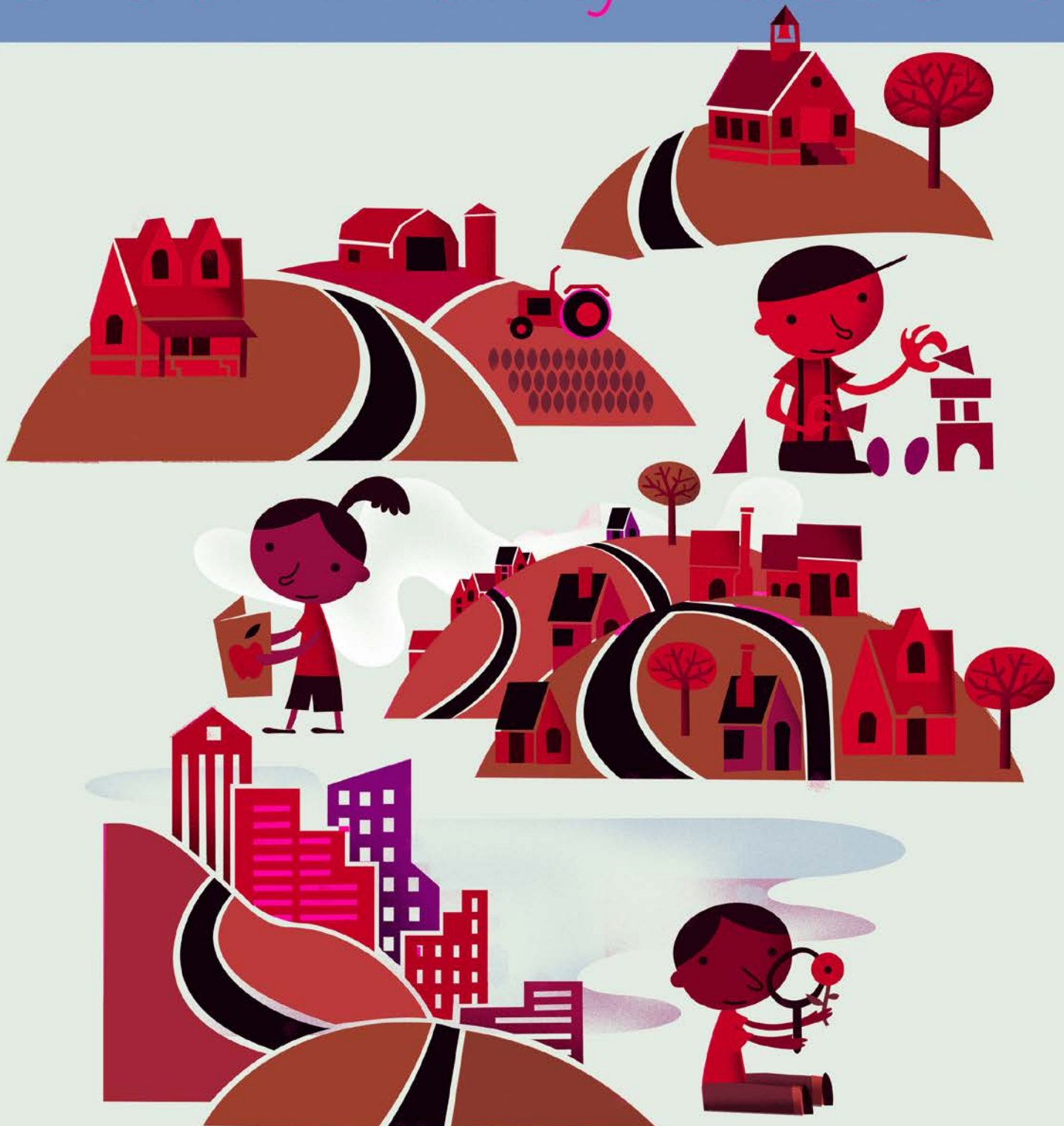# Home, School
# & Community Relations

## CAROL GESTWICKI

# NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs: A Correlation with *Home, School & Community Relations*, Ninth Edition

The NAEYC Standards provide a guiding framework for the preparation of professional early childhood teachers based on extensive research and evidence-based practices, answering the question "What should tomorrow's teachers know and be able to do?" The standards are divided into six distinct yet interrelated core areas:

1. Promoting child development and learning

2. Building family and community partnerships

3. Observing, documenting, and assessing

4. Using developmentally effective approaches to connect with children and families

5. Using content knowledge to build meaningful curriculum

6. Becoming a professional

    A seventh standard describes requirements for early childhood field experience and clinical practice.

    This chart identifies how the content in this book aligns with the standards addressed in **Standard 2, Building Family and Community Partnerships**. A summary of the ideas is that candidates should know about, understand, and value the importance and complex characteristics of children's families and communities. They use this understanding to create respectful, reciprocal relationships that support and empower families and to involve all families in their children's development and learning.

    In the text, you will find these standards referred to as LS (Licensing Standards).

| NAEYC Standards for Professional Preparation | Text Chapter |
|---|---|
| **STANDARD #2: Building Family and Community Relationships** | |
| **2a:** Knowing about and understanding diverse family and community characteristics | Chapters 1, 2, 3, 12, 13, and 14 |
| **2b:** Supporting and engaging families and communities through respectful, reciprocal relationships | Chapters 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14, and 15 |
| **2c:** Involving families and communities in young children's development and learning (Note: Advanced standard adds the words: Demonstrating cultural competence and effective collaboration to involve) | Chapters 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 |
| **Other Related Standards for Professional Preparation** | |
| **6e:** Engaging in informed advocacy for children and the profession | Chapter 12 |

The complete position statement PDF can be accessed at www.naeyc.org/positionstatements/ppp.

# Home, School
# & Community Relations

**CAROL GESTWICKI**

## CENGAGE
Learning®
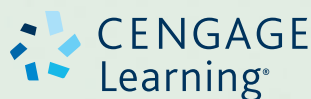
This is an electronic version of the print textbook. Due to electronic rights restrictions, some third party content may be suppressed. Editorial review has deemed that any suppressed content does not materially affect the overall learning experience. The publisher reserves the right to remove content from this title at any time if subsequent rights restrictions require it. For valuable information on pricing, previous editions, changes to current editions, and alternate formats, please visit www.cengage.com/highered to search by ISBN#, author, title, or keyword for materials in your areas of interest.

> For product information and technology assistance, contact us at
> **Cengage Learning Customer & Sales Support, 1-800-354-9706.**
>
> For permission to use material from this text or product,
> submit all requests online at **www.cengage.com/permissions.**
> Further permissions questions can be e-mailed to
> **permissionrequest@cengage.com.**

# Brief Contents

# Contents

# SECTION II Teacher-Family Partnerships in Early Education

## SECTION III Methods for Developing Partnerships

# SECTION IV Making a Partnership Work

# Preface

## The Goal of This Book

It is not unusual in classes for teachers and students preparing to become teachers to hear the statement "I do just fine with the children; it's the parents who …

- make me crazy."
- I can't stand."
- I could do without."
- make me think about quitting."

As more families and teachers share the care of young children, it becomes obvious that disruptive tensions are more common than rare. Learning the skills of communicating effectively with families about matters both routine and emotionally charged has become an important part of a teacher's preparation. In fact, the standards set by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) for college programs that prepare early childhood teachers require that teachers become skillful in building family and community relationships. Likewise, the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards for accreditation of good schools for young children specifically mandate that "program staff establish intentional practices designed to foster strong reciprocal relationships with families" (NAEYC, 2007, p. 56).

In addition, in today's society, attention is increasingly focused on the stress experienced by the contemporary family. Television specials and politicians have found it appropriate to speak out about the dilemmas of working parents—caught between choices of unaffordable or inadequate child care and stretched between home and work responsibilities. Schools feel inadequate to the task of filling in the gaps in children's lives created by families under stress. Efforts are being made in public and private sectors to offer some external support to alleviate family stresses, as the understanding dawns that family breakdown is responsible for many of the ills plaguing the community at large. Conversely, it may also be stated that the breakdown of the community, with escalating incidences of drug use, violence, unemployment, and economic hardships for families, may contribute to many of the ills that plague families. As part of the community, teachers are active participants in the initiatives of family support that are becoming more numerous.

As families with two working parents become the norm and single-parent families are ever more numerous, teachers are challenged to find ways to support and cooperate with families who depend on them to help educate and care for their children. Various mandates also demand that teachers in public schools and teachers working with particular funding sources develop family involvement plans. This is a large issue and perhaps more philosophical in its nature than merely practical: Once teachers are convinced about the necessity and benefits of working with families, they will find their own ways to do so—ways appropriate for their own situations.

This is not merely a pleasant possibility for those teachers who choose to work with families. Rather, the reality is teachers find that their own practice and work with children is much enhanced by working effectively with their families. The standards of early childhood professional organizations indicate the recognition that working with families is in fact an essential role for the early educator—difficult though this frequently is, given the changing nature of families today.

The purpose of this ninth edition of *Home, School, and Community Relations* is to continue to raise some of these larger issues—to sensitize teachers and prospective teachers to the complex nature of parenting in today's world—so teachers' basic stance will not become "us against them" but instead "we're all in this together." Therefore, your retention of particular small facts is less important than understanding larger concepts, incorporating into your personal teaching philosophies the idea that supporting families to do an optimum job with their own children is a worthy and essential goal. In this way, you will begin to perceive your role in communication with individual families so as to help parents become stronger in their parenting skills and to make appropriate decisions for their children's care and education. This is not the old view of the teacher as an all-knowing professional who will tell parents what they should be doing—a somewhat daunting figure who could usually not be said to be in any sort of relationship with families. Rather, this new view recognizes that early childhood teachers, schools, and programs are part of the community systems to support the development of healthy families and enhance development and education of their children by creating working partnerships and engagement with families.

## Themes of the Text

Readers will encounter several specific themes running through the text.

### Emphasis on Diversity

Emphasis in the text is placed on developing the ability to empathize with parents and developing the communication skills and techniques that will support real partnerships. In the ninth edition of this book, particular emphasis has been placed on encouraging teachers to understand the diversity of experience, values, and functioning to be found in today's families. The idea that teachers must prepare themselves to work with families whose culture, language, and beliefs about raising children may be very different from their own is an important awareness for new and experienced teachers. Throughout the text, you will find icons to indicate attention to the topic of diversity.

### Legislation Recognizing Families as Partners

Attention is also given to the aspect of working along with parents as advocates for children and families. Considerable discussion is included about some of the stresses and circumstances that affect today's families. There is recognition of current moves within the business and legislative communities to support families. There is also discussion of the most recent education legislation—No Child Left Behind and Race for the Top—that mandates family involvement and choices as part of the educational reforms. The far-reaching implications of this legislation mean that teachers at all levels will be working closely with families.

### Full Family Engagement

The dual nature of teachers' roles in working with parents and children is emphasized, with the inclusion of books and resources to use with children who have diverse family

backgrounds and needs. The many practical problems that must be addressed in working with families are considered. But perhaps the most important overriding theme is the idea of the necessity for working partnerships and full family engagement, and the need for persistence in the face of often difficult circumstances and responses. Hopefully, you will complete your coursework and text reading with the conviction that this is a necessary teacher role. Coming to such an understanding is a process that occurs over time.

This ninth edition of the text continues to stress the specific attitudes, philosophies, and practical techniques that teachers in any setting can find useful in building relationships with families. The underlying philosophy of the book is that those relationships are crucial in providing appropriate educational experiences and success for children. The text also recognizes that some family situations today create real challenges for teachers trying to create partnerships with families, and that such efforts are often frustrating and seem almost hopeless. Rather than giving up, which means failure to support children with the connections among home, school, and community, teachers are encouraged to develop a strong belief in the importance of partnership and family involvement and to keep returning to this philosophy to find new strength and inspiration in the face of bleak situations.

## Continuing Strengths of the Text

Also included in this ninth edition is a strong focus on local and national community efforts and organizations to remind teachers that they have responsibilities to work with and support families beyond the walls of the schools or centers in which they work with children. The federal No Child Left Behind legislation has implications for families and for teachers, as well as larger implications for schools and communities. This legislation and its significance to teacher–family concerns are addressed in Chapters 4 and 12. There is an expanded discussion of the many components that constitute family engagement, as well as a look at the history of parent involvement in this country.

Also presented are specific techniques teachers can use to be sure of conveying an attitude of welcoming acceptance to every family. Discussions of dealing with common problems that arise between teachers and parents, including the current issues of testing young children for "readiness" and changes in parenting concerns, have been expanded. Additional aspects of various models of parent education are included. Updated references and suggestions for further reading will be helpful to students who wish to go beyond the text.

Working with families will always be one of the more challenging tasks for educators. Students are encouraged to realize that this is not a separate role but one that is integrated into the concept of working with the whole child—and one for which they need to prepare fully.

## The Intended Audience

This book is intended for you—as a student, a new or experienced teacher, or any professional working with families of children in public and private schools and kindergartens, elementary schools, early childhood programs, family child care homes, afterschool care programs, and other settings. The principles of partnership and communication with families remain constant—whether you are a teacher who is concerned about relationships with families of kindergarten students, fourth-grade students, or toddlers in a child care setting. If you read an example in this book that seems relevant to younger (or older) children, ask yourself how the ideas would apply in your particular situation. Good professional communication practices are the same, even though the content may differ.

The philosophy and practical techniques discussed in this textbook are appropriate for use no matter where you work with children and their families. Examples of elementary and pre-K teachers help make this clear, as well as information about the No Child Left Behind legislation and requirements that affect public schools and all families with children. Indeed, this important piece of legislation has far-reaching effects on every community and citizen.

## Organization and Content

Section I, "Introduction to Families," is designed to introduce readers to the experience of parenting. Chapter 1 introduces the subject by taking a close look at what life is like for two families, reminding students of the need to prepare to work respectfully with families of diverse backgrounds and experiences and with unique needs. Chapter 2 considers families in our modern world and the factors that shape their lives. Chapter 3 describes the various roles of parents in bringing up children and creating families.

Section II, "Teacher–Family Partnerships in Early Education," explores the subject of teacher–parent partnerships in early education. Chapter 4 examines the various models and motivations for family involvement. Chapter 5 identifies benefits for children, parents, and teachers when parents and teachers work in partnership, as well as potential barriers to teacher–parent relationships. Chapter 6 describes the attitudes and conditions that create the foundations for successful partnerships and offers examples of schools that are trying to implement partnership philosophy in their practice.

Section III, "Methods for Developing Partnerships," moves the student into a discussion of the various techniques that teachers can use to involve families in the educational process. Chapter 7 describes the orientation process for children and parents to begin the process of exchanging information and supporting one another during the separation experience. Chapter 8 introduces a number of informal communication methods, including newsletters, bulletin boards, electronic communication, and other personal methods. Chapter 9 outlines how to plan and conduct effective parent–teacher conferences. Chapter 10 focuses on involving families in their children's classrooms in a variety of ways. Chapter 11 considers parent education. Chapter 12 describes ways that parents and teachers can collaborate to affect community policy and action on family and children's issues as we recognize the need to support families' efforts. It also discusses current legislation and community movements that affect families and schools, and it describes the use of community resources.

Section IV, "Making a Partnership Work," moves to a discussion of working with families with specific needs and issues. Chapter 13 examines ways to welcome and include all families—no matter how richly diverse their language, culture, race, religion, or family structure. Chapter 14 considers working with families in particular circumstances: Families experiencing separation and divorce, families with infants, families with children who have special needs, families who have experienced abuse and neglect, and adoptive families are discussed in particular. Chapter 15 identifies strategies for teachers who face particularly challenging attitudes and situations.

Each chapter begins with clearly defined learning objectives, linked with the specific criteria from the NAEYC program standard for accreditation of programs for young children and from the NAEYC Licensure standards. These standards are printed on the front and back inside covers of this book for handy reference. Specific examples and dialogues from teachers and parents, who may be quite like those encountered by students, make ideas and suggestions real, as in the previous editions. The exercises for students listed at each chapter's end and in the Instructor's Guide are designed to help

students grapple actively with the concepts. Bibliographies of suggested readings can help students examine the issues further; in this edition, they are found on the website.

# Teaching and Learning Tools

- **Use of color throughout the text.** The ninth edition uses full-color photographs, illustrations, tables, and graphs, and to draw attention to examples and other important features. We are excited to offer you this attractive new format.

- **Stronger emphasis on NAEYC standards.** As mentioned earlier, the standards for NAEYC program accreditation for early childhood programs and for professional preparation programs inform the objectives and content of each chapter. You will find the standards themselves printed on the inside covers of this book for easy reference, and you can find them linked after each objective. Throughout the text, you will find icons to denote NAEYC standards and statements.

- **Learning Objectives.** The learning objectives correlated to the main sections in each chapter show students what they need to know to process and understand the information in the chapter. After completing the chapter, students should be able to demonstrate how they can use and apply their new knowledge and skills.

- **Digital Downloads.** Downloadable and often customizable, these practical and professional resources allow students to immediately implement and apply this textbook's content in the field. The student downloads these tools and keeps them forever, enabling preservice teachers to build their library of practical, professional resources. Look for the TeachSource Digital Downloads label that identifies these items.

- **TeachSource videos** feature footage from the classroom to help students relate key chapter content to real-life scenarios. Critical-thinking questions provide opportunities for in-class or online discussion and reflection.

- **Strengthened coverage of working with families from diverse backgrounds.** Throughout this book, readers will encounter an extended understanding of the importance of working respectfully with families of very diverse backgrounds and beliefs. A feature to further highlight this emphasis is the specific points of "Cultural Considerations" to be found in each chapter. Each feature concludes with a personal reflective question to stimulate thought on the topic and to evaluate one's own beliefs/thinking. Watch for these specially marked boxes.

- **MindTap for Education** is a first-of-its kind digital solution that prepares teachers by providing them with the knowledge, skills, and competencies they must demonstrate to earn an education degree and state licensure, and to begin a successful career. Through activities based on real-life teaching situations, MindTap elevates students' thinking by giving them experiences in applying concepts, practicing skills, and evaluating decisions, guiding them to become reflective educators.

- **What Does Brain Research Tell Us feature boxes.** Where relevant, discussions of brain research have been added to broaden reader understanding of the practical implications of research on brain development for working with children and families. Watch for these specially marked features.

- **Opportunities for Self-Reflection** are intended to encourage you to consider your personal attitudes and experiences related to the concepts discussed in each chapter. Thought-provoking questions are included to promote your individual reflection and class discussion.

- **Ideas for Teachers** boxes contain practical considerations, highlighted at appropriate points.

- **Cultural Considerations** sections are found in each chapter to further highlight the text's emphasis on diversity and are accompanied by personal reflective questions to help students evaluate their own beliefs regarding the topic.

- **List of books for both children and adults.** Books that are appropriate for important issues, such as family diversity, divorce and stepparenting, living with children with special needs, child abuse, and adoption, are noted.

- **Key Terms** are printed in **bold type** where they first appear in the chapter and are defined in the margins and again in the glossary at the back of the book. Reinforcement and cross-referencing enhance comprehension.

- A bulleted **Summary** concludes each chapter.

- **Student Activities for Further Study** may be used for in-class or out-of-class assignments.

- An exercise titled **Apply the Concepts: Case in Point** encourages the application of particular concepts to classroom practice and teacher experience. Questions may be used for individual thought and group discussion. In addition, most chapters include realistic scenarios of interaction and attitudes of teachers and parents.

- **Review Questions** check students' mastery of the chapter content.

- **Helpful websites** are offered to recognize the important role that technology plays in today's world in expanding resources for learning. Due to the fluid nature of the Internet, we are not providing web addresses, but instead we describe the relevant agencies and organizations. Students may then use their search engine to locate websites.

- **References**, containing a vast amount of new and updated research, are now found at the end of the textbook.

- **Appendix on Home Visits with Parents and Children** is a newly expanded appendix, which offers information about the topic of home visits, recognizing that some programs and schools may consider using this strategy for family involvement. (This was included as a chapter in earlier editions.)

- A comprehensive **Glossary** and **Index** conclude the text with reader-friendly cross-references.

## Chapter-by-Chapter Coverage and Updates

- Chapter 1 is an introduction to the dominant theme of the text—the need to work respectfully with very diverse families, and the need to understand the unique needs of every family. The chapter has been expanded to help students more easily identify the learning objectives in the chapter. Other new additions include updated information on diversity in America and a new TeachSource video activity.

- Chapter 2 is an in-depth study of modern families and the factors that shape their lives. All statistics and figures in this chapter have been updated. With the numbers of families living in poverty increasing, two new additions to this chapter include a summary of the effects of poverty on brain development and a TeachSource video activity related to homeless families.

- Chapter 3 focuses on the various roles of parents in creating families and bringing up children in order to heighten teacher awareness of the challenges facing parents.

A new section on parenting and brain development has been added. All statistics and references have been updated.

- Chapter 4 offers a discussion of the various models and motivations to include families in the education of their children. A new TeachSource video activity explores the effects of one of the intervention programs that involved parents. One new addition to this chapter is a summary of the benefits of family engagement in their children's education, as identified by the National PTA, as well as an expansion of Hart and Risley's study on the effects of supporting parents to adopt new behaviors with their children. The recommendations of NAEYC are discussed.

- Chapter 5 identifies benefits for children, parents, and teachers when parents and teachers work in partnership, as well as potential barriers to teacher–parent relationships. This chapter has been streamlined to present cogent arguments for working with families, as well as promoting teacher awareness of attitudes and behaviors that prevent real partnership.

- Chapter 6 describes the attitudes and conditions that create the foundations for successful partnerships and offers examples of schools that are trying to implement partnership philosophy in their practice. Realistic examples are offered throughout the chapter.

- Chapter 7 describes the orientation process for children and parents to begin the process of exchanging information and supporting one another during the separation experience. Helpful questionnaires, suggestions for teachers, and handouts are offered for digital download in addition to being embedded in the text.

- Chapter 8 introduces a number of informal communication methods, including newsletters, bulletin boards, electronic communication, and other personal methods. Again, very practical examples are given, as well as a number of video activities to increase understanding and digital downloads for future classroom use.

- Chapter 9 offers a comprehensive look at parent–teacher conferences, with many practical tips for effective communication. The chapter includes a video activity for application.

- Chapter 10 explores the various methods for involving families in the classroom and recognizes other ways that families can support the teacher's efforts outside the classroom.

- Chapter 11 discusses the various facets of parent education and offers many practical suggestions for teachers planning such efforts. A new video case allows students to apply the concepts from the chapter.

- Chapter 12 considers how home and schools work with and within communities. The role of advocate is discussed, and a discussion of service learning for children within the community also is included.

- Chapter 13 focuses entirely on the issue of working with diverse families, including both linguistic and cultural diversity. Some of the issues that often arise are explored, and a detailed example of working with diverse families in a particular program is given, along with another that is available on the website.

- Chapter 14 helps students understand ways of working with families in unique circumstances, such as divorce and remarriage, parenting children with special needs or in adoption, families with infants, and families where abuse and neglect have occurred. Specific examples help clarify the teacher role. New additions to this chapter include information on how brain development is impacted.

- Chapter 15 deals with the recognition that teachers have to work with all parents, including those who are difficult to work with or reach. Helpful strategies are offered, along with tools for considering things from the parent's viewpoint.

## Accompanying Teaching and Learning Resources

The ninth edition of *Home, School, & Community Relations* is accompanied by an extensive package of instructor and student resources.

## MindTap™: The Personal Learning Experience

MindTap for Gestwicki *Home, School, & Community Relations* 9e represents a new approach to teaching and learning. A highly personalized, fully customizable learning platform, MindTap helps students to elevate thinking by guiding them to do the following:

- Know, remember, and understand concepts critical to becoming a great teacher.
- Apply concepts, create tools, and demonstrate performance and competency in key areas in the course.
- Prepare artifacts for the portfolio and eventual state licensure, to launch a successful teaching career.
- Develop the habits to become a reflective practitioner.

As students move through each chapter's Learning Path, they engage in a scaffolded learning experience, designed to move them up Bloom's Revised Taxonomy, from lower- to higher-order thinking skills. The Learning Path enables preservice students to develop these skills and gain confidence by:

- Engaging them with chapter topics and activating their prior knowledge by watching and answering questions about TeachSource videos of teachers teaching and children learning in real classrooms
- Checking their comprehension and understanding through *Did You Get It?* assessments, with varied question types that are autograded for instant feedback
- Applying concepts through mini-case scenarios—students analyze typical teaching and learning situations and create a reasoned response to the issue(s) presented in the scenario
- Reflecting about and justifying the choices they made within the teaching scenario problem

MindTap helps instructors facilitate better outcomes by evaluating how future teachers plan and teach lessons in ways that make content clear and help diverse students learn, assessing the effectiveness of their teaching practice, and adjusting teaching as needed. The Student Progress App makes grades visible in real time so students and instructors always have access to current standings in the class.

MindTap for Gestwicki *Home, School, & Community Relations* 9e helps instructors

**MindTap Moves Students Up Bloom's Revised Taxonomy**

Create
Evaluate
Analyze
Apply
Understand
Remember & Know

Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. (Eds.). (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives.* New York: Longman.
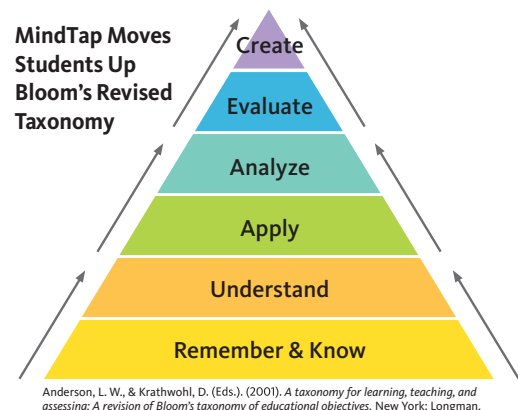
easily set their course since it integrates into the existing Learning Management System and saves instructors time by allowing them to fully customize any aspect of the learning path. Instructors can change the order of the student learning activities, hide activities they don't want for the course, and—most important—add any content they do want (e.g., YouTube videos, Google docs, links to state education standards). Learn more at www.cengage.com/mindtap.

## PowerPoint® Lecture Slides

These vibrant Microsoft® PowerPoint lecture slides for each chapter assist you with your lecture by providing concept coverage using images, figures, and tables directly from the textbook.

## Online Instructor's Manual with Test Bank

An online Instructor's Manual accompanies this book. It contains information to assist the instructor in designing the course, including sample syllabi, discussion questions, teaching and learning activities, field experiences, learning objectives, and additional online resources. For assessment support, the updated test bank includes true/false, multiple-choice, matching, short-answer, and essay questions for each chapter.

## Cognero

Cengage Learning Testing Powered by Cognero is a flexible online system that allows you to author, edit, and manage Test Bank content from multiple Cengage Learning solutions; create multiple test versions in an instant; and deliver tests from your LMS, your classroom, or wherever you want.

## About the Author

Carol Gestwicki was an instructor in the early childhood education program at Central Piedmont Community College in Charlotte, North Carolina, for over 30 years. Her teaching responsibilities included supervising students in classroom situations as they worked with families. Earlier in her career, she worked with children and families in a variety of community agencies and schools in Toronto, New York, New Jersey, and Namibia (Southwest Africa).

She received her MA from Drew University. She has been an active member of the NAEYC for many years, including making numerous presentations at state and national conferences. She has been a Fellow in the Early Childhood Leadership Development Project at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and she has been associated with the T.E.A.C.H. Model/Mentor program.

Her other publications include more than two dozen articles about child development and family issues and scripts and design for 14 audiovisual instructional programs. She has three other books on topics in early education published by Delmar Learning: *Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Curriculum and Development in Early Education,* Fifth Edition (2013); *Essentials of Early Education* (1997); and *Authentic Childhood: Exploring Reggio Emilia in the Classroom* (2002). Currently, she writes a regular column titled "Grandma Says" for *Growing Child.*

## Acknowledgments

And as always, I appreciate the support and love from my own family, who taught me everything I know about the complexity and importance of family.

**CHAPTER 1**

# A Day with Two Families: Diversity of Experience

Digital Vision/Photodisc/Getty Images

## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

**1-1**   Identify circumstances in families' lives that influence parents and children.

**1-2**   List several external factors causing stress in the families portrayed.

**1-3**   List several emotional responses evidenced in the parents portrayed.

**1-4**   Describe why teachers have an obligation to understand family life and how family life impacts teaching.

**1-5**   Identify types of diversity that may be found in typical communities.

**naeyc**

## Related NAEYC Standards

Accreditation Standards (see inside text back cover for full listing of the Accreditation Standards for exemplary early childhood programs)

1.A.01, 1.A.02, 1.A.03, 1.A.04; 2.A.08; 7.A.01, 7.A.02, 7.A.04

Licensure Standards (see inside text front cover for full listing of the Licensure Standards for this chapter)

2a, 2b, 2c

Building partnerships with families is a complex process. The most important way for teachers to begin learning how to work effectively with families is to become sensitive to the needs and pressures of every family. This requires an authentic appreciation of the strengths and challenges inherent in each situation. Families that teachers encounter may be difficult to understand in their diversity. The ideas, emotions, and cultural experiences of unique individuals are what create families. Their living places, their family traditions, and their styles of communicating and living together are familiar and comfortable to those within the family and to no one else. Even families who share the same cultural, linguistic, or religious traditions will not be alike because of the unique inner and outer views of the individuals involved. And in contemporary society, with the myriad cultures, family structures, and lifestyles that exist side by side, interacting within the same schools, workplaces, and communities, it is vital that this assumption and celebration of uniqueness be made explicit and accepted by all teachers.

The differences in families create divisions with teachers only when those differences are seen as frightening, threatening, and mysterious. When they are seen as interesting and enriching to society in general and to the lives they touch in particular, differences are to be valued. When individuals come together to form relationships and communicate in the spirit of openness that is vital for effective family–teacher partnerships, a first step is to attempt to understand the other and to convey an attitude of respect and acceptance. Understanding and acceptance are products of knowledge and an attitude of openness. In this chapter, an examination of the hypothetical lives of two of the case study families we will meet throughout the book may help to heighten awareness of the demands and stresses in the lives of families and of the individual circumstances of each family's life. The more sensitivity that teachers can develop to the complex lives of different families, the more likely they can approach those families with true empathy.

As a teacher working with children, it is important to be mindful of the absolute significance of the families from which they come. Family is the preeminent force in developing us as people. Families are unique in their circumstances, but they are related by the common roles and experiences of parenthood. No one who is just an onlooker to the living drama of any family can come close to appreciating the thousands of details, interactions, and emotional nuances that comprise a family's experience. Researchers (or teachers) frequently do not have the opportunity to record the actions of family members as they live their daily lives, but it is probably only through such methods that the individual threads of the family fabric can be perceived and appreciated. Children and their families may face enormous individual and social pressures, which may not be perceived or understood by teachers. This is why teachers must become as familiar as possible with the story of each family.

Such familiarity has nothing to do with being intrusive; rather, it helps a teacher become as professionally helpful as possible. Appreciating the contribution of each family is a good starting place to consider how to build effective partnerships with them. Throughout the book, you will find references to the diverse fictional families that will be introduced in detail in Chapter 2. They represent the many family structures, cultural backgrounds, and particular circumstances that you may find among families in your

own classrooms. Here is a closer look at two of our case study families as they move through a day. Consider their challenges and their needs as you reflect on the stories. (If you want details on each family, read the section in Chapter 2 beginning on page 23 now.)

## 1-1    Case Study: Meet Two Families

### 1-1a    The Lawrence Family

When the alarm went off at 6 a.m., no one moved. Fannie stayed quite still, hoping Otis would remember it was his morning to get the children up and start the dressing and breakfast process. She felt so tired that she could not get up yet anyway, stifling the guilty reminder that it was 11 the night before when Otis got home from his class, and he must be pretty tired, too. But the past month, she seemed to be completely exhausted at the start of each day. She wondered how she would get through the next three months. She again considered whether it might be a mistake to work right up until the birth, but that was the only way she could take three months off after the baby was born. In her head, she reviewed the decision, but there appeared to be no other options. Their income looked fine on paper, but when you subtracted the child support that Otis sent for the boys—and it would soon increase because Danny had to get braces—there just was no extra money for her to take additional unpaid leave.

She groaned, but Otis still did not move. In a burst of exasperation, she maneuvered out of bed and banged the bathroom door louder than was necessary. Otis stretched and turned over, feeling guilty about Fannie but also telling himself he needed the extra rest after the late night at class and the late night he would have tonight at work. He would get up in a few minutes and help Fannie get the kids ready.

Fannie laid out breakfast things and went to wake the children. Four-year-old Pete was tired and hard to get moving, so she practically had to dress him, and eight-year-old Kim was impatient to get her hair done. By the time they were eating breakfast, Fannie looked at the clock and realized she would have to skip hers and dress quickly or she would be late again. In the still-dark bedroom, she fumbled for clothes and shoes and then went into the bathroom to shower quickly and dress.

She returned to the kitchen to find the table a mess of cereal and milk and heard the TV blaring in the living room. "Kim, when I leave you in charge, I don't expect you to let Pete watch TV. Just look at this mess. Turn that off and at least put the milk in the fridge and get your teeth brushed, and Petey, see if you can't tie your shoes to help Mama out today."

Kim said, "Mama, I want a lunch packed. It's that awful fried chicken for lunch at school today, and I hate it."

"Kim! I told you before, I have to fix lunches at night. I don't have the time. We've got to leave right now, so don't start that." Kim's lip trembled, and Fannie turned away abruptly. She did not have time for one of Kim's scenes; besides, she was getting pretty sick of them because Kim was doing this more and more often. Last night, she spent an hour whining that she did not have any friends in her class and she hated Miss Yates. This was not like Kim, Fannie thought distractedly. She had always been a happy child.

Otis appeared in the kitchen just in time to see Kim burst into tears. "Hey, what's the matter here?" he asked cheerily. Fannie glared at him as Kim sobbed that Mama would not make her a lunch and that she could not eat the lunch at school. "Oh, won't she—" Otis began teasingly, but Fannie snapped, "Just be quiet, Otis. I haven't had one second this morning. I haven't even had time for breakfast, so if she wants a lunch, you'd have to make it, but we have to leave right now!"

Otis handed some change to Kim and said, "Well, at least you can eat some ice cream, OK? Now leave your mama alone." He patted Fannie's shoulder apologetically. "Slow down, babe. You'll make it. You shouldn't be skipping breakfast. Come on, Petey, hurry up. Your mom's in a hurry. Don't forget I work late tonight, Fannie. See you by 10. Try to be awake," he joked, patting her again.

"Fat chance," muttered Fannie and she hustled the children to the car, with Kim still sniffling loudly. As she drove along, Fannie again wondered why they had even gotten married. With work and his college classes, Otis was never home in the evenings. Instantly, she stifled the thought and wished she had at least given him a hug. He did work hard. She knew this was a good marriage—better than the too-young one with Kim and Pete's father that had left her a single mother for two years before she met Otis, who was also recently divorced.

She dropped Kim off at her school with a determined smile. Kim walked off sullenly, and Fannie tried not to mind. She noticed that no one else was entering the door with Kim. It was early, she knew, but she had to drop Kim off, then Pete, and still arrive at her own school by 7:45 a.m. She would not have felt right leaving Kim to wait for the bus, but this was another one of Kim's complaints—all the other kids got to ride the bus. She made a mental note to try to see Kim's teacher soon and ask her whether Kim was justified in saying she had no friends. Perhaps she could arrange for a girl to come with Kim after school—on a day when her own schedule allowed Kim to skip going to afterschool child care. Anyway, she would have to ask Miss Johnston if Kim being dropped off early created a problem; she was a little afraid to do that because the teacher was young and single and probably would not understand hectic morning schedules. Heaven knows it would be worse next year because Pete's school did not offer infant care; that would mean three stops before 7:45 a.m. She had been tempted to move Pete to another school but decided that he already had to adjust to a lot of changes in his young life—and the baby would be yet another one. She sighed and then realized they were at Pete's school. Thank goodness he had been quiet—unusual for him.

"Oh, no," she whispered as they passed the classroom bulletin board with its reminder that they needed toothpaste. "I forgot again." Fannie helped Pete take off his jacket and smiled toward a teacher who approached her.

"Oh, Mrs. Lawrence, I see Pete's got one of his cars again. We really can't let the children bring their own toys; it creates such problems. Please take it with you."

Confused, Fannie looked down and realized Pete was clutching a tiny car in his hand. She started to explain that she did not realize he had brought it, but then she fell silent as she realized that made her sound like a pretty careless mother. Pete put his hand behind his back, and Fannie looked for help from the teacher, who moved down the hall. Fannie realized she had to take the car away. She had a nasty thought about the teacher while she pried the car out of Pete's fingers. Pete burst into tears, and Fannie's stomach tightened. She gave him a quick hug and muttered a few words in his ear, looked appealingly at the teacher—who now looked even more annoyed—and quickly dashed down the hall. She felt like crying herself as she listened to Pete's wails and thought about what a horrible morning it had been for all of them. She was so preoccupied with thinking about the kids' reactions and making resolutions for a tranquil evening that she walked right past another parent, who called hello after her. Sheepishly, she waved and then hurried on, her face hot with embarrassment.

Stoplights and blocked lanes punctuated the trip to her own school, and she found herself almost running from her parked car, aware that several busloads of children had already arrived.

The day went fairly smoothly for Fannie, although with 28 third-graders to look after—plus her turn at playground duty—she was worn out when the final bell rang.

A parent who came to pick up her child wanted to talk about the new reading program, but Fannie had to cut her off to get to the weekly faculty meeting on time. As she hurried down the hall, she reminded herself to make an appointment with Kim's teacher so she would not start off by annoying the teacher showing up unannounced. The faculty meeting dragged on, and Fannie found herself glancing repeatedly at her watch, estimating how long it would take to pick up Kim and get her to her dancing class.

The meeting finally ended and she rushed to her car, noticing with longing the group of young women who stayed back, chatting and planning to go out for a drink.

Her heart lifted when she saw Kim playing happily with another girl at the afterschool child care where the bus dropped her each afternoon. The college student in charge of the group apologized for not remembering that it was Kim's dancing class day and having her already changed. Fannie swallowed her irritation, but it became more difficult to control because rather than change into her dancing clothes, Kim dawdled with her friend until Fannie had to brusquely order her to leave and hurry up and change. Kim began to whine, but she stopped when she saw the look on her mother's face.

Fannie tried to relax and make pleasant conversation about Kim's day as they drove to the dancing class. Kim chattered happily about her new friend at child care and asked if she could come to their house to play one afternoon. Fannie promised, thinking uneasily of the logistics problems of rides and permission that might entail. She dropped Kim at the door, promising to try to be back in time to watch the last few minutes of the class. Checking her watch, she tried to organize her errands to fit them into the hour time slot—drop off the dry cleaning, cash a check at the bank, pick up a few groceries, and get to the post office for stamps. That would cut it pretty close for picking up Pete. She hated his day to be so long, but she knew from experience that it was worse to drag a tired child with her. Trying to ignore her own fatigue, she hurried on.

Pete looked up hopefully as she walked into his room at the child care center, and she realized with a pang that he had probably been doing that as each parent entered the room for the previous half hour. His teacher said that he had had a good day after the upsetting beginning. Fannie was annoyed that she brought that up again. She wished this young woman could understand that it was bad enough having to rush Pete in the morning, let alone strip him of all his favorite things for the day.

An accident held up traffic on the way to the dancing studio, and by the time they arrived, Kim was waiting in the parking lot with the dancing teacher, who looked in a hurry to leave. Kim's face was stormy as she accused Fannie with "You promised." Fannie tried to explain but felt helpless and angry at the eight-year-old's indignation. Impulsively, changing the mood and giving in to her own fatigue, she suggested supper at McDonald's.

Amid the kids' squeals of glee, she thought glumly about the nutritional consequences and decided she would not ask them what they had eaten for lunch. Some mother, she thought, conjuring up an image of her own mother's plentiful dinner table. And there would be nothing to keep warm for Otis. Well, maybe she would fix him a nice omelet if he was not too late.

The kids were cheerful and chatty over hamburgers, so Fannie relaxed and enjoyed their stories. "We're doing OK," she told herself. "They're really fine."

It was after 8 p.m. when they got home. Fannie put Pete in the bathtub and started Kim on her reading homework in the bathroom to watch him so Fannie could unpack the groceries and start a load of laundry. At least Otis had cleaned up the breakfast mess; that was more than she could have stood 12 hours later!

She read Pete a bedtime story and then tucked him in. He was tired and settled down easily. Fannie looked at him tenderly. He was growing so quickly; pretty soon, he would

no longer be the baby. For the thousandth time, she wondered how he would feel when the new baby arrived.

Kim wanted to watch some television, but Fannie reminded her to first find her clothes for the morning and decide if she wanted a lunch, which she did. Making the sandwiches, Fannie thought, "Maybe tomorrow will be a better day." At bedtime, Kim asked her to be sure to give Daddy a kiss for her. Fannie wished again that Otis could be home more at night so they could feel like a real family. She knew what Otis would say if she brought it up again. "The classes are important if I'm ever going to be able to stop selling cars at night. It's only a couple more years. And in the meantime, selling cars is giving us a good living." He was right, of course, but the kids practically never saw him. For that matter, it was tough on all of them.

Fannie folded the laundry, washed her hair, spread out her clothes for the morning, and lay down on the bed to read the morning paper. Within 10 minutes, she had fallen asleep. When Otis came in at 10 p.m., she was still sleeping. He sighed, turned out the light, and went to see if there were any leftovers in the kitchen.

## 1-1b  The Ashley Family

Sylvia Ashley, mother of six-year-old Terrence and four-year-old Ricky, got up quickly when the alarm went off at 6 a.m. She had washed out Terrence's shirt the previous night and wanted to iron it before it was time for him to get up. Anyway, she liked having time in the early morning when the building was still quiet. The rest of the day, there was hardly a moment when someone was not yelling or throwing something. She turned on the kitchen light cautiously, knowing the roaches would scurry away from the sink.

She ironed carefully. She felt bad that Terrence had to wear the same clothes over and over, but at least he was always clean and tidy. She hoped the teacher would notice that and not treat him badly. He had recently made some comments about boys bullying him on the playground, and she hoped it was not because of his clothes. She hated the way some people treated people without money. She also did not want her kids to grow up thinking they were not as good as everyone else just because they lived in subsidized housing and were in a single-parent family.

She sighed, remembering she had to return to the social services office today to talk to the social worker. She dreaded it, but their check had been reduced two months earlier and she simply could not make it on the lower amount. Last week, she had to borrow $5 from her neighbor across the hall to get some macaroni and milk for the kids' supper. She knew she could not do that again—the woman barely spoke to her anyway. Because she was entering that job-training program, she also knew she had to get a new pair of shoes. Ricky's sneakers had a hole right through the toe, too.

She unplugged the iron and glanced at the clock. Time to get the boys up. They were cheerful and chattered away, and Terrence helped Ricky get dressed. Ricky ate a bowl of cereal; Terrence drank a glass of milk to have something in his stomach until he got to school. He preferred to have breakfast at home, and she had always let him until things got so tight. Because he was eligible for the free breakfast at school, she took advantage of that small opportunity to save money.

She dressed quickly and cleaned up the kitchen. Terrence was ready at the door, hair neatly combed, when she got there. He grumbled a bit every day about his mother and little brother having to go with him to school, but she was afraid to let him walk alone six blocks through this neighborhood where shots frequently rang out.

Ricky struggled to keep up. They waved to Terrence from the street as he climbed the school stairs by himself. Sylvia worried about him; he never mentioned a friend, and

after school, she and Ricky walked him home and then he played with Ricky. She knew he needed friends his own age, but she kept him in the apartment unless she could go to the playground with them. She had seen and heard plenty of fights and wildness from some of the kids in their building, and she knew some of them were already in serious trouble with the police. She was going to keep her boys free from that. Terrence was a good student—a smart boy; he would grow up differently from those other kids.

She and Ricky waited at the corner for the bus that would take them downtown to the square, where they could transfer to the one that would take them out to the social services building. She barely heard Ricky chattering and pointing out cars and asking questions as they rode along because she was busy rehearsing what she had to say.

The waiting room was full; she found one chair and held Ricky on her lap for a while until he got wiggly. Then, she let him sit on the floor beside her. She kept listening for the woman to call her name, knowing that Ricky was getting restless. He asked her for something to eat as he watched a man eat crackers he had bought from the vending machine. Sylvia did not want to waste 85 cents and wished she had remembered to bring something for him. Fortunately, they called her name just then, and moving into the small office distracted Ricky.

At least this social worker was kinder than the last one, who had positively glared every time Ricky moved. Sylvia had been furious underneath; the woman had to have known there was no money for babysitters and that nobody could help them out, but it would not have done to let that anger show.

By the end of the discussion, Sylvia felt very depressed. She hated the questions about whether she had heard from either of the boys' fathers; she always wanted to say she was thankful she had not and would not take a penny from either of them anyway. Now that she was starting the job-training program, Ricky's child care would be paid for until after she was working full time.

Sylvia worried about whether her wages would be enough to support all of them when she was no longer receiving assistance and whether the children's medical expenses would be covered, but she was hopeful about what her work could mean for her small family. Maybe she would make enough to get them into a little apartment somewhere nicer, and she would have some friends from work, and Terrence could have friends to play with, and things would be better. She had to do it. Her kids deserved more.

Ricky was tired and cranky as they waited for the bus home. He started to cry, and she shook him a little—not very hard, but she just could not stand to listen to it or have the bus driver stare at her when she got on with a crying child.

He fell asleep on the bus, and she pulled him against her shoulder, knowing he would wake up when they had to transfer. It had been a long morning for him. Neither of them said much as they rode the last bus and walked home for lunch. Ricky finished his soup, and she put him in bed for a nap. She sat and thought about Ricky going to child care and about herself starting the training program. She hoped she could do it. It had been a long time since she had been in school—and she did not have kids and everything else to worry about. She worried about how it would be for Ricky; he had never been away from her at all. The social worker told her that the preschool was a good one, but that did not reassure her that Ricky would not get upset.

She glanced at the clock; in a few more minutes, she would have to wake up Ricky to go get Terrence. He was so worn out that she wanted to let him sleep, but there was nobody to ask to stay with him. She worried briefly about Terrence, who would have to undergo yet another change when she started her job-training program. He would have to come home to an empty apartment and stay by himself for a couple of hours until she

finished her class, picked up Ricky, and arrived home. She had already lost sleep worrying about that, but there was nothing else to be done. She would warn him about not answering the door, staying away from the windows, not using the stove, and everything else she could think of and then just hope he would stay in the apartment, safely, by himself.

Terrence was quiet on the way home. In the apartment, he unfolded a note and handed it to her. It was a reminder that parents needed to send $5 the next day to pay for a ticket to a play at the children's theater next week. Sylvia avoided Terrence's eyes as she said that she could not send the money, so he could stay home from school the day of the play. Terrence said nothing.

She gathered the laundry, her wallet, and keys and then took the boys with her to the basement laundry room. The children sat and argued. When another woman came in, Sylvia snapped at the kids to be quiet, and they sat glumly until she asked Terrence to help her match the socks. Back upstairs, the boys watched cartoons while she made hamburgers for supper. After supper, Terrence did his homework at the kitchen table, and Ricky sat beside him and colored in a coloring book. She put them in the bath together while she tidied the kitchen. After the children watched some more TV, she put them in bed and sat by herself in the living room, on the couch where she would sleep. There was nothing she wanted to see on TV, but she left it on to keep her company. After an hour or so, she turned out the light and went to sleep.

Stop now and consider the various external sources of stress in the lives of these two families, as well as some of the typical emotional responses of the parents.

## 1-2 External Factors That Cause Stress

Socioeconomic status is an evident factor. In the case of the Lawrence family, two fully employed adults are needed to maintain their middle-class lifestyle, especially with the demands of child support after divorce. Work hours and a two-parent working family conflict with family life, and parents usually feel stretched and tense. In the case of the Ashley family, there is the constant struggle of poverty, involving concerns about adequate housing and food, and pressures on the parent to try to improve her socioeconomic status. The demands and functions of other institutions, such as the social welfare system and the school and child care systems, impact families. The complexity of modern life, with time spent commuting and driving children, as well as the errands necessary to maintain a household, is another stressor. Community factors, such as unsafe or violent neighborhoods, add stress, as does the isolation of families, caused by all these factors. The dynamic of marital and family relationships may add additional stress, to say nothing of the minutiae of daily life. No family is immune from these stressors.

## 1-3 Emotional Responses

As you considered the emotional responses of the parents portrayed, surely love and concern for the well-being of their children were most evident. Each of these parents genuinely cared about doing the best possible for their individual children. Even when parents were stressed, their children brought them joy. Guilt was another emotion portrayed in several instances—a feeling that they were not able to do the best for the children that they wanted to do. All were proud of their children and recognized that they deserved good things. Exasperation and frustration were present as well, with the daily annoyances. The feeling of loneliness also was evident.

## CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

### Gender roles

One thing that culture defines is the gender roles played by male and female family members. Create a list for family responsibilities that you expect both males and females to carry out. Then, compare and discuss your assumptions with a fellow classmate. Consider the source of your understandings. Also consider the assumptions about gender roles of each adult family member in these two stories. A teacher's awareness of the diversity of cultural assumptions should be constant.

## 1-4 Implications for Teachers

It is a good idea to try to comprehend the lives of the families with whom you will work. Perhaps this has been a useful exercise to help you be aware of the circumstances of individual families that may affect so many of their interactions with teachers and schools. It is often too easy for teachers to be critical of parents who pick up their children late, forget the rules about bringing toys from home or signing reading records, or seem unwilling to cooperate with field trip plans. Seeing only one's own perspective is a common problem that disrupts relationships and communication.

When viewed more closely, both families have unique living circumstances and experiences, but both also have a common thread of stress with the various roles and responsibilities of parenthood, the isolation that comes from concentrating on children's care, and the deeply felt concerns for the children's lives. The families are alike in that, as with every other family you will encounter, they have both strengths and challenges.

You, the teacher, may or may not be a parent. If you are, then you have had daily experiences from a parent's perspective and do not need further convincing of the astonishing task of blending and fulfilling these various roles. But add to that understanding the awareness that variety in family structure, socioeconomic circumstances, individual abilities, and needs affect all families. Separately and on the printed page, parenting roles appear demanding; when experienced together in the particular context of daily life, they can be staggering. Even so, it is not unusual for teachers to use their own experiences as a standard against which to measure all other families: "If I could do it as a single parent, why can't she do a better job?" This is dangerous because each individual situation is unique.

For those of you who are not parents, recollections of your parents' lives during your childhood may be faint and will not reflect the enormity of life's demands. Even acquaintance with the parents of children in your classroom probably does not fully expose you to the extent of the demands on them. An active imagination will help you best here. On a sheet of paper, jot down any facts you know about several families' lives: the family members' ages, jobs or schools, hobbies and interests, and special family circumstances.

Now mentally take yourself through a sample of their days—and nights. (Parenting does not have a neatly prescribed limit on working hours!) Remember to include the details of daily life, such as doctors' visits, haircuts, and trips to the library and bank, as

well as the unforeseen emergencies that pop up—the car breaking down, the babysitter getting sick, and the additional assignment at work.

Choose a cross section of families to contemplate; remember that the socioeconomic circumstances of any family may add additional strains— whether they are the daily struggles of a poverty-level family or the demands on an upwardly mobile professional family. If you are doing this right, you will likely soon be shaking your head and growing tired in your imagination.

This might be a useful exercise to repeat whenever you find yourself making judgments or complaining about families. It is virtually impossible for a teacher to work effectively with classroom families until he or she is able to empathize with them. Remember, this is only an attempt to mentally understand possible situations; no outsider can fully appreciate what really goes on in any one family. Every family truly stands alone in its uniqueness.

## 1-5    The Importance of Understanding Diversity in Classrooms

In recent years, teachers have been urged to ensure that the children in their classrooms are supported in developing multicultural understanding and appreciation of the many differences and similarities that exist among people. Indeed, developmentally appropriate practice depends in part on teachers' responsiveness to "what is known about the social and cultural contexts in which children live—referring to the values, expectations, and behavioral and linguistic conventions that shape children's lives at home and in their communities" (NAEYC, in Copple & Bredekamp, 2009, p. 10). Culturally responsive teachers create an environment where children feel comfortable exploring the differences that exist among themselves and their families or among families to whom they may be introduced through stories, pictures, dolls, or classroom visitors. A crucial element in such an environment is a teacher who has taken the time to identify personal biases and has the courage to go beyond bias to reach for real understanding and appreciation of differences. Biases are mostly the result of fear, ignorance, and misinformation. It is vital that teachers make the effort to become comfortable and informed about the kinds of life experiences, values, and behaviors of diverse cultural groups and develop nonjudgmental dispositions toward working with the **diversity** of individual families.

**Culture** is a comprehensive term that includes the various understandings, traditions, and guidance of the groups to which we all belong. "In essence, it is a lens through which each of us views and interprets the world" (Espinosa, 2010). This includes the cultures of family; ethnic, linguistic, and racial groups; religious groups; gender and sex role identifications; and geographical and community orientations.

In Chapter 13, we will explore in more detail ways that teachers can incorporate classroom practices that indicate the welcoming of each unique family and the valuing of the contributions their culture can make for rich classroom experiences and positive dialogue. Welcoming each family lays the groundwork for the development of positive identity formation and self-esteem for children and for respectful communication with their parents. In the context of this chapter's appreciation of unique family orientations, it is vital that teachers see the importance of taking the initiative in attempting to understand the backgrounds and circumstances of the families with whom they work (see Figure 1-1). The information to do this may come from published accounts written by members of particular cultural backgrounds.

**diversity**
State of being varied, as by family structure, race, religion, socioeconomic class, primary language, ethnic background, and so on.

**culture**
The various understandings, traditions, and guidance of the groups to which we all belong; the ways of living developed by a social group and transmitted to succeeding generations; the social backgrounds that imbue children with particular forms of knowledge, values, and expectations for behavior.

Published accounts, as in the case of imaginary accounts of the daily lives of families found in this chapter, may be less than perfect sources of understanding. They can, however, certainly heighten teacher awareness of cultural patterns of behavior and communication styles that might otherwise be misinterpreted or even offensive.

Teachers preparing to work with the diverse cultures represented in America or Canada today should become familiar with literature about working with at least the following cultural groups: African American, Native American or indigenous people, various Latino cultures, various Asian cultures, new immigrant families (whether legal or not), interracial and biracial families, gay, lesbian, and transgender families, and inner-city, homeless, single-parent, teenaged, and migrant families (see Figure 1-2). In addition, the populations of particular schools may reflect unique characteristics related to their geography, parents' occupations, or class composition. Such understanding will at least begin to open the doors of knowledge that will increase within relationships with members of the particular cultures; each family will still have its own specific interpretation of its particular culture. Teachers are also cautioned that learning about other cultures is not for the purpose of further separating groups into subjects to be studied but rather to bring people closer together through increased understanding and respect. As Janet Gonzalez-Mena warns in *Diversity in Early Care and Education Programs: Honoring Differences* (2008), "cultural labels are necessarily generalizations." Teachers must always remember that the best source of information about any individual family comes from the relationship with the family itself. And only as families perceive a genuine spirit of welcome and acceptance conveyed by a teacher will they become willing to share information about themselves.

It is important for a teacher to consider ideas about families actively. Recording thoughts about families in a notebook is a good starting place. Throughout this textbook, you will find suggestions titled "Opportunity for Self-Reflection."

**FIGURE 1-1**
Teachers must go beyond their own cultural experiences to understand the circumstances of all families with whom they work.



© Cengage Learning®

TeachSource

**VIDEO ACTIVITY**



© 2016 Cengage Learning®

After viewing the video *Teachers Share their Experiences of Building Understanding of Families,* consider these questions:

**1.** How do the personal experiences of these teachers influence their understanding of diversity?

**2.** How do you see that these teachers' awareness would enhance their relationships with diverse families?

**3.** What strategies are presented to help teachers when encountering cultural diversity?

**FIGURE 1-2**
America is made up of families from very diverse backgrounds.



Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander
2%

2 or more races
2%

Some other race
2%

American Indian and Alaskan Native
1%

Asian
5%

White, non Hispanic
64%

Hispanic/Latino
16%

Black non Hispanic
12%

© Cengage Learning®

Thinking in a journal offers teachers opportunities to reflect actively on the attitudes and experiences that will shape practice and to ask questions that will help them decide on future actions. Here is the first "Opportunity for Self-Reflection." Watch for more in later chapters. Your instructor may assign these to you.

## OPPORTUNITY FOR SELF-REFLECTION

How would you rate your experiences of the diversity that exists in America? So far in your life, have you been fairly removed from individuals who reflect America's diversity or have you had some encounters?

If you have been removed, reflect on the circumstances that have created this absence. If you have encountered diverse lifestyles and values, what was your response? What does this imply about areas on which you will have to concentrate or enhance in your professional development?

## SUMMARY

It is important for teachers to realize the stresses that come with daily family life, and to recognize the unique circumstances of every family.

- Learning the circumstances of family lives helps teacher understanding and effectiveness.

- Time, socioeconomic stresses, and family structure, as well as the specific interpersonal relationships within families, are all factors that create stress within families.

- Most parents are devoted to their children and feel overwhelming love, along with pride, guilt, frustration, and exasperation. Parenting is an intensely emotional experience.

- The more teachers understand about the social and cultural contexts in which their families live, the better they can respond, and the more they can support learning and development. Respect and acceptance will lay the foundation for successful communication and partnerships.

- Understanding something of the framework within which members of various cultural groups operate is important for teachers as a beginning place to appreciating the family's unique perspective.

### Student Activities for Further Studies

1. Consider a family you know well. Create an imaginary day in their life—similar to the stories you read early in the chapter. Work with a partner, brainstorming to stimulate your thinking. Share your account with the class.

2. Invite a parent of a young child to join your class discussion. Ask him or her to come prepared to present a sample diary of the family's daily life.

**3.** Read an account of a family or cultural group that might increase your understanding of various cultures or segments of society. For ideas, refer to the "Suggestions for Further Reading" box. Then, small groups of students could create a day in the life of a particular family, such as a newly immigrated Asian family, a Latino family, a family with two mothers, and so forth.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Birckmayer, J., Cohen, J., Jensen, I., & Variano, D. (2005). Kyle lives with his granny—Where are his mommy and daddy? Supporting grandparents who raise grandchildren. *Young Children, 60*(3), 100–104.

Bloom, L. (2001). I'm poor, I'm single, I'm a mom and deserve respect: Advocating in schools as/with mothers in poverty. *Educational Studies,* (32), 30–36.

Burt, T., Gelnaw, A., & Lesser, L. (2010). Do no harm: Creating welcoming and inclusive environments for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) families in early childhood settings. *Young Children, 65*(1), 97–102.

Clay, J. (2007). Creating safe, just places to learn for children of lesbian and gay parents. *Spotlight on Young Children and Families.* Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Copple, C. (Ed.) (2003). *A world of difference: Readings on teaching young children in a diverse society.* Washington, DC: NAEYC.

DeJong, L. (2003). Using Erikson to work more effectively with teenage parents. *Young Children, 58*(2), 87–95.

Deparle, J. (2004). *American dream: Three women, ten kids, and a nation's drive to end welfare.* New York: Viking Books.

Duarte, G., & Rafanello, D. (2001). The migrant child: A special place in the field. *Young Children, 56*(2), 26–34.

Eggers-Pierola, C. (2006). *Connections and commitments: Reflecting Latino values in early childhood programs.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Ehrenreich, B. (2002). *Nickled and dimed: On (not) getting by in America.* New York: Owl Books.

Elliott, K., & Fujiwara, S. (2005). Working with homeless young children and families. *Exchange,* (166), 45–48.

Hale-Benson, J. (1986). *Black children: Their roots, culture and learning styles* (rev. ed.). Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. (2001). *Learning while black: Creating educational excellence for African-American children.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Hildebrand, V., Phenice, L., Gray, M., & Hines, R. (2007). *Knowing and serving diverse families* (3rd ed. [most cultural groups]). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Howard, G. (2006). *We can't teach what we don't know: White teachers, multiracial schools* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Huntsinger, C., et al. (2000). Understanding cultural contexts fosters sensitive caregiving of Chinese American children. *Young Children, 55*(6), 7–15.

Joshi, A. (2005). Understanding Asian Indian families: Facilitating meaningful home–school relations. *Young Children, 60*(3), 75–79.

Lamme, L., & Lamme, L. L. (2002). Welcoming children from gay families into our schools. *Educational Leadership, 59*(4), 6–11.

Lipper, J. (2004). *Growing up fast* [teenaged mothers]. New York: Picador.

Louie, V. (2004). *Compelled to Excel: Immigration, education and opportunity among Chinese Americans.* Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.

Lundgren, D., & Morrison, J. (2003). Involving Spanish-speaking families in early education programs. *Young Children, 58*(3), 88–95.

Lynch, E., & Hanson, M. (2004). *Developing cross-cultural competence: A guide for working with young children and their families* (3rd ed.). Baltimore: Paul H. Brooks.

Rosier, K. (2000). *Mothering inner-city children: The early school years.* Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Shipler, D. (2004). *The working poor: Invisible in America.* New York: Knopf.

Swick, K., & Bailey, L. (2004). Communicating effectively with parents and families who are homeless. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 32*(3), 211–215.

Thompson, G. (2004). *Through ebony eyes: What teachers should know but are afraid to ask about African American students.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Walker-Dalhouse, D., & Dalhouse, A. D. (2001). Parent–school relations: Communicating more effectively with African American parents. *Young Children, 56*(4), 75–80.

Wardle, F. (2001). Supporting multiracial and multiethnic children and their families. *Young Children, 56*(6), 38–39.

Washington, V., & Andrews, J. D. (Eds.). (2010). *Children of 2020.* Washington, DC: NAEYC & Council for Professional Recognition.

**4.** Read the children's book *On the Day I Was Born* by Debbi Chocolate (Scholastic Press, 1995). Discuss with your classmates the specific ways your family celebrates the birth of a new baby. How do the celebrations you hear about differ from the customs in the book? How are the family's emotional responses like the emotional responses you hear described by your classmates? Write a brief summary of the differences and similarities among various family experiences.

**5.** With your classmates, generate a list of questions that would help you conduct a respectful interview with a person from another cultural or religious background. For example, you might want to formulate some questions that ask about family customs and holidays, religious observances, the roles played by family members, how discipline is approached within the family, and so on. Conduct the interview and then share some of your learning with your classmates. You may find the person to interview among your classmates, among the faculty at your college, in your neighborhood, or in one of your community institutions.

## Apply the Chapter Concepts: Case in Point

This chapter is about the case studies of two families. Now that you have finished reading the case studies, consider these questions to further your understanding:

**1.** Identify the distinct emotions felt by Fannie Lawrence. What situations caused these emotions?

**2.** Identify the distinct emotions felt by Sylvia Ashley. What situations caused these emotions?

3.  Identify some sources of stress for the children in the Lawrence family. Identify some sources of stress for the children in the Ashley family. What effect did the children's stress have on the parents?

4.  In addition to the stress felt by the children, what are some other causes of stress for each mother?

## Review Questions

1.  List several external factors causing stress in the families portrayed.

2.  List several emotional responses evidenced in the parents portrayed.

3.  Describe why it is important for teachers to understand family life.

4.  Identify the various kinds of diversity teachers may encounter.

## Helpful Websites

- The National Association for the Education of Young Children. This website contains the NAEYC position statement "Responding to linguistic and cultural diversity, recommendations for effective early childhood education."

- National Black Child Development Institute. NBCDI initiates positive change for the health, welfare, and educational needs of all African American children. Visit this website to find helpful resources.

- Culturally & Linguistically Appropriate Services. The CLAS Institute identifies, evaluates, and promotes effective and appropriate early intervention practices and preschool practices that are sensitive and respectful to children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The site has information for consumers (e.g., practitioners, families, and researchers) about materials and practices that are available and the contexts in which they might select a given material or practice.

# Families Today



© Sunny Studio/Shutterstock.com

## Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

**2-1**    Define family and consider several characteristics of families.

**2-2**    Describe seven characteristics of contemporary life that influence the nature of modern families.

**2-3**    Describe the importance of teacher understanding of contemporary trends that affect families.

**naeyc**

## Related NAEYC Standards

Accreditation Standards (see inside text back cover for full listing of the Accreditation Standards for exemplary early childhood programs)

7.A.01

Licensure Standards (see inside text front cover for full listing of the Licensure Standards for this chapter)

2a

For a teacher, one very important role is collaborating with families. Although many teachers might prefer to concentrate only on the children who enter the classroom each day, children live in the context of their families—and their families are the most important and lifelong influence on their development. Teachers must understand those family contexts and respect the uniqueness of each family while bringing them into the child's educational world as full partners.

The families with whom a teacher works may not resemble the teacher's own and may be quite unlike each other in their structure, family lifestyles and values, cultural influences, and relationships. As America grows increasingly diverse, teachers need to prepare themselves to recognize, appreciate, and work with such diversity.

In this chapter, we begin to consider some of the reasons for the diversity and changes in family structure and appearance that are apparent in most American classrooms.

## 2-1  What Defines a Family?

The family is the most adaptable of human institutions and is able to modify its characteristics to meet those of the society in which it lives. Certainly, the family has adapted to much in recent decades: urbanization, a consumer-oriented economy, economic uncertainty, wars and terrorist attacks, changes in traditional religious and moral codes, increasing cultural diversity, and changes in all relationships basic to family life—including but not limited to those between male and female and young and old. Such changes have been occurring in every corner of the world, although our primary concern here is the American family.

Consider the families you might meet within any classroom or community: single-father families and single-mother families, with parents who may be widowed, divorced, or have never married; blended families from second marriages that bring together children from unrelated backgrounds; unmarried couples with children; gay and lesbian parents; adoptive families; grandparents functioning as parents in the absence of the intermediate generation; foster families; and families of mixed racial heritage—either biological or adoptive.

Such a wide range of families and relationships may make us feel uncomfortable in the distance from our values or ideals or comforted by the realization that our families are not the only ones that do not fit the perfect image of 1970s families in *The Cosby Show* seen on late-night cable reruns.

The word *family* has always meant many things to many people. What comes to mind when you think of the traditional family? Social historian Stephanie Coontz reminds us that this answer has changed depending on the era and its particular myths (2000). Despite the obvious fact that the phrase *the American family* does not describe one reality, it is used sweepingly. Many creators of television commercials seem to think it usually means a white, middle-class, monogamous father and mother at work, children busy with school and enrichment activities family—one that lives in a suburban one-family house, nicely filled with an array of appliances, a minivan or SUV in the driveway, and probably a dog in the yard. Such a description excludes the vast majority of American families, according to the last census (which does not enumerate dogs or minivans but found less than 7 percent of households conforming to the classic family headed by a working husband with a wife and two children at home). A recently made comment was that whereas most families used to have 2.6 children, many children now have 2.6 parents.

The entire Western world has experienced similar changes in family life during the past several decades.

Rather than suggest that the family is under siege, it is more accurate to suggest that our image of family may need to be broadened to accept diversity. It may be more important to concentrate on what families do rather than what they look like. Family may be more about content than about form (see Figure 2-1).

**FIGURE 2-1**
Families come in all shapes and sizes.

(a)

(b)

(c)

(d)

(e)

(f)

(g)

(h)

(i)

(j)

### 2-1a "Ideal" Family Images

What image comes to mind when you see the word *family?* People's mental images vary greatly, based in large part on their individual life experiences.

Try an experiment while you think about family. On a piece of paper, draw stick figures to represent the members of the family you first knew as a young child. Who represented family to you? Then, do the same to represent your family when you were a teenager. Had your family changed? Was anyone added or removed? What were the reasons for any changes?

Now draw the family in which you presently live. Who are your family members? What does this say about any changes in your life? If, as an adult, you have lived in numerous family structures, represent them, too.

Now, for one last picture. Imagine that you could design the ideal family for yourself. Draw what it would look like.

Sorting through your pictures may generate some thinking about family. One prediction is that most of the ideal pictures include a father, mother, and two children (probably a boy first and then a girl). If you are like most students who have done this, the ideal family usually includes these members—regardless of the actual composition of the families in which individuals have participated or presently live. Real experiences are often passed over in favor of the ideal two-parent, two-child home.

For many, the image of an ideal family is influenced less by real experiences than by subtle cultural messages that have bombarded us since childhood. The Vanier Institute reports that 86 percent of high school students surveyed, including 78 percent of the teens whose own parents had not stayed together, expect a lifelong marriage. From magazine advertisements to children's books—and, even more pervasively, from television shows—the attractive vision of husband, wife, and children beams at us. These inescapable messages influence our thinking about desirable family characteristics, and may produce guilt and negative feelings when the reality does not match the ideal.

Interestingly, students surveyed are aware that their ideal image is just that and are also aware of the societal influences that helped produce it.

---

### FAMILY IMAGES

1. Draw the family you lived in as a child.
2. Draw the family you lived in as a teenager.
3. Draw the family in which you presently live.
4. Draw the ideal family you would design for yourself.
5. Share your pictures with two classmates.
6. Considering all the pictures, what statements can you make about family and the influences that have created your sense of an ideal family?

---

But they may be less aware of how insidiously this subliminal image can influence their encounters with real families. If an ideal lurking unknowingly in a teacher's value system is considered "right," then a negative evaluation can be made of any family that does not measure up to this standard. The problem with assessing this one **nuclear family** model as "good" is that it may prevent us from considering alternative family structures as equally valid.

**nuclear family**
A social unit composed of parents and children.

It is too easy for a teacher to feel more affinity and comfort with a family that approaches his or her ideal than with one that is clearly outside the teacher's individual frame of reference.

## 2-1b  Samples of Diverse Family Structures

If personal images of family cannot convey a complex enough picture, perhaps brief descriptions of families you might meet and work with will help. In Chapter 1, you followed two fictitious families through a day. Here, we will meet them and others—as a sample of families any teacher may encounter—to consider the diversity in structure that corresponds to the differing values, customs, cultural influences, and lifestyles that appear in our world. Watch for these same families later in this book when we consider different relationships and techniques in teacher-parent communication.

A.  From Chapter 1, you will recall meeting Sylvia Ashley, 29, who lives alone with her sons Terrence (nine) and Ricky (three). Her marriage to Ricky's father ended in divorce before Ricky's birth; she did not marry Terrence's father, who was in one of her classes in college before she dropped out during the first semester. She has had no contact with her parents since before Terrence's birth. Although she lives in a subsidized housing apartment, she rarely has contact with her neighbors; hers is the only white family living in the area. Before Ricky was born, she worked in a department store. Since then, her income has come from **TANF** (Temporary Aid to Needy Families) funds and food stamp payments as well as the subsidized housing. She is now beginning a job-training program, hoping to follow through with her plan to become a nurse's assistant. Ricky has been home with Sylvia, but he will enter a child care program when his mother begins the job-training program.

B.  You have also met Otis and Fannie Lawrence, each married before. Otis has two sons from his first marriage—14 and 10—who visit one weekend each month and for about six weeks each summer. Fannie's seven-year-old daughter Kim and four-year-old son Pete see their father, who has moved out of state, only once or twice a year and have called Otis "Daddy" since their mother married him three years ago. Fannie is six months pregnant, and they have recently moved into an attractive new four-bedroom house, knowing even that will be too small when the boys visit. Fannie teaches third grade and will take a three-month maternity leave after the baby is born; she is on the waiting list at four centers for infant care. Otis sells new cars and is finishing up a business degree at night. Kim goes to an afterschool child care program that costs $115 a week. Pete is in a private child care center, operated by a national chain, that costs $175 a week. The Lawrence family income is $98,000 annually. The Lawrence family is African American.

C.  Bob and Jane Weaver have been married five years. They married the day after Jane graduated from high school. Sandra, blonde and blue-eyed just like her parents, was born before their first anniversary. Bob and Jane live in an apartment down the street from Jane's parents and around the block from her married sister. Jane has not worked outside the home much during their marriage. They are hoping to have another child next year. A second pregnancy ended in stillbirth last year. Bob earns $49,750 on the production line at a furniture factory. Jane started working part-time this year to help save for a down payment for a first home purchase. Her mother cares for Sandra while Jane works. Her income of $950 a month after taxes would not go far if she had to pay for child care. They are concerned that Bob's hours could be decreased in the economic downturn.

D.  Salvatore and Teresa Rodriguez have lived in this country for six years. Occasionally, one of their relatives comes to stay with them, but the rest of the family has stayed in

**TANF**
Temporary Aid to Needy Families—the welfare reform legislation passed in 1996.

Mexico. Right now, Sal's 20-year-old brother Joseph is here taking an auto mechanics course; he plans to be married later this year and will probably stay in the same town. Teresa misses her mother, who has not seen their two children since they were babies. Sylvia is seven and has cerebral palsy; she attends a developmental kindergarten that has an excellent staff for the physiotherapy and speech therapy that she needs. Tony is four. Teresa works part-time in a bakery. Her husband works the second shift on the maintenance crew at the bus depot so he can be home with the children while she is at work. This is necessary because Sylvia needs so much extra care. They rent a six-room house, which they chose for the safe neighborhood and large garden.

E. Mary Howard is 16 and has always lived with her parents in a predominantly middle-class neighborhood of African American families. Her grandmother had a stroke and now lives with them, too. When Mary's daughter, Cynthia, was born last year, her mother cared for the baby so Mary could finish the tenth grade. Cynthia is now in a church-operated child care center because Mary's mother needed to return to work to cover increased family expenses. Mary still hopes she might someday marry Cynthia's father, who is starting college this year. He comes to see her and the baby every week or so. Mary also wonders if she will go on to train in computer programming after she finishes high school, as she had planned, or if she should just get a job so she can help her mother more with Cynthia and with their expenses.

F. Susan Henderson celebrated her thirty-ninth birthday in the hospital the day after giving birth to Lucy. Her husband Ed is 40. After 13 years of marriage, they have found adding a child joyful and shocking. Lucy was very much a planned child. Susan felt established enough in her career as an architect to be able to work from her home for a year or so. Ed's career as an investment counselor has also demanded a lot of his attention. Some of their friends are still wavering over the decision to begin a family. Ed and Susan are quite definite that this one child will be all they will have time for. Money is not the issue in their decision; their combined income last year was well over $350,000. Susan's major complaint since being at home with the baby is that the condominium where they live has few families with children, and none of them are preschoolers. She has signed up for a Mother's Morning Out program for infants one day a week and has a nanny who comes to their home each day so she can work.

G. Sam (age two) and Lisa (age four) Butler see their parents a lot—they just never see them together. Bill and Joan separated almost two years ago, and their divorce is about to become final. One of the provisions calls for joint physical custody of their two preschoolers. What this means right now is spending three nights one week with one parent and four with the other. The schedule gets complicated sometimes because Bill travels on business, but so far, the adults have been able to work it out. The children seem to enjoy going from Dad's apartment to Mom and the house in which they have always lived, but on the days they carry their suitcases to the child care center for the midweek switchover, they need lots of reassurance about who is picking them up. Joan worries about how this arrangement will work as the children get older. Sam and Lisa attend a child development center run by the local community college. Joan is already concerned about finding good afterschool care for Lisa when she starts school in the fall, and she knows that it will further complicate her schedule when she has to make two pickup stops after work. She works as a secretary for the phone company and needs to take some computer courses this fall, but she does not know how she can fit them in and the kids, too—let alone find time to date a new man she has met.

H. James Parker and Sam Leeper adopted a one-year-old Korean boy, Stephen, four years ago. They have been together in a committed relationship for 10 years, although they

do not live in a state that recognizes gay marriage or legal civil unions. They live a fairly quiet life and visit with Sam's family, who lives in the same town, as well as a few friends, including another family they met at an adoptive parents' support group. Many of their gay friends have also expressed the desire to adopt but are concerned about the prejudices sometimes directed toward gay fathers. Stephen attends prekindergarten in an early childhood program at a church in their neighborhood. Sam is an emergency room doctor at the local hospital. James sells insurance with a national company. When asked if they are worried about their son growing up without a relationship with a mother figure, James responds that Stephen has a grandmother and aunt with whom he is close and that they are more concerned about helping him come to know something of his native culture, as well as for him to be free of some of society's myths regarding sexuality.

I. Justin Martin (age five) lives with his grandparents. His grandfather retired this year after working for the city as a horticulturalist for 30 years. His grandmother has never worked outside the home, having raised five children of her own. Justin is the child of their youngest daughter. She left high school after his birth and has drifted from one minimum wage job to another. On several occasions, she left Justin alone rather than find a child care arrangement for him, and she was reported for neglect by neighbors in her apartment building. Justin's grandparents felt they could provide a better home environment for him, so they petitioned the court for his custody. Neither Justin nor his grandparents have much contact with his mother—she did not come to the house for his last birthday, and she sent some money for Christmas. Justin is in a public school kindergarten. His grandfather takes him to school. His grandmother is quite homebound with arthritis and often finds a lively five-year-old exhausting as well as financially draining on their retirement income.

J. Nguyen Van Son has worked very hard since he came to this country with his uncle 12 years ago. After graduating from high school near the top of his class, he completed a mechanical drafting course at a technical college. He has a good job working for a manufacturing company. His wife Dang Van Binh, a longtime family friend, came from Vietnam only six years ago, and they were married soon after. Her English is still not good, so she takes evening classes. Their three-year-old son Nguyen Thi Hoang goes to a half-day preschool program because his father is eager for him to become comfortable speaking English with other children. Their baby daughter Le Thi Tuyet is at home with her mother. On weekends, the family spends time with other Vietnamese families, eager for companionship and preserving their memories of Vietnam. None of their neighbors talk much with this family, assuming they cannot speak English.

K. Richard Stein and Roberta Howell have lived together for 18 months. Richard's six-year-old son Joshua lives with them. Roberta has decided she wants no children; she and Richard have no plans for marriage at this time. Roberta works long hours as a department store buyer. Richard writes for the local newspaper. On the one or two evenings a week that neither of them can get away from work, Joshua is picked up from a neighborhood family child care home by a college student Richard met at the paper. Several times, this arrangement has fallen through and Joshua has had to stay late with his caregiver, who does not like this because she cares for Joshua and five other preschoolers from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m. each day.

L. Ted Sawyer winces when a member of his Thursday night basketball team calls him "Mr. Mom." He does not like the name, but he admits it is often difficult for others to understand why he is the primary caregiver in his family while his wife Jana works for a large corporation. She also travels with her job—and often is gone for most of the

workweek. Ted cares for their first-grader Jacob and their toddler daughter Emma. Between getting Jacob to school and watching out for his active daughter, Ted rarely has time for part-time plumbing jobs—the work he did before the children were born. He has already decided that he will likely not return to full-time employment until both children are in high school because he and his wife believe that one parent should be available as much as possible during children's early years. He sometimes wonders if some of the digs he receives are because his wife, who is the main family breadwinner, is white and he is black, or whether it is just because others do not seem to understand the reasoning they used to make their choices about roles inside and outside the home. Jana is happy and very successful in her work, providing for a comfortable lifestyle, although she misses being home with the family. When out of town, she tries to talk with the children on Skype every night.

In this sample, as in any other you might draw from a cross section in any school, the family some might call "traditional"—with a father who works to earn the living and a mother whose work is mostly rearing the children and caring for the home—is a distinct minority in the variety of structures; in fact, well over 60 percent of American children under age eighteen live in what used to be considered as unconventional families (Downer & Myers, 2010).

The last census indicated the diversity and continuing change in patterns of living situations. The proportion of children living with two married parents continues to steadily decrease, falling from 77 percent in 1980 to less than 25 percent in 2011 (Coontz, 2011). Among children younger than age 18 today, about one-quarter live only with their mothers, 5 percent live only with their fathers, and another 4 percent live with neither parent—often in the care of grandparents, other relatives, or foster care (Coontz, 2011).

## CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

### Family diversity

As you read the descriptions of the various families, you may be focusing only on the most obvious cultural differences, as in families who have come from other countries or speak different languages. But when we define culture broadly to include the values, beliefs, and usual behaviors passed on to individuals by the segment of society around them, we realize that each of these families will have its unique culture, related to the specific environment that surrounds each one. Cultural beliefs are influenced by educational and socioeconomic experiences, ethnic and racial backgrounds, and individual community and family interpretations of societal norms.

To reflect on the reality of this awareness, think about answers to the following three questions and then discuss your answers with two classmates to discover how your unique family culture influences your own thinking:

1. What one food would you be astonished *not* to see on the table during a family celebration?
2. What is one thing you would expect only a mother to do? Only a father?
3. What is the correct way to fold a bath towel?

Each of us comes from a unique cultural background, no matter what our ethnic or language background.

The Vanier Institute defines family as any combination of two or more persons who are bound together over time by ties of mutual consent, birth, and/or adoption of placement and who, together, assume responsibilities for variant combinations of some of the following:

- Physical maintenance and care of group members
- Addition of new members through procreation or adoption
- Socialization of children
- Social control of members
- Production, consumption, and distribution of goods and services
- Affective nurturance—love

How do we define *family?* The Census Bureau definition of "two or more people related through blood, marriage, or adoption who share a common residence" seems too narrow to include all the dynamics of these sample families. *Webster's Eleventh New Collegiate Dictionary* suggests a broader interpretation and no fewer than 22 definitions that seem more applicable when considering these sample families: "a group of people united by certain convictions or common characteristics" or "a group of individuals living under one roof and usually under one head." Perhaps the most inclusive definition of a family is "a small group of intimate, transacting, and interdependent persons who share values, goals, resources, and other responsibilities for decisions; have a commitment to one another over time; and accept the responsibility of bringing up children." Or simply, from the definition in a survey by the Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company, "a group of people who love and care for each other." The organization Family Support America says that "family is a group of people who take responsibility for each other's well-being, and defining the family is up to the family itself." What about the idea that *family* is "not only persons related by blood, marriage, or adoption, but also sets of interdependent but independent persons who share some common goals, resources, and a commitment to each other over time" (Hildebrand et al., 2007)? Mary Pipher (1996) adds these thoughts:

> *Family is a collection of people who pool resources and help each other over the long haul. Families love one another even when that requires sacrifice. Family means that if you disagree, you still stay together.... All members can belong regardless of merit. Everyone is included regardless of health, likability, or prestige.... Families come through when they must.... From my point of view, the issue isn't biology. Rather the issues are commitment and inclusiveness.*

## CONSIDER THE TRUTH OF THIS STATEMENT

A family is like no other family, like some other families, and like all other families.

No matter how we define it, family is important to us (see Figure 2-2). Families may include more than just parents and children. Mary Howard's family includes her parents, grandmother, and child, and the Rodriguezes have Uncle Joseph. The development of the nuclear family is more for affection and support than for the self-sufficient economic unit that the traditional extended family created. Families may include people not related by blood and hereditary bonds. The Parker-Leeper and Stein-Howell households include parents and children and others whose relationship is based on choice, not law.

**FIGURE 2-2**
Family defined as caring.

We may be related by birth or adoption or invitation.

We may belong to the same race or we may be of different races.

We may look like each other or different from each other.

The important thing is, we belong to each other.

We care for each other.

We agree, disagree, love, fight, work together.

We belong to each other.

© Cengage Learning®

## WHAT DOES BRAIN RESEARCH TELL US ABOUT POVERTY AND BRAIN DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD?

With millions of American children spending their first years living in families with incomes below the poverty line, the concern arises for their greater risk of impaired brain development. This is due to the number of risk factors associated with poverty that can influence the brain through multiple pathways. During the sensitive early years, children's brains are most vulnerable to deficits and negatives in their environments. These include the following: inadequate nutrition, both prenatally and in the early years; effects of nicotine, alcohol, and drugs; exposure to environmental toxins; trauma and abuse; maternal depression; and the quality of daily care. Any or all of these risk factors may have a direct impact on the neurological development within the brain, becoming evident later in delayed motor skills and in much lower test scores related to vocabulary, reading comprehension, math, and general knowledge. America's poor children are disproportionately exposed to these risk factors.

1. Consider how quality child-care experiences for America's poor children can help mitigate some of these specific risk factors.
2. What is being done in your community to alleviate the effects of poverty on children's development?
3. Learn more about the work of the Children's Defense Fund by visiting their website.

## OPPORTUNITY FOR SELF-REFLECTION

Think about our case study families just described. Are there any families with whom you would be uncomfortable? What is causing this discomfort? How would you work with this family, given the discomfort? Which families seem closest to you in values? How do you define *family?*

## GOOD BOOKS TO READ WITH CHILDREN TO CELEBRATE FAMILY DIVERSITY

Ackerman, K. *By the Dawn's Early Light.* (Mom works the night shift)

Adoff, A. *Black Is Brown Is Tan.* (interracial family)

Aldrich, A. *How My Family Came to Be—Daddy, Papa and Me.* (adoption, biracial family, two dads)

Aylette, J. *Families: A Celebration of Diversity, Commitment, and Love.* (photos and descriptions of all kinds of families)

Bauer, C. *My Mom Travels a Lot. [self-explanatory]*

Baum, L. *One More Time.* (child going between Mom's house and Dad's house)

Blain, M. *The Terrible Thing That Happened at Our House.* (Mom takes a job)

Blomquist, G., & Blomquist, F. *Zachary's New Home: A Story for Foster and Adopted Children. [self-explanatory]*

Bosch, S. *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin.* (two fathers)

Boyd, L. *Sam Is My Half-Brother. [self-explanatory]*

Brisson, P. *Mama Loves Me From Away.* (mother in prison)

Brownstone, C. *All Kinds of Mothers.* (mothers who work in and out of the home)

Bunting, E. *Can You Do This, Old Badger?* (living with grandparent)

Bunting, E. *Fly Away Home.* (homeless child and father)

Cowen-Fletcher, J. *Mama Zooms.* (mother in a wheelchair)

Crews, D. *Bigmama's.* (extended family)

Davol, M. *Black, White, Just Right.* (biracial family)

Downey, R. *Love Is a Family. [self-explanatory]*

Drescher, J. *Your Family, My Family.* (different shapes and sizes)

Eichler, M. *Martin's Father.* (nurturing single father)

Eisenberg, P. *You're My Nikki.* (new working mother)

Falwell, C. *Feast for 10.* (large family)

Galloway, P. *Good Times, Bad Times—Mummy and Me.* (working single mother)

Galloway, P. *Jennifer Has Two Daddies.* (child alternates weeks with her mom and stepdad and her father)

Garden, N. *Molly's Family.* (two moms)

Gonzalez, R. *Antonio's Card/La Tarjeta de Antonio.* (two moms; bilingual book)

Hayes, M., & Witherell, J. *My Daddy Is in Prison. [self-explanatory]*

Hickman, M. *Robert Lives with His Grandparents. [self-explanatory]*

Hines, A. *Daddy Makes the Best Spaghetti.* (father cooking)

Jenness, A. *Families.* (family diversity)

Juster, N. *The Hello, Goodbye Window.* (grandparents)

Kroll, V. *Wood-Hoopoe Willie.* (African American family)

Kuklin, S. *How My Family Lives in America.* (real stories of different ethnic backgrounds)

Lasker, J. *Mothers Can Do Anything.* (many jobs mothers do)

Loewen, I. *My Mom Is So Unusual.* (contemporary American Indian)

Maslac, H. *Finding a Job for Daddy.* (unemployed father)

McPhail, D. *The Teddy Bear.* (homelessness)

Merriam, E. *Mommies at Work.* (mothers who work in and out of the home)

Moore, E. *Grandma's House.* (spending the summer with an active, nontraditional grandmother)

Newman, L. *Gloria Goes to Gay Pride.* (child in gay family)

Parr, T. *The Family Book.* (different types of families, including two moms and two dads)

Pelligrini, N. *Families Are Different.* (family diversity)

Quinlan, P. *My Dad Takes Care of Me.* (unemployed father at home)

Richardson, J., & Parnell, P. *And Tango Makes Three.* (two dads)

Rotner, S., & Kelly, S. *Lots of Moms.* (the many appearances of American mothers, and what they do)

Schlein, M. *The Way Mothers Are.* (unconditional love)

Schwartz, A. *Oma and Bobo.* (mother, grandmother, and child)

Simon, N. *All Families Are Special.* (different types of families)

Simon, N. *All Kinds of Families.* (diverse family structures)

Skutch, R. *Who's in a Family?* (multicultural contemporary families)

Soto, G. *Too Many Tamales.* (Mexican American family)

Spelman, C. *After Charlotte's Mom Died.* (single father)

Stinson, K. *Mom and Dad Don't Live Together Any More.* (divorce)

Tax, M. *Families.* (variety of families)

Valentine, J. *One Dad, Two Dads, Brown Dad, Blue Dads.* (all kinds of dads)

Vigna, J. *My Two Uncles.* (child with uncle and his partner)

Wickens, E. *Anna Day and the O-Ring.* (two mothers)

Wild, M. *Space Travelers.* (homeless)

Willhoite, M. *Daddy's Roommate.* (divorced parent, gay father)

Williams, V. *A Chair for My Mother.* (families; generations of urban working-class family)

Woodson, J. *Visiting Day.* (father in prison)

New relatives, like those acquired in a stepfamily, such as the Lawrences, may be added. Families may omit a generation, such as Justin Martin and his grandparents. In Justin's case, as with increasing numbers of children—now about 4 percent (Childstats, 2013), he is being raised by grandparents in the absence of his own parents. Aunts, grandparents, and other family members as well as thousands of foster parents who are not related to children by blood are some of the adults who head modern families.

Families may consist of more people than those present in a household at any one time. The Butler joint custody arrangements and the "blended" Lawrence family are examples of separated family structures.