Parent-Professional Partnerships
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Life affords no greater responsibility, no greater privilege, than the raising of the next generation.  
C. Everett Koop

Attitudes Toward Partnering with Parents

- An open-ended questionnaire was emailed to SLPs
- 88% strongly agreed that parental involvement is essential
- 48% of SLPs were unhappy with the level of parental involvement (citing workplace barriers, SLP barriers, parent barriers)

What Parents Say About Professionals

- 1. They don’t listen to/understand what I say.
- 2. They don’t take time with us (time to explain what they’re doing and why).
- 3. They talk in strange ways - AAC, ADD, PDD, LRE, SLP.
- 4. They don’t answer our questions.

What Professionals Say About Parents

- 1. They don’t listen. They “hear what they want to hear.”
- 2. They don’t take time to help us (no carry over), respond to our contacts, notes, etc.
- 3. They don’t answer our questions fully and honestly.
- 4. They keep information from us.

Watts Pappas, ASHA Convention 2005
Stonestreet, Johnston, & Acton, 1991
Stonestreet, Johnston, & Acton, 1991
Adapted from Stonestreet, Johnston, & Acton, 1991
What Professionals Say About Parents

- 5. They insist we make the decisions. “You’re the professional!”
- 6. They guess the diagnosis and seek unusual treatment (“a cure”) based on TV shows, advice from uninformed people, the Internet, etc.
- 7. They aren’t realistic about the level/competence of the child.
- 8. They don’t accept our help.

Adapted from Stonestreet, Johnston, & Acton, 1991

The joys of parents are secret, and so are their griefs and fears. Francis Bacon

First Encounters with Families

- Ask yourself:
  - Do you give parents enough information to prepare for the first meeting with you?
  - Do you ask parents what they want before telling them what you offer?
  - Do you convey to the family your admiration or recognition of what they have accomplished to date (in a sincere and convincing manner)?

Feel Like Dancing?

- What makes the dance of partnership so difficult?
  - Choice: Parents did not choose to be in this relationship, professionals did.
  - Forced, immediate intimacy: “We cry in front of people whose last names we don’t know.”
  - So many partners, and the faces change constantly!

Fialka, 2001, Young Exceptional Children

First Encounters with Families

- Do you comment to the parents about the strengths of their child?
- Do you ask questions and provide information using language that is readily understood by the family?
- Do you answer parents’ questions in an open and honest manner?

Feel Like Dancing?

- What makes the dance of partnership so difficult?
  - Who leads? Professionals have content knowledge, but families know the child. “. . .apply our knowledge with caution and humility, with the recognition that it is one of many truths. . .”
  - Priorities: Include parents’ perspectives so that our recommendations are relevant, practical, and manageable.

Fialka, 2001, Young Exceptional Children
From: Advice to Professionals Who Must “Conference Cases”

... If you could see the depth of our sadness, then you would be moved to return our almost five-year-old son who sparkles in the sunlight despite his faulty neurons. ... Please do not give us advice, suggestions, comparisons or another appointment. (That’s for later.) We want only a quiet shoulder upon which to rest our too-heavy heads.

Janice Fialka

Breaking the News

- Try to talk to both parents together (or parent with supportive other).
- Talk in a private, quiet setting.
- Avoid interruptions.
- Communicate regard for the child as an individual.
- Choose clear, direct, accurate statements.

Breaking the News

- Tell the whole truth, but in a caring way with “a tag of hope”.
- Be sensitive to problems of conflicting information.
- Never be afraid to say “I don’t know.”
- Be wary of making predictions.

Breaking the News

- Expect strong reactions and emotions.
- Offer a time to follow up.
- Give parents something to take away from the meeting.

Tips for Effective Communication with Families

- The central struggle of parenthood is to let our hopes for our children outweigh our fears.

Ellen Goodman
**Tips for Effective Communication with Families**

- Use a modulated voice that reflects the family’s emotional tone.
- Be comfortable with and respect silences.
- Stay on topic. Take cues from what family members have already said.
- Note words and expressions that family members use and incorporate their language into your comments.

**Tips for Effective Communication with Families**

- **T**  **F** One essential requirement for being an active listener is to anticipate what the speaker is going to say.
- **T**  **F** Empathy means reading nonverbal as well as verbal messages.
- **T**  **F** The effective listener maintains constant eye contact with the speaker.

**Tips for Effective Communication with Families**

- **T**  **F** The effective listener listens for the “big picture” from the speaker’s message.
- **T**  **F** The efficient listener listens to what is being said and, at the same time, develops a response.
- **T**  **F** A speaker’s looks or accent can make active listening more difficult.

**Tips for Effective Communication with Families**

- **Active Listening**
  - You are not listening when:
    - You have an immediate answer for my problem.
    - You feel critical of my speech or grammar.
    - You tell me about your experience.
    - You are dying to tell me something.
  - You are listening to me when:
    - You really try to understand, even if I don’t make sense.
    - You feel a little tired after we talk.
    - You do not take my problem from me, but help me deal with it.
    - You hold back your desire to give advice.
    - You accept my gratitude by telling me how good it makes you feel to have helped me.

**Tips for Effective Communication with Families**

- **Effective Questioning**
  - Begin conversations with open-ended questions.
  - Use close-ended questions when precise information is needed.
  - Avoid “why” questions. They may create defensiveness.
  - Keep questions simple and ask one at a time.
**Tips for Effective Communication with Families**

- Have a clear understanding of the problem or situation before seeking solutions.
- Ask questions to convey interest and curiosity rather than attempting to analyze or diagnose.
- Ask about times or situations when things were going well and what seemed to work.

**Tips for Effective Communication with Families**

- Reflecting Feelings
  - Be aware of what a family member says and how it is said (e.g., body language, voice tone, glances).
  - Respond to all aspects of a family member’s feelings.
  - Reflect feelings in a clear, concise manner.

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**Reflecting Feelings or Content?**

- Parents of a 4-year old who stutters:  "We have tried to be good parents, but obviously we messed up with Peter."
- Mother of a child with autism:  “I can't tell you how tired I am of everybody patronizing me with their sympathy! What the hell do people know about how I feel?”
- Parent of 4-year-old nonspeaking child:  “He’s just too stubborn to talk. He'll talk when he's good and ready.”
The secret of dealing successfully with a child is not to be its parent. 
~Mell Lazarus

Discussing Treatment Methods with Families
- Point out that there is no single approach that works for everyone; discuss the research/claims surrounding the suggested treatment
- Obtain the family’s view of the child’s problem and possible solutions
- Use the family’s terms to explain what you hope to do

Howitt, 2004

Discussing Treatment Methods with Families
- Work with the family as a team to seek solutions:
  - Find exceptions to the problem (when does the problem not occur?)
  - Reframe: find an alternative, more positive way to view a problem
  - Scale: determine the degree of importance of each issue

Howitt, 2004

Building Bridges with Families
- Selecting strategies
  - Think about strategies that have already worked for the family
  - Ask family to notice a target behavior that the child sometimes demonstrates
  - Relate these exceptions/solutions to possible treatment methods
  - Ask family to alter one behavior with their child

Briggs, 1998

Building Bridges with Families
- Plan for future contacts
  - Use the “miracle question” to determine the parents’ long-term goals
  - Empower the parents by presuming they have all the skills necessary to help their child
  - At the same time, give them information they may not have
    - e.g., refer them to reliable resources

Briggs, 1998

Characteristics of Useful Intervention Plans
- Plan includes goals that are important to the family.
- Enjoyable activities embedded in daily routines.
- Resources available and accessible for (e.g., time, money, emotional support, energy, space, materials).
- Intervention plan amenable to frequent changes and updating.
- Written plan passes the “refrigerator magnet test”.

Hewitt, 2004
**Research on Partnering with Families**

- 5 preschoolers with autism and their families participated
- Parents were taught 2 teaching strategies (based on specific needs) to use in play routines and caregiving routines
- Teaching strategies included arranging environment, natural reinforcement, time delay, modeling, and gestural cuing
- Used the family’s toys and materials


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**Research on Partnering with Families**

- With support and instructions, parents consistently generalized the teaching strategies
- Intervention had positive effects on each child’s specific communication outcome


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**Research on Partnering with Families - Tips**

- Focus on 1 or 2 teaching strategies that “fit” the family (e.g., if family already uses gestural cuing, teach a different strategy)
- Provide the family with:
  - written information about the strategies
  - examples of the strategy being used
- Ask the parent to practice the strategy while you observe, and practice the strategy in other routines


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**Research on Partnering with Families**

- A study by Elder et al. focused on 2 particular strategies used by parents:
  - expectant waiting
  - imitating with exaggerated affect
- 8 children with autism and their parents participated
- Training took place in the home


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**Research on Partnering with Families**

Results:

- Children’s word production (# of total words and # of different words) increased
- Imitation with exaggerated affect facilitated vocabulary development
- Parent’s turn length decreased
- Expectant waiting was effective


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**Research on Partnering with Families**

- 51 children 24 to 33 months with developmentally delays and their families
- Treatment - 6 months of responsivity education/prelinguistic milieu teaching
- Treatment strategies individualized
- More communicative acts for the treated group
- No significant differences in parental stress between the treatment group and the no-treatment group

Fey, et al. 2006
Research on Partnering with Families

Goals of Treatment:
- Heighten parent awareness of nonintentional and intentional communicative behaviors
- Encourage parents to wait for child to produce interpretable behaviors
- Encourage parents to follow child’s lead
- Provide appropriate consequences to child’s act

Fey, et al. 2006

Research on Partnering with Families

Fey et al. taught strategies of waiting and following child’s lead by:
- Role play
- Video clips
- Video taping parents
- Asking parent to critique own performance

Fey, et al. 2006

Research on Partnering with Families

Ecological Model of Interaction
- Balance
  - Shared contribution to the interaction
- Match
  - Adult’s behavior must be similar to the child’s
- Responsiveness
  - Child’s attempts depend on adult’s response
- Nondirectiveness
  - Style that encourages active engagement
- Emotional Attachment
  - Adult reinforces, models, and enjoys communication

McDonald & Carroll, 1992

Research on Partnering with Families

- Child: (opens box) “Key!”
- Adult: “You’ve found more toys.”
- C: “Zoom, zoom”
- A: “That’s a van like mommy’s.”
- C: (makes car fly) “Ooh, up, up”
- A: “Cars don’t fly. They stay on the ground.”
- Child: (opens box) “Key!”
- Adult: “Key!”
- C: (offers a car to adult)
- C: (begins racing) “Zoom, zoom!”
- A: “Zoom, zoom!”
- C: (flies car) “Up, up.”
- A: (flies too) “Up, we’re flying.”

Research on Partnering with Families

Project Parent involved parents teaching their preschoolers speech production. The parents were given teaching goals, material, and strategies.
- Results: When compared to the control group, the children in the experimental group improved significantly when parents taught.

Broen & Westman, 1990

Research on Partnering with Families - Tips

- Provide individualized teaching programs
- Provide a home activity kit weekly
- Provide group meetings as well as individual meetings
- Group meetings: share experiences, successes, and frustrations
- Individual meetings: answer individual questions, model teaching techniques

Project Parent - Broen & Westman, 1990
**Research on Partnering with Families**

- Participants - 28 parents and their typically developing 4-year-old children.
- Experimental group parents instructed to use non-verbal and verbal print referencing. Control group parents did not receive instruction.
- Results:
  - Children's literacy skills improved.
  - Children's references to print increased.

Justice & Ezell, 2000

**Research on Partnering with Families - Tips**

- Instructional videos are helpful
- Review strategies with the parent
- Demonstrate strategies
- Provide verbal feedback to parents after watching them practice
- Be specific with tasks
  - "Use each target behavior at least three times per book reading."

Justice & Ezell, 2000

**Don’t forget fathers!**

- Assume that fathers are interested; avoid asking for or only talking to the mother
- Specifically invite fathers to be involved, respecting gender and cultural practices
- Can also ask other male family members (like grandfathers, uncles, etc.) for their observations

www.specialquest.org

**Culture**

- **Culture is a way of life.**
- **Culture is learned.**
- **Culture includes a group’s:**
  - Values and beliefs
  - Behaviors
  - Verbal & nonverbal communication style
  - Relationship patterns
- "What everybody knows that everybody else knows."

**Tips for Addressing Cultural Diversity**

- Do not assume anything about a particular family
- Carefully observe the family for their interaction styles
- Interview to obtain the information needed to develop culturally appropriate interventions
  - Aim to understand social situations typical to the family, feelings about those social situations

Van Kleeck, AJSLP, 1994

Van Kleeck, 1994
Tips for Addressing Cultural Diversity

- Ask descriptive (rather than “why”) questions
  - e.g., “How would you describe a typical playtime with your child?”
- Ask for specific examples
- Questions should be open-ended
- Ask one question at a time

Van Kleeck, 1994

Tips for Addressing Cultural Diversity

- If the interaction styles are remarkably different from those found in mainstream parent-child interactions, you have options

Van Kleeck, 1994

Tips for Addressing Cultural Diversity

- Keep the Program
  - some parents may wish to participate even if it does not match their cultural interaction patterns
- Create a Program that Fits the Family
  - intervention is more effective if fitted into the family’s lifestyle; but, can be difficult for clinicians from another cultural background
- Alter a Mainstream Program to Fit the Family
  - Allows for modifications to evolve during the course of intervention

Van Kleeck, 1994

Challenging Situations-Families Who Don’t Follow Through

- Child with severe hearing loss wears hearing aids at preschool but parents do not put hearing aids on the child at home
- Child with severe cerebral palsy and normal intelligence, but no speech; parents do not want the child to use AAC
- Respond nonjudgmentally; try to find out the reason family does not accept/provide the recommended intervention.

Challenging Situations-Families Coerced into Services

- Families required to receive services; services seen as an interference
- Don’t become defensive or react to anger.
- “It is understandable that you are frustrated and upset. Maybe we can figure out some things to work on that would help you and be worth the time that you are going to have to spend here. How can we work together to do our best for Stevie?”

Challenging Situations-Families with Multiple Needs

- Affected by drugs, violence, poverty
- Parents with mental retardation or illness
- Multiple children with special needs
- Families who lack skills and resources
- Start with small child goals that are important to the family.
- Ensure that strategies do not impose additional burden.
- Attend to the needs of the family as a whole.
Challenging Situations - Families Who Want It All!

- Families who want as much and as many kinds of intervention as possible (and may pay exorbitant sums for controversial therapies)
- Families who “shop around” for diagnoses and treatment methods
- Explore what it is the family hopes will be accomplished by additional time or services.
- Provide objective information on alternative perspectives and methods of intervention.
- Offer printed materials and opportunities to talk with other parents or professionals.

Resources

- http://firstwords.fsu.edu/
- http://www.primeraescuela.com/
- http://www.colorincolorado.org/
- http://www.spiesforparents.cpd.usu.edu/Site%20Map.htm
- www.fathersnetwork.org
- www.walearning.com

References


