



## Webinar C6 – Coping with Families Who are Coping with Adversity

### Question and Answer

#### **Question 1 - What are some strategies to address any negative attitude staff may have toward parents?**

**Answer:** Every professional has a unique background that is shaped by family/cultural experiences, education, professional pursuits, previous work experience, professional interests, and other influences. Each of these factors influences who you are as a professional and the beliefs that you hold about yourself and others. It is important to recognize that your beliefs influence how you work with families. Here are some suggestions to help staff work through possible negative attitudes.

- Try to help staff view a family's beliefs through the perspective of the family rather than their own
- Reflect upon how the difference in beliefs is affecting the partnership process
- Help them acknowledge negative emotional reactions to families and what brings them up
- Help them concentrate on those things they can respect and appreciate about families
- Discuss differences when important
- Encourage staff to talk with families about their needs and stressors
- Being an "appreciative ally" is not always easy

In addition, the use of a reflective practice when working with vulnerable families is essential. Negative feelings are usually aroused by this work. However, these experiences can become obstacles. Staff will need assistance identifying and processing intense feelings of helplessness, hopelessness, anger, abandonment, etc. Often administrators want to fix it, solve the problems for staff and are unable to take these feelings away from them. Administrators need to create a safe space for staff to better understand what these feelings are saying about the work and the families that evoke these feelings. The parallel here is to engender the same stance that is used with staff to be used with families. [Click here for a good resource for this practice.](#)

**Question 2 – What could programs do for families who keep being repeatedly referred to the same services yet those services are not able to sufficiently support the family?**

**Answer:** This challenge may require cross agency meetings with service providers to determine a plan that involves increased collaboration and resource sharing to support the family in ways that individual agencies are unable. At times, it is helpful to take on the role of advocate after identifying the unmet needs of families. Advocating for flexibility in service provision is often necessary for families who have special needs.

Develop a resource book with information about commonly used services that help support goals and plans of families with whom you work. Keep it up to date with recent brochures. With this tool, you can be aware of the services provided, whether they are still provided and how best to access them. This book can be made available to families as a resource. It is important to:

- Follow through on family plans to access resources to make sure they were able to obtain what they needed
- Follow-up with calls to the service providers if the family did not get the support they needed
- Assist families on how to effectively work to get the services and supports they need
- Connect with local Parent Training Centers or Family to Family Centers which can help families with navigating the complex service array and advocate to get appropriate help

**Question 3 - What particular family strengths are the most important to build on?**

**Answer:** It is often the case that families fail to recognize strengths they have, so it is important to ask questions covering the way they interact, their personality, their humor, interests, individual accomplishments, and parenting successes (based on your own experience with them). Important strengths to start with are strengths deriving from family relationships and other natural supports such as friends, people at work, and/or teachers.

Additionally, it is important to focus on successes, problem solving capacities, resourcefulness, and their love and hope for their children’s safety, health, and happiness. Reviewing the strength section in the book by Carol Klass, *The Home Visitor’s Guidebook: Promoting Optimal Parent & Child Development*, is recommended. Regularly check family’s beliefs about their ability to help produce change and show them how they have been successful in the past.

**Question 4 - What are some ideas for supporting staff who may be struggling with similar adversities as the families we work with?**

**Answer:** Supervisors can use the partnership strategies reviewed in the vBTT webinar, *C6: Partnering with Families Who are Coping with Adversity*, with staff who are dealing with adversity. These could include:

- Exploring the staff member’s needs and stressors
- Help the staff member develop effective coping strategies to reduce burdens
- Create a plan for reducing stressors and obstacles.

- Offer encouragement and help the person problem-solve ways to eliminate or reduce obstacles
- Link to necessary resources, service providers, and advocates
- Have available a list of local community providers who can assist staff members in meeting their needs
- Identify natural supports
- Assist staff member to achieve change in something they see as their most immediate problem
- Check in regularly

**Question 5 - What are some strategies to engage families who do not want to create family partnership goals?**

**Answer:** Reluctance to enter into a partnership role can stem from many reasons. Two foundations of are beliefs and trust. Focusing on these two areas as you develop relationships is critical in the process or engagement, particularly for families who are wary of committing. They may have had previous experiences, which have turned them off, or they do not believe that your work with them will be a real partnership—that is, they will essentially be told what to do, blamed for things or their point of view will not be understood. In particular, it is important to ensure that the initial focus of your work with the family is focused on goals that are jointly established with the family. Make sure to help prioritize goals, respect choices, get feedback, and employ a shared approach to determining failure or success.

**Question 6 - You've talked some about home visiting. The families I serve are so stressed that it can be hard to focus at all on the curriculum stuff that I bring in. I know I am supposed to ask families how they think the stresses they are experiencing are affecting a child. How else can I help them to focus on their kid?**

**Answer:** Increasing our understanding on how stressors impact the parent and how they are emotionally affected will give us information on how challenging it may be for them to be emotionally attuned to their children. Emotional attunement suffers under toxic stress. Helping to support a parent's capacity to be emotionally attuned to their infant or toddler is focusing on their relationship. Highlighting and building on positive interactions, activities, ideas or desires that the home visitor observes between a parent and child no matter how small it may seem will be important. At times parents are so overwhelmed by the stressors that they have a difficult time noticing that anything positive may be occurring with their child. Our keen parent child observation skills will be needed and depended on during these visits.

**Question 7 - I have been thinking this week that I work with families who are doing a lot of things to protect themselves from pain from past experiences like addictions, depression, lots of things! I wonder how direct I can be in saying to a parent, "you're addicted. Why do you think that is?" I feel really frustrated, like I am making no progress so often.**

**Answer:** This is hard work!! You are doing such important work that can really make a difference with the families that you work with. With folks like you are describing, you have to concentrate on the building of trust. Don't try to push things. Make sure that they know that you are on their side. Your

job is to be a partner, to help them overcome the adversity that they experience. It is so important that they see you as an ally to creating positive change. You make have to work with them to find resources to help. Here are some ideas.

- Encourage families to talk about their needs
- Convey emotional understanding
- Use active listening technique
- Identify and acknowledge stress and burden for family
  - Focus on impact on youth and family
  - Understand feelings of guilt about problems
  - Discuss possible negativity from the family resulting from stress and try not to take it personally
- Make sure family the knows that you are there to support their goals and work with them
- Emphasize possibilities and resourcefulness rather than deficit and dysfunction. "what is and could be" rather than "what isn't and should be"
- Support family buy-in to the goals and process of therapy
- Use a solution-focused approach - concentrate on the family's goals and not on reasons why problems arose