

Communicating Policy Changes with Families

This tool will help your organization communicate policy changes in a family-centered way, with a focus on increasing family and community engagement.

1

Explain what is changing.

- What policy change is coming?
- When will the change take effect?

2

Explain how the change came to be.

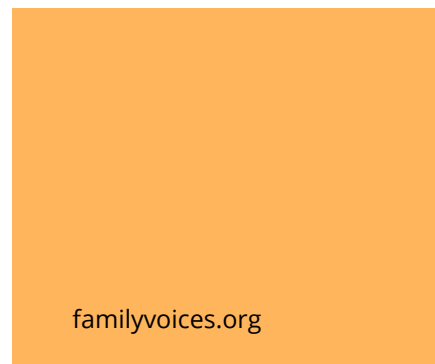
- How was this change decided?
- Who made the decision to change this policy?
- Was the change driven by our institution or by local, state or federal policy?
- How were families consulted about the change before it was decided?

After completing steps 1 and 2, you can engage families in helping you develop the language in step 3.

3

Explain implementation of the policy change.

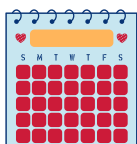
- How will this change affect the services available to children and families and how these services will be delivered?
- What will be different for families after this change takes effect? What will families need to do differently?
- Are there some families that will be more impacted than others?
- How and where can families seek support in advance of the changes, or who can they talk to about their concerns?



Practical Communication Guidance for Policy Changes



Use plain language. Sharing information using plain language ensures that a broad audience can understand your message and take appropriate action. Plain language also helps people to trust your message. Test your message with community partners or family partners who can provide feedback on whether the message is clear and easy to understand.



Timing matters. Share information about policy changes as far in advance as possible. Families' lives are structured around the services and supports they have, and the later you communicate, the less time families have to pivot or plan for the impacts on their lives.



Include support mechanisms for families. If the policy change you are sharing will affect the services families receive, refer them to additional supports or replacement services that can fill any gaps in care they may experience. You might share about community organizations that offer needed services, for example. This will help families navigate the new landscape and allow you to highlight your community partners.



Get the message out. Partner with trusted organizations to disseminate policy information. Go where families are and share information with the people families listen to. You can prepare newsletter releases for community organizations or online ads to share policy information.



Make space for two-way communication. Assign a point of contact for questions and concerns families may have after receiving your message, and include this person's contact information in your policy communication. You may also offer ways for families to get involved in your work by inviting them to family groups that shape policy implementation.



Be prepared for ongoing communication. Because policy changes can fluctuate based on state budgets and federal allocations, things can change during the implementation process. It's important to keep families aware of any changes that happen along the way.

Sample Policy Change Communication

New Guidance on Transportation Funding

Released on January 1, 2026

Effective April 31, 2026, transportation funds can be used for rideshare services to medical appointments. This change is a result of a new policy with the county Board of Developmental Disabilities.


 **1** Explain what is changing and when.

After hearing from families about some of the barriers of public transportation, the Board of Developmental Disabilities worked with its family advisory group to develop a new rule that allows people to use rideshare services like Uber and Lyft to get to their medical appointments.

 **2** Explain how the change came to be.

Families will need to pay for the rideshare service at the time they use it, and they can be reimbursed (paid back), if they upload their receipt and a doctor's note to the portal that confirms they attended the appointment.

We will share additional information if there are changes to this policy.

 **3** Explain implementation of the policy change.

For more information

- If you have any questions about this change, you can reach out to your case manager. The main number to reach case managers is xxx.xxx.xxxx.
- If you need help using ride sharing services, here's a link to an article about how they work.
- For a list of transportation services in our county, visit WEBSITE.
- For more information on the Board of Developmental Disabilities family advisory council, visit WEBSITE.

Additional resources

Family Voices Plain Language Checklist to help you draft your message in simple language

Developing a Family Centered Policy Agenda, a tool to help your organization engage families meaningfully in creating a policy agenda