

EMBRACING YOUR JOURNEY

- AS YOUR CHILD'S -

# FIRST TEACHER

A family guide to support your child's healthy development at home and in their early learning programs.

TOGETHER, OUR KEIKI WILL THRIVE!

1. Families are our Children's First Teachers

2. Communication is Key

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DHHC

3. Supporting Success

4. Speaking for All Keiki



## Hānai ‘ia i ka poli o ka lima

*"Fed in the palm of the hand"*

Said of children reared with constant attention from those around them. *‘Ōlelo No‘eau #450*

Our children of Hawai‘i are as unique as each sunrise. In our island community, we believe that it is our kuleana (responsibility) to raise our children together.

A child's early learning years, prenatal to age 8, are a critical time of brain development where children build the foundations for success in life. It takes all of us to provide a supportive environment for our keiki to develop a love of learning to grow and to thrive.

Here are four ideas to help promote a shared responsibility between families and early childhood programs and services to come together and build relationships that support our keiki.

### THE FOUR IDEAS ARE:

#### 1. Families Are Children's First Teacher

#### 2. Communication is Key

#### 3. Supporting Success

#### 4. Speaking for All Keiki

Experts agree that **families** are children's first and most enduring teachers in life. When families are able to recognize and embrace this role, they are empowered to engage in their children's learning and partner with programs to support them.

Each idea has suggestions for things you can do to build relationships that support your child's learning, both at home and at their **early learning programs**. Check the boxes of things you've done, try something you haven't checked, and consider how you can apply the ideas into your family routines. Make it fun and enjoy your parenting journey!



Photo: University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa Children's Center; Kristi Kawahara-Xu

### Terms used in this guide:

**Families** describe a child's primary caregivers as those who have a parenting role, including parents, adoptive parents, resource caregivers, aunts, uncles, and grandparents.

**Early learning programs** may include family child care (in private homes), center-based care (i.e. preschools), family-child interaction programs, schools, home-visiting and community programs, and professional medical services.

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**Families teach the values and behaviors they feel are needed to prepare their children for life. From birth, they play a critical role in laying the foundation for their keiki's success.**

## **Aloha**

*To give and receive love, affection, and trust*



Photo: Monica Lau Photography

Children thrive when they are provided with a loving, safe, healthy and stable environment. While they will have many teachers throughout their childhood years, family influence remains constant. When families recognize that they are their children's first and most enduring teachers, they can intentionally support their learning with teachable moments throughout their daily family life.

When we leave our children in another's care, we experience a range of emotions, from excitement, relief, worry, and guilt. How we deal with these

personal stressors also shows our children how to have healthy relationships, strong problem-solving skills, and the ability to bounce back from challenges. Sharing our personal experiences, joys, and challenges with those who care for our children welcomes them to be partners in raising them.

## **As families, we can:**

- ☐ **Bring a family photo to leave with the program**
- ☐ **Greet program staff daily, talk story when we can, and get to know our children's caregivers**
- ☐ **Be willing to support our children's learning by telling program staff that we are here to help our children grow and learn**



Photo: University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Children's Center

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## Open and respectful communication with teachers or program staff enable them to better support our children.

### Kākou

*We are all in this together; the language of "we"*

When families and program staff learn more about each other, there can be free-flowing back and forth communication on a daily basis.

We can learn from each other by giving and receiving ideas to support our children. When families share personal knowledge about our children's strengths, skills, and interests, program staff understand our children and can better plan for them. Our children benefit from more proactive and supportive environments as a result.

### As families, we can:

- ☐ talk about our children's personalities, strengths, likes and dislikes
- ☐ share important family changes or dynamics, illness, marital concerns, naptime and toileting routines, physical or medical conditions such as allergies, or special needs
- ☐ give permission for the program staff to talk freely with us and be open to hearing about the highs and lows of our children's day

- ☐ inform the program staff of the best way to communicate with us
- ☐ check in often with program staff to see how our children are doing (during drop off or pick up time, through daily logs or bulletins, etc.)
- ☐ observe and discuss with program staff about how they work with our children on a specific challenging behavior or other problem solving opportunity as a team
- ☐ share our family's cultural ways to respond to problems. For example, I can introduce a meditation circle, *Ho'oponopono*, or other calming ways to talk through issues and come to a resolution
- ☐ participate in parent/staff and child conferences and discuss goals



Photo: Kapi'olani Community College Alani Children's Center

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## Children develop at their own pace but will typically follow a common path of development.

### Alu Like

*Together striving for the same goal*

Children experience the highest growth of brain development in the first 3 years of life when the executive functions of the brain (working memory, mental flexibility, and self-control) needed for success are built. When families are equipped with knowledge of typical child development and appropriate parenting strategies to encourage growth, they can help their children develop a strong foundation and love for learning. The early childhood years are a critical time period when additional supports, such as early intervention to help children with developmental delays, are most effective.

Families know their children best which makes them their best advocates. Families advocate by talking about concerns with program staff or medical professionals. Together, they can identify any needs their children may have.

As families, we can take advantage of opportunities to build upon our knowledge of how our children learn and develop. When we understand how children learn, we can plan experiences and interact with them in ways that support their growth.

Children benefit from consistent guidance from their role models. Our active involvement with program staff can help us connect learning experiences between home and our children's early learning programs. When we are involved in our children's early learning programs, we can feel confident to speak up for our children's needs, strengthen home-program partnerships and work as a team to support our children's success.

### As families, we can:

- ☐ attend parent workshops on child development milestones and parenting strategies
- ☐ share our stories about learning new parenting skills with other parents
- ☐ complete child developmental screening to track my child's growth
- ☐ learn about and access additional supports through my child's program or medical professional when I am concerned
- ☐ find ways to contribute our time or talents to the program
- ☐ ask program staff how we might participate in learning trips, serve on a parent board, read a book during morning drop off, or other ways to be involved in our children's learning while getting to know the staff and children's friends

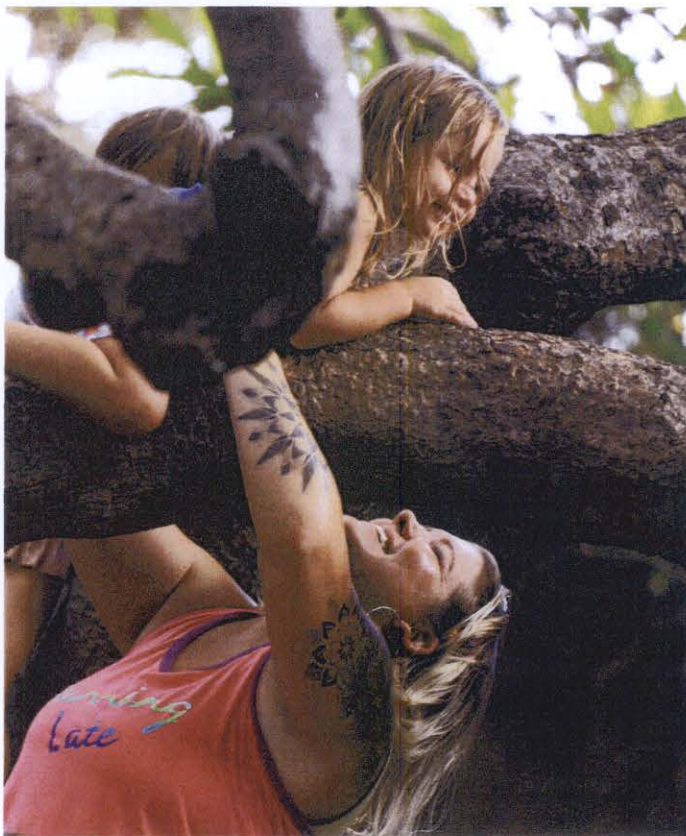


Photo: Royce Bowman

## 3. Supporting Success

## 4. Speaking for All Keiki



**The keiki of Hawai'i are everyone's kuleana or responsibility. Young children need adults to speak up for their needs, both in their programs and in their community.**

### **Lokahi**

*Collaboration and cooperation; working together*

Ideally, families, program staff, and community members work together in making important decisions to ensure that support systems are available to meet the physical, mental, social, and emotional needs of all children in their care.

Our shared personal experiences, joys and challenges can help make our programs and communities be respectful learning environments for diverse communities. When we are engaged in program decision making, we can contribute our strengths and knowledge toward a common goal, project, or direction.

### **As families, we can:**

- ☐ **learn about my child's program philosophy and curriculum or activities, ask questions and provide input when appropriate**
- ☐ **participate in leadership opportunities, such as joining a parent group/club for the program/school**
- ☐ **participate in program evaluations so that programs can know our needs and make necessary changes in program activities and policies to meet them**

### **Pilina and Ho'omau**

*To join together and to continue, persevere, and never give up*

Children rely on us (adults) to speak up for their needs. As we support and advocate for our children, we gain experience and knowledge to help all children in similar situations. We can support each other to be aware of our own and others' needs and how to access community supports. Together, we can combine our voices and ensure that the needs of all our keiki are met.

### **As families, we can:**

- ☐ **gather a group of families together to share ideas on what could be better in our community and share them with community policy makers**
- ☐ **learn about advocacy, how to make a case, and voice my opinions appropriately in support of a cause**
- ☐ **participate in surveys and focus groups to tell community programs what my community needs are**
- ☐ **learn about community resources such as requesting health and wellness charts, information about nutrition programs, vision and hearing screenings, and other necessities for my child to be healthy inside and out; and share them with other families**
- ☐ **join a support group within the community, sharing the knowledge I have with others so that we can support and learn from each other's experiences**



Photo: Family Hui Hawai'i



Prepared by



**FamilyHui**  
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**ACTION STRATEGY**  
TAKING ACTION FOR HAWAII'S CHILDREN



**Little  
Minds  
Matter**