Engaging Parents: 
An Important Role for 
All Practitioners

Carol M. Trivette, Ph.D.
Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute
Morganton and Asheville, North Carolina, USA
www.puckett.org


Focus of this Presentation

• Talk about our goals when working with parents
• Talk about strategies for enhancing parental competence
• Talk about some of the challenges and solutions in working with parents.
• Talk about resources that you might find helpful in working with parents.

Possible Goals for Working with Families

• Help parents find the resources they need for their family
• Help parents create a safe environment for their family
• Help parents get the medical care they need for their children
• Help parents to be great parents
### Head Start Parent and Family Engagement Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Well-Being</td>
<td>Parents and families are safe, healthy, and have increased financial security.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Parent-Child Relationships</td>
<td>Beginning with transitions to parenthood, parents and families develop warm relationships that nurture their child's learning and development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families as Lifelong Educators</td>
<td>Parents and families observe, guide, promote, and participate in the everyday learning of their children at home, at school, and in their communities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families as Learners</td>
<td>Parents and families advance their own learning interests through education, training, and other experiences that support their parenting, careers, and life goals.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Head Start Parent and Family Engagement Outcomes, continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Engagement in Transitions</td>
<td>Parents and families support and advocate for their child's learning and development as they transition to new learning environments, including EHS to HS, EHS/HS to other early learning environments, and HS to kindergarten through elementary school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Connections to Peers and Community</td>
<td>Parents and families form connections with peers and mentors in formal or informal social networks that are supportive and/or educational and that enhance social well-being and community life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families as Advocates and Leaders</td>
<td>Parents and families participate in leadership development, decision making, program policy development, or in community and state organizing activities to improve children's development and learning experiences.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### IDEA Parent Outcomes

Families understand their child's strengths, abilities, and special needs.

Families know their rights and advocate effectively for their child.

Families help their child develop and learn.

Families have support systems.

Families access desired services, programs, and activities in their communities.
Parent and Family Outcomes

Head Start Outcomes
1. Family Well-Being
2. Positive Parent-Child Relationships
3. Families as Lifelong Educators
4. Families as Learners
5. Family Engagement in Transitions
6. Family Connections to Peers and Community
7. Families as Advocates and Leaders

OSEP Outcomes
1. Families understand their child’s strengths, abilities, and special needs.
2. Families know their rights and advocate effectively for their child.
3. Families help their child develop and learn.
4. Families have support systems.
5. Families access desired services, programs, and activities in their communities.

Challenges
- Sometimes hard to get a response to requests
- Sometime tough to get follow through
- Frequently miss appointments
- Sometimes hard to keep engaged

Contrasting Approaches to Intervention

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capacity-Building Models</th>
<th>Traditional Models</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>Treatment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment</td>
<td>Expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths-Based</td>
<td>Deficit-Based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource-Based</td>
<td>Service-Based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family-Centered</td>
<td>Professionally-Centered</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Conceptual Foundations (Capacity-Building Paradigm)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Promotion Models</th>
<th>Enhancement and optimization of competence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment Models</td>
<td>Create opportunities to use existing abilities and learn new competencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths-Based Models</td>
<td>Emphasis on the use of strengths to obtain resources improving functioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource-Based Models</td>
<td>Use of a broad range of resources and supports as “interventions”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family-Centered Models</td>
<td>Family choice and family involvement in obtaining resources and supports</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DEC Recommended Practices**

1. Practitioners interact with the family in ways that are sensitive and responsive to cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic diversity and that build mutual trust and respect.
2. Practitioners use effective communication strategies (including attending and active listening; seeking and verifying; and joining and supporting) that are responsive to the family’s concerns, priorities, and changing life circumstances.
3. Practitioners provide the family with complete and unbiased information in order for family members to make informed choices and decisions.
4. Practitioners build on the family’s strengths to support family functioning, promote family member competencies, and strengthen parent-child relationships.
5. Practitioners assist family members to identify and access formal and informal resources and supports to achieve family-identified outcomes or goals.
6. Practitioners provide the family with individualized and flexible opportunities to enhance their knowledge, skills, and confidence related to their child’s development and learning.
7. Practitioners and the family work together to achieve family-identified outcomes and goals.

**Division for Early Childhood Recommended Practices**

[http://www.decrecpractices.org](http://www.decrecpractices.org)
Family-Centered Practices

Family-centered practices are practices that place primary emphasis on creating a relationship with a parent in such a manner that uses and builds on the parent’s capabilities and competencies when supporting his/her child.

- Relational Practices
- Participatory Practices

Relational Practices

Relational practices include behaviors typically associated with effective help giving (active listening, compassion, empathy, etc.) and positive practitioner attributions about parent capabilities.

- These kinds of practices are typically described in terms of behaviors that strengthen parent and practitioner interpersonal relationships (mutual trust, collaboration, etc.).
- Relational practices also include practitioner beliefs about existing family member strengths and their capacity to become more competent as well as practitioner respect for personal and cultural beliefs and values.

Family-Centered Practices Scale

Relational Indicators

- Staff really listen to my concerns/requests.
- Staff see my child/family in a positive, healthy way.
- Staff understand my child’s/family’s situation.
- Staff recognize my child’s/family’s strengths.
- Staff recognize the good things I do as a parent.
- Staff do what they promise to do.
- Staff are warm and caring toward me.
Participatory Practices

Participatory practices include behaviors that involve parent choice and decision making, and which meaningfully involve parents in actively procuring or obtaining desired resources or supports for achieving desired life goals.

- These kinds of practices strengthen existing competencies and provide opportunities for learning new capabilities by engaging family members in informed choices and acting on those choices.

- Participatory practices also include practitioners’ responsiveness to a family’s situation and changing life circumstances, and help-giver flexibility to these situations and circumstances.

Family-Centered Practices Scale

Participatory Indicators

- Staff provide me information to make good choices.
- Staff respond to my requests for advice/assistance.
- Staff help me be an active part of getting desired resources/supports.
- Staff are flexible when my family’s situation changes.
- Staff help me learn about things I’m interested in.
- Staff support me when I make a decision.

Video

Bubbles
Relationships Among Family-Centered Help Giving Practices, Self-Efficacy Beliefs, and Program Participant Outcomes

Video

Practices with families

“Unresponsive” Parents

• Why might this happening?
• What does the parent do well? What are the parent’s strengths?
• What are the interests of the parent?
• Patience, Patience, Patience
**Telling “Bad News”**

- Be honest
- Listen for their feelings
- Listen for their informational needs

**Parent-Professional Conferences**

- Prior to meeting
  - Ask parents when it would be convenient to meet
  - Ask parents what they want to discuss
  - Provide all relevant information
- Introduce everyone in the room including yourself
- Review the agenda
- Use good communication facilitators

**Communication Facilitators**

- Wait Time
- Overlapping Talk
- Topic Changes
- Technical Terms

Community Mapping Action: Uncovering Resources and Assets for Young Children and their Families

- “Through community mapping, EI/ECSE professionals can gather neighborhood resources that potentially can have a profound impact on family outcomes by providing useful information to families.”
- Provides a roadmap to uncovering resources for young children

http://yec.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/15/3/31?ijkey=IgTNjdCHCH1o2&keytype=ref&siteid=spyec

Home-School Collaboration for Embedding Individualized Goals in Daily Routines — Salazar, 2012

- “Collaborative planning for an activity-based approach to intervention allows teachers and parents to work together on shared goals within the natural contexts of daily routines and activities.”
- Provide tools to guide you through this process

http://yec.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/15/3/20?ijkey=KkOcpitQ58Zq.&keytype=ref&siteid=spyec

Blogs

- Practitioners can provide information about what a child did during the day
- Practitioners can post something a child does and how it shows what he is learning — “... shows he is starting to understand the purpose of drawing/writing and some early literacy awareness”
- Parents can write to teachers about what their children did outside of school

http://yec.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/15/2/20?ijkey=qxvCIUJbQZx1j0158xqtype=ref&siteid=spyec
• Benefits of Blogging for Parents
  Increases communication about what is happening at school

• Benefits of Blogging for Children
  Encourages parents to read blog entries with their child

• Benefits of Blogging for Educators
  Becomes a way of documenting progress


Head Start’s National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family

Head Start Resources on Family Engagement and Relationships
http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/Early%20Head%20Start/FamilyEngagement
Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Simulation

http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/hsdy/center/hs_ece_simulation

Resources for Families

Parent Practice Guides from the Center for Early Literacy Learning (CELL)

http://www.earlyliteracylearning.org/parentresource1.php
Resources for Families from the Technical Assistance Center on Social Emotional Intervention (TACSEI)

http://www.challengingbehavior.org/communities/families.htm

TACSEI’s “Backpack Connection Series” Handouts

http://www.challengingbehavior.org/communities/families.htm

TACSEI’s “Making Life Easier” Handouts and Tipcards

http://www.challengingbehavior.org/communities/families.htm
Conclusion

• Watching families grow in confidence is one of the most exciting things

• You can have a powerful confidence-building influence by being strengths-based, encouraging families to make their own decisions, and by helping parents understand what a great “job” they are doing with their children.
Resources


---

Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children

- Council for Exceptional Children www.sped.org

- Division for Early Childhood. www.dec-sped.org