

## Handout 1: What Families Might Say<sup>5</sup>

### Overview

Studies show that positive staff behavior usually results in a positive relationship with the family. Negative behavior, on the other hand, may result in difficult staff-family relationships. What do families want from professional helpers? The contrasting experiences of families, as cited below, provide some critical clues. The column on the left denotes positive experiences, while the one on the right denotes the negative.

### **Empathy**

*The ability to perceive and communicate accurately and with sensitivity to the feelings and experiences of another person.*

#### Positive

Able to put me at ease, relax me. Concerned about me, interested. Understood me, picked up my vibrations. Gave me time to talk about myself. Was nice to talk with. Was gentle, kind, understanding. Was an avid, intense listener. Made me feel comfortable. Tuned in to my needs, feelings. Communicated easily with me. Comforted me when needed. Cared a lot about me. Had a lot of concern for people.

#### Negative

Was detached, distant. Was a cold fish. Didn't relate to me. Didn't hear what I was saying. Didn't get us to open up. Was off in their own world. Didn't seem to care.

### **Genuineness**

*The ability to be spontaneous and come across as a real person.*

#### Positive

Was warm, lively, alive. Had a good sense of humor. Was casual, relaxed, easy-going, low key. Talked about own family, self, own experiences. Shared own feelings. Didn't seem like a social worker. Seemed like a friend. Seemed like a natural person. Acted like it was more than a job. Was friendly, pleasant, easy to talk with. Was likeable, personable.

#### Negative

Was too nice, phony, put on. Was too low key. Was too calm and collected. Too reserved. Was above it all; almighty, holy. Was mechanical, business-like.

<sup>5</sup>Adapted from the Department of Health and Human Services, "Child Welfare In-Service Training Curriculum," *Serving Families* (Washington, D.C., Department of Health and Human Services, 1982).

## Handout 1: What Families Might Say (Continued)

### Acceptance

*The ability to communicate warmth, respect, liking, and concern in gentle ways.*

#### Positive

Let me say what I felt. Didn't accuse, criticize, or condemn me. Respected me. Didn't hold anything against me. Didn't treat me like a child. Felt I could trust them, could say anything. Made me feel equal. Made me feel good. Treated me as an individual. Didn't put me down.

#### Negative

Pushed me when I wasn't ready. Seemed superior to me. Made me feel inferior. Lectured me. Didn't like me. Got angry when I didn't follow their ideas.

### Concreteness

*The ability to communicate thoughts and ideas clearly and specifically.*

#### Positive

Talked clearly. Could understand them. Made a lot of sense. Was down to earth. Came right to the point.

#### Negative

Was vague. I didn't understand what they were getting at. Didn't come straight to the point. Beat around the bush.

### Competence

*The ability to know what to do and how to do it.*

#### Positive

Knew what they were doing. Knew their job. Knew what they were talking about. Obvious that they were very good in their work. Seemed well educated. Seemed experienced. Was a good teacher. Had put it all together. Seemed to know when to ask a question. Always had the situation well in hand.

#### Negative

Didn't know much more than I did. Was too quiet; rarely said anything. It was just like chattering with a friend; too casual. Gave us no guidance. Was too new, inexperienced. Seemed like they were still in training. Was not capable; not professional. Was disorganized. I had no confidence in them.

### Objectivity

*The ability to see different points of view.*

#### Positive

More objective than a friend. Didn't take sides. Didn't just tell you what you wanted to hear.

#### Negative

Didn't realize I had different ideas. Sided with my spouse. Couldn't see my point of view.