and in this way our conversation really started from the parents' point of view. The childcare workers answered with a lot of feeling and empathy. One of them can be rather straightforward in her statements, but using the reflection questions made her milder and more open.'

- Aïsha, pedagogical coach

REFLECT

Imagine you have a child in an ECEC centre and you are out of a sudden invited to have a conversation with your child's educator.

- What would work for you or what could possibly be a letdown?
- How would you like to learn about concerns that the educator and the team might have?
- Who would you want to hear this message from?
- Who should attend this conversation? Should both parents be present? Would you like to bring someone along? Who may support you or add a valuable perspective?
- Would you like to have a say in how and when the conversation takes place?
- How would you like to be invited? What would you want to know in advance?
- Why is it important to feel like equal partners in this conversation?
- How do you know that your own pace of processing is respected?
- Think back to how you shared a concern with parents in the past. How was this perceived? How was it experienced? How did you feel after the conversation?

INSPIRE

- Concerns that emerged in the ECEC centre about a child's experience of development should be discussed with the parents by the person who has the best trusting relationship with parents and knows the child. ECEC leaders, who are less familiar with all facets of the child and the family, may have a coaching role in this but should not take the lead.
- If a relationship has already been shaped positively by more extensive conversations with parents on arrival and departure moments, this conversation will be all the easier.
- Try to have both parents present for such conversations. Ensure balance: if both parents are there, you may then 2 educators present or an educator and a coordinator. In any case, it gives trust when parents know in advance who will participate, so they do not feel blind sighted.
- Parents can also bring another support person or confidant to the conversation.
- Use the most recent child's portrait as conversation guidelines. This way, you will have a picture of the child's wellbeing, involvement and development in all its facets.
- At each step, listen first to the parents about their experiences in the home context. Perhaps they share similar concerns or questions. This way, you will be able to be on the same wavelength.
- Possibly for the first time, the parents are hearing concerns about their child that are expressed by someone else. Realise that this can be very confronting, even if the parents themselves had concerns about it. The unspoken becomes then reality.
- Be aware of the different stages and the pace of processing. Understand that parents need time in order to process this message. They do not have to share all their concerns in a one conversation and may still have (many) questions/doubts.
- Be available/accessible to parents in the days after such a conversation. Additional questions may arise after. Be a continuous, available listening ear for parents.
- Sharing a concern is an ongoing process. Be aware that a conversation is the start of a process, followed by multiple conversations and support. It is important to take time to understand each other.
- Several exchanges with parents may be necessary before taking a step towards looking with them for other kind of (external) support (for example, asking in-home support, financial support for inclusion in ECEC, consulting healthcare partners …). The parents set the pace and (co-)initiate this. You can support them in this search.
- Respect the parents' pace. The same goes for taking other actions.

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- conversation guidelines;
- ...

3.3
Meeting with external partners

'During the follow-up meeting for James, his ECEC educator was also present. I found that enriching and noticed that it made the parents feel more at ease. The educator and the parents brought strengthful examples, which helped us expand our view of James.'

- Hélène, language and speech therapist

REFLECT

- What people and/or organisation can be part of a child and family's inclusive network?
- How can you encourage and support parents in participating in a meeting with interdisciplinary partners from their inclusive network (for example, through the transition to school)?
- How can you ensure that the parents are approached as the first educators of their child?
- How can you help them feel comfortable enough to discuss their own experience with their child and express their parental concerns in such a meeting?
- How can you ensure that discussing a child's developmental and educational experience starts from a positive strength-based image of the child?
- Imagine someone wants to share personal information about you with someone else: how do you personally wish for that person to handle this information?
- How do you ensure transparency in these meetings?
- What do you say to parents to reassure them that their privacy will be respected?

INSPIRE

- The parents decide which partners and people belong to the inclusive network that surrounds their child. You should make clear agreements with them about the flow of information.
- Always let parents know that they are welcome to participate in the meetings with partners from their inclusive network and ask them if they want to join.
  - If not, ask if it is OK if the meeting goes ahead without them and agree when and how the information and questions will be communicated back to them.
  - If they join, ask what they need in order to feel well prepared.
- Always respect the data protection and privacy regulations and the internal agreements of the organisations.
- Without exception, always ask the parents' permission to share information on the child's portrait. This is assumed that you already have discussed the information in detail with the parents, before sharing this with extern partners from the inclusive network. Be clear and transparent about the goals of this meeting. Parents should always keep the freedom to decide which information to share or not to share with other organisations.
- The child's portrait mapped in your ECEC centre is of high interest for the partners in the inclusive network and can provide guidelines for the meetings. The ECEC educator who knows the child and parents the best preferably should participate.
- Those meetings are preferably done in person. If this is not possible or the parents prefer it, a digital conversation can take place.
- Bring back the information from inclusive network to the whole ECEC team (see also Dimension 2, Card 2.3). It includes the proposed and planned actions for every partner.
- Ensure a reciprocal conversation with all partners (of the inclusive network) and the parents. Listen to their perspective and what information they have. Think about how you could use the information within the ECEC centre.
- The voice from the ECEC centre should be heard in such a meeting. It represents the voice of the child and parents, and bring a professional view of the child into the context of ECEC.

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- tips and tools for digital consultations;
- ...

3.4
Planning actions

'Also in feeding. Every time we thought of now we've found it which means she does get something in, even if it was finger feeding or the back of the spoon, Sara tried and did it all with us. Endless patience.'

- Hassan, father

REFLECT

- Based on your observations, on the child's portrait, on the conversations with parents, and meetings with the inclusive network, actions could be planned and undertaken to optimise the experience of the child and family in the ECEC centre. From an inclusion perspective, what should these actions be focused on? What are the objectives?
- How can you use the observations mapped in the child's portrait in order to plan those actions?
- Who can be involved in planning actions?
- How do you ensure that the actions are sufficiently attuned with the specific needs and characteristics of the child?
- How do you concretise those actions in the ECEC centre? Which adjustments or support can you put in place yourself? Where may you need extern help?
- What can you learn from the home context when drawing up these actions?

INSPIRE

- Actions may aim to improve the child's wellbeing and involvement and to support the child's development. This requires creative thinking to seek ways to make the child more comfortable and involved in all domains.
- Discuss possible actions with the parents and with their inclusive network. Both parents and partners from the inclusive network have (other) valuable insights about what works/doesn't work with the child.
- Whatever you talk about in a meeting, agreements on how to proceed concretely should always be made at the end, towards an action plan.
- Take a thorough look at the information included in the child's portrait. In which situations are wellbeing and involvement optimal? The child's experience gives us a lot of information on contextual factors that can be adjusted. In addition, you can verify if the child's basic needs are met.
- A lot of contextual factors in an ECEC centre can be addressed to support a child:
  - proposed activities and material: activities, play material, room design ...
  - climate: connecting the children with each other, atmosphere ...
  - space for taking initiative: can children choose, are appointments made ...
  - organisation: routines, transition moments, size of the group ...
  - educator's interactions: way of communicating, predictability ...
- Document the new implemented actions: observe the wellbeing and the involvement of the child to evaluate them. Do you notice any significant changes? How can you ask parents if they have noticed possible difference?
- Discuss the actions and their evaluations with your ECEC colleagues during the next team meeting. Think of how to involve parents.
- Dare to explore and discuss all support options. For example, if applicable in your country, ask for a governmental subsidy for inclusion, ask for the support of an inclusion coach, ...

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- a needs pyramid diagram to help evaluate if the basic needs of a child are met;
- an instrument to map the child's portrait;
- ...

Connecting with Parents

DIMENSION 4

Connecting parents with each other

Co-funded by the European Union

4.1 Connecting two parents with each other

4.2 Facilitating informal contacts between parents

4.3 Proposing activities for and with parents

4.1 Connecting two parents with each other

'It is important to meet other parents, to exchange experiences, find recognition, give and receive advice and support.'

- Amir, father

REFLECT

- What do parents who visit your ECEC center have in common?
- Do they have common challenges?
- Who can help them when they are struggling with something? Who understands them?
- Do you see opportunities/moments in which parents have the opportunity to connect with each other? How can you facilitate this?

INSPIRE

- Introduce parents and children to each other.
- Respect the choice of parents who do not wish to interact with other parents.
- Listen carefully to what parents tell you, make the connection in your mind as you recognise similar stories from other people.
- Listen/observe which stories (from other parents) parents find interesting.
- Highlight what they have in common. Examples:
  - children will both start school soon
  - children are discovering the potty
  - children experience difficulties in eating
  - tips on how to take a trip outside the house with a child
  - dealing with older siblings when there is a new baby
  - how do parents take care of themselves?
  - do they speak the same language or can a common language be found (check full language repertoire, don't just assume)
  - you heard they are both looking for a babysitter
- The importance of acknowledging the child first, instead of solely focusing on the special needs, also applies to other parents.
- Ask parents of a child with specific needs if they themselves would like to share the story of their child. What information would they like to share with other parents and in what way?
- Encourage parents with questions on another child to engage with the child's parents themselves.

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- ...

4.2
Facilitating informal contacts between parents

'You have just had a child and that is still your whole world. You're so happy with it and then suddenly you're out in the world and there's all sorts of things swirling around you, but you will still be fully occupied with your child fow a while.'

- Lien, mother

REFLECT

- What informal moments are an opportunity for parents to connect with each other?
- How do you create a climate where parents 'stick around' during drop-off or pick-up time?

INSPIRE

- In the entrance hall of the ECEC center, use pictures of the children (and their names) who are about to leave for school (if necessary, use a drawing of a bus for each school).
- Create a children's book library where parents can choose books to take home once a week. It creates places for informal contact.
- Provide a water/coffee/tea point (fresh water and cups) in a central place of the center, available to parents. It is ideal for spontaneous meetings.
- when bringing the child to the group, tell parents they can linger for a while. They can for example join the children on the mat. It creates more opportunities for parents to informally see and meet each other.

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- ...

4.3
Proposing activities for and with parents

'I'm just saying that the educators set the atmosphere a lot. I clearly see a difference between here and the park. The children here are all equal.'

- Wendy, mother

REFLECT

- How do you create a positive vibe during activities with and for parents?
- Do you have an idea on how to bring a particular conversation topic into a group of parents?
- Do all parents have a need to engage with other parents? How do you know?
- Can you reach all parents? If not, what barriers are there?
- What do you expect from parents during the activity? How can you communicate that with them?
- How do you evaluate a parent activity afterwards?

INSPIRE

- Provide enough variety in activities. Not everyone is interested in the same thing.
- Vary the timing so everyone has the chance to join activities.
- If there are many multilingual parents present, hang a map of the world in the room.
- Make parents and children aware of each other's presence (e.g.: 'welcome' in different languages, also in SMOG or Braille, pictures of the children and their parents, a family wall).
- Show hospitality: provide coffee, tea, water and biscuits.
- Think about the invitation: make a nice card and be clear about what the activity is. Vary the way you disseminate information about the activity. Think about speaking to them in person, an e-mail, drop a card in the bag.
- Give the suggestion for parents to join the children on an outside activity (for example: a walk to the forest).
- If parents feel more comfortable bringing a relative, friend or neighbour, encourage them.
- Provide some opening questions to start a conversation in the group.
- Are there parents interested in joining a sewing workshop or knitting club?
- Making soup with the children and inviting parents to come and drink a cup in the group.
- Host a parent breakfast in the group.
- Involve parents in helping to organise the activity (e.g.: baking a cake).
- Preferably organise small-scale moments of connection per group rather than for the entire ECEC center.
- If you are unable to contact all parents: look for thresholds they might experience. Try to remove possible barriers.

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- ...

Connecting with Parents

DIMENSION 5

Transition to school and out-of-school care

Co-funded by the European Union

5.1 Warm transition through an alliance with parents

5.2 Working together towards a smooth transition for the child and the parents

5.1
Warm transition through an alliance with parents

'Our son has severe visual impairment. When I first meet with the preschool teacher Barzan will have in September, she immediately suggested that she can come to visit Barzan in his group at the ECEC centre. She even knows the educator. That's when we felt: this will work out!'

- Felix, father

REFLECT

- How do you prepare the transition to school with parents?
- How can you involve the children?
- What can you do so that you, together with the parents, can make a carefully constructed connection with the school as a new educational environment?
- How do you stay available for parents and children after the transition?
- What added value sharing a child's portrait in ECEC with the school/out-of-school care staff can have? Under what conditions?
- How do you kindly initiate the first contact towards the confidant of the new school and/or out-of-school care centre?

INSPIRE

- Parents often worry about transitioning to school. Take the initiative to talk about this transition.
  - Do parents already have a school and transition time in mind?
  - What concerns do they have? Can you help to clear up any of these concerns?
  - What expectations do parents have?
  - Which option(s) do parents prefer? An inclusive approach would expect you to be flexible with the transition period. Reassure parents.
- Provide timely explanations about the approaches at the different schools (e.g. sleepover class, settling-in times, toileting support, support at lunchtime, etc.).
- Have they managed to enrol? Support, if necessary, yet do not take over.
- Have child and parents already visited the school and how did they experience it?
- Can the child have some familiarisation time? Encourage them to participate. If you feel any hesitation, ask what is holding them back.
- Make parents aware that they should also think about out-of-school care options and be sure to inform them about what you know.
- Be easily accessible and available during the period of enrolment in school/out-of-school and as the last period in the ECEC centre approaches.
- You can lower the psychological threshold if the trusted educator of the ECEC centre accompanies the parents to the first contact or familiarisation moment at school. Above all, allow the parents to talk about the child.
- Consider using tools for the transition of children with special needs to school/out-of-school care. Talk this over with parents and take the step towards it together. For example, you can use the child's portrait in ECEC as a guide to share information. In addition to this portrait, experiences from the home context can be shared with the teacher.
- The schoolteacher or out-of-school educator can visit the child in the ECEC centre to get to know each other in advance and exchange with the educators.
- Speak to the parents about your school partners with appreciation/confidence. And, of course, vice versa: speak with appreciation/confidence about the parents to your partners. It is the start of a new trusting relationship.

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- a video's on transition, as an elicitation for reflection (for example, *Across the line*);
- …

5.2
Working together towards a smooth transition for the child and the parents

'Barzan's father told us how well he was doing in the neighbouring childcare centre. We visit each other regularly. I thought it was important to observe Barzan and his interaction with the other children and the childcare workers already. I also sat down with him with a book already. My idea was that he could already hear my voice and feel my presence before the start in school.'

- Mireille, teacher

REFLECT

- How can you bring the world of childcare/ECEC and the world of school closer together so that the transition for the child becomes less abrupt ? What can be your part in this?
- Do you know how the various schools in the area work?
- How can you guide the child in the transition to this new environment?
- How can you as an ECEC educator get better acquainted with the new context/organisations where the children will go to? (schools, out- of -school care, different rules and habits, etc.).

INSPIRE

- Invest in cooperation with neighbourhood schools/out-of-school centres: get to know each other, visit each other's premises. Be present at each other's open school days.
- Visit schools in the neighbourhood and engage with them about the school's pedagogical vision and concrete pedagogical approach (see Dimension 5, Card 5.1). How can parents communicate with the school if they have questions, what kinds of activities do the children do in school ... ? Collect this info to share with parents.
  - Do you know which child follow-up system they use?
  - Do you know what pedagogical values they have?
  - Is there an entry-level class and do you know how it works?
  - Can parents have a personal conversation with the schoolteacher?
- Be attentive on how you talk about the school /out-of-school care and make clear that you are well known with the people and contexts. This gives confidence to parents.
- Bring the teams of ECEC and school together, e.g. organise a meeting together
- Share brochures of schools in the neighbourhood with parents in the ECEC centre.

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- the child's portrait of other tools for transition;
- all cards, but in the context of school and out-of-school care;
- ...

Connecting with Parents

DIMENSION 6

Accessible communication with parents

Co-funded by the European Union

6.1 Physical accessibility

6.2 Approchable attitude

6.3 Open verbal communication

6.4 Using visual support for communication

6.5 Clear written communication

6.6 Using digital communication

6.1
Physical accessibility

'I placed a cool sofa in a corner of my room. I see that parents often sit there, to say goodbye to their child and watch them come to play. From there, more spontaneous conversations or questions arise. It's like the sofa says: "Be welcome to linger a while" '

- Nancy, educator

REFLECT

- How do you ensure that parents can move easily through the building?
- In what ways can physical barriers or thresholds to enter the building be addressed?
- Where can parents have a seat, pause or have a conversation?
- What steps do parents need to take before entering the child's group (think: badge system, intercom, shoecovers, stairs)?
- When you sit down to talk with parents, how can you do position yourself to make them comfortable?
- Where in the ECEC centre is the acoustic the best?

INSPIRE

- Resolve some physical barriers in the building by installing safety ramps.
- Provide parking space close to the entrance of the building.
- Apply a pictogram or other visual signals to help with some thresholds (e.g. how to use the bell).
- Make sure there is a clear visible entrance.
- Make clear how to enter the building: by ringing the doorbell, a code panel, an access badge, ...
- Write down a phone number in a clearly visible space.
- Ask where parents wish to engage in a conversation. Think more broadly than within the walls of the ECEC centre.
- Place yourself in the role of the parents when they come to collect their child: note down what you see (posters, photos, games, etc.), what you notice, etc.

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- the *Educas toolbox: Wonder and Beauty* (via de VBJK-website);
- ...

6.2
Approchable attitude

'Parents that are in a socially vulnerable situation start with a lot of mistrust and/or only for a short period of time. Because of specific low-threshold and open operation, which strongly involves parents and because of the extra support that allows them to come to us, parents keep coming.'

- Roxana, coordinator

REFLECT

- What does accessible body language mean for you?
- Is there a particular way you speak to parents? (Volume, tone, ...)
- How do you express the importance you give to alliance with parents through your attitude and non-verbal behaviour?
- How do you make parents aware that you make time for them?

INSPIRE

- Warmly greet everyone.
- Smile.
- Maintain eye contact with parents while you are speaking.
- Speak in a warm, compassionate tone of voice.
- Make time or schedule in an appointment when you can't free your planning during that particular moment.
- Let them feel that you can take your time for them.
- Your place at the table: point your head and torso towards the parents, do not sit opposite them, sit side by side if possible.
- Make sure to not put any material between you as a barrier (for example: laptop or mobile phone on which a call could come in).
- Consider whether the furniture is inviting or threshold-enhancing.
- Ensure predictability in communication (especially for multilingual parents).
- When talking to multilingual parents, try to make them aware that it is okay not to master the language perfectly. That their home language, and their language repertoire is welcome. For example, you can say a few words yourself in their language, to welcome them and show that there is room to dare and make mistakes, as long as we try to understand each other.

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- ...

6.3
Open verbal communication

'The educators do their best to speak English. Sometimes I use Google Translate. And my wife does the rest of the translation. That communication is very important, because when parents are more confident, the children are more confident too. And Dutch is quite a strange language.'

- Steven, father

REFLECT

- To what do you pay attention in terms of verbal communication with parents??
- To what do you pay attention in terms of verbal communication with parents in a vulnerable situation?
- To what do you pay attention to in terms of verbal communication with multilingual parents?
- What are things that can help support you in communicating with multilingual parents?
- How do you feel about using a language you cannot speak perfectly, to engage with parents?
- How do you feel when parents do not speak your language fluently?
- How can you support communication? What tools can help?

INSPIRE

- You may try to greet multilingual parents in their own language or ask them what they prefer
- Map and use the full language repertoire of all the parents, staff and volunteers (e.g. ask a colleague who speaks Arabic to be present at the conversation).
- Speak slowly and articulate clearly.
- Avoid using jargon, use clear words.
- Avoid metaphorical language use or clarify the metaphor.
- Dare to discuss more complex topics with all parents, even if there is a language barrier. Support conversation with visual material (e.g. pictures of daily activities with children)
- State first what you want to talk about: it gives direction to the conversation and the specific vocabulary is thereby 'activated' and more easily recognisable to parents.
- Try to summarise the essence of your message.
- Repeat and look for signs that the parents have understood your message.
- Verify with the parents whether the message has been understood by asking pointed questions.
- Look for a common language if necessary.
- Make use of a translation app when something is not understood (for example: Google Translate).
- Languages mistakes and accents have little importance: the focus is on the child and understanding each other, not the language.
- Engage an interpreter, with whom the parents feel safe (sign language interpreter or language interpreter). Agree on this beforehand with the parents (Always consider privacy, reliability and trust):
  - professional interpreter;
  - an acquaintance who can interpret;
  - a colleague who can interpret. The colleague does not take part in the conversation but offers support.
  - another parent who can interpret.
- Use hand gestures to support your spoken language.
- Use images to support your communication (see card 6.4)

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- a translation app (for example *Google Translate* or *Deepl*)
- ...

6.4
Using visual support for communication

'Once a child of Romanian parents was in our care. We felt we didn't understand each other in the daily drop-off and pick-up contacts; we couldn't find a common language. Until one day we were involved in a pilot project to use pictograms in communication with parents. In the tool were pictograms linked to Romanian words. A world opened up for these parents. Suddenly they understood what we wanted to say and we could start building trust.'

- Maartje, coordinator

REFLECT

- What visual support can help during a conversation with parents?
- How do you ensure that visual support can be used by both educators and parents (two-way use, for back-and-forth communication)?
- What should you be aware of when you are making use of visual support?

INSPIRE

- Use pictograms, pictures or written words to clearly inform parents about the main topic of a conversation. This can verifiably promote mutual understanding.
- Experiment with pictograms. Be careful not to simplify the complexity of certain themes by communicating with pictograms:
  - Do not assume that every parent understands every icon. Icons can be ambiguous, and they can be interpreted differently.
  - There should not be an 'overload' of pictograms. The message must remain clear without giving the impression of a simplified explanation, which undermines the concept of competent parents.
  - It is also important to regularly ask parents whether the use of pictograms actually (still) helps him/her.
  - Find pictograms/ emoticons/ visual tools that are not too simple (e.g. routine words like milk, sleep, pampers are quickly recognised by parents and may not need a pictogram).
- Use photos or other visual aids such as videos.
- Use a visual scale to ask about feelings in parents.
- Explain the daily routine during a tour so you can show what you mean. Example: 'Each child has their own bed' - you can support this visually by hanging a picture of the beds + a picture or name of the children on a bedroom door.
- Develop and use a ‘conversation board for certain conversations (a sheet with steps in the conversation, some key words) (e.g. ‘conversation board’ to reflect on the child’s portrait).
- Write down key words that illustrate the core message of a story (e.g. when you talk to parents, of when another parent intervenes during in a group context).

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- Pictures and videos from the daily routine in the ECEC centre
- pictograms lexicon (for example, the *English-Ukrainian pictograms for students and teachers*, published by the European Union)
- Seize opportunities to check out other ECEC centres. Get inspired (read more, for example, about the ‘jobshadowing modality’ for professional development.)
- ...

6.5
Clear written communication

'I can read in English. I also know how to use a translation app. But it takes me energy and focus. When I get two sheets full of text and information from the childcare or school, it makes me nauseous. Even though I know it could be important, I sometimes leave it aside for a few days. I can't manage to read it diagonally."

Isabelle, mother

REFLECT

- What should you pay attention to if you are creating a flyer aimed at a wide variety of families?
- In what way do you best structure written language aimed at families in a vulnerable situation?
- What may be important for families in a vulnerable situation in terms of layout?
- How do you ensure accessible and clear language for everyone in a flyer/newsletter?

INSPIRE

- State the most important thing first.
- Write short and everyday words.
- Check the difficulty level of the words you use.
- Write in bullet points.
- Write in simple and short sentences.
- Write instructions in the imperative.
- Use enough white space in between sentences.
- Start each new sentence on a new line. Place the sentences separately from each other and not one after the other.
- Make use of a sober layout.
- Use clear visual support (see Dimension 6, Card 4).
- Avoid metaphorical language use in written statements.
- Avoid jargon.
- Be aware of functional illiteracy (difficulty in extracting information from long text).
- Coach multilingual parents in how to use a translation app (see Dimension 6, Card 6).

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- translated brochures available online,
- websites to consider the difficulty of a word that you have picked.
- tips for using clear language from alphabetisation and literacy organisation
- …

6.6
Using digital communication

'We rarely have people from more vulnerable groups directly contacting u, by finding our contact information online. To reach these more, we have prepared flyers and self-go to our partners to distributed, but more importantly to create opportunities to have real-life contacts with those parents.'

- Raïssa, coordinator

REFLECT

- How is your ECEC centre being advertised?
- How can parents register their child?
- How are photos shared with parents?
- In which way do you share news with parents?
- Is there a website? Is this website clear for everyone?
- When do you engage in digital communication with parents? Have you considered the disadvantages and the advantages?
- How can illiteracy play a role in digital communication?

INSPIRE

- Use various materials to advertise and communicate. In addition to digital, think of advertising through other media or through other facilities.
- Offer parents the option of physically enrolling the child instead of digitally.
- Provide a place in the centre for photos: digital photo frame, PowerPoint on a screen, ... in addition to using an online platform.
- Provide an accessible website for all (e.g.: speech technology, contrast, ...)
- Provide the opportunity for parents to consult you digitally if they wish (better a digital consultation than no consultation at all). When you have the choice, favour in person contact.
- Check if important news or guidelines have reached all parents well.
- Coach parents in how to use a translation app. Do not translate in advance, but let parents translate themselves so they are aware of any mistranslations. This way, you also increase parents' autonomy.
- Digital communication does not replace in-person contact, but can be seen as complementary.

WHAT ELSE COULD BE HELPFUL?

- ...