



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Health



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
**Parent, Family, and
Community Engagement**

Facilitating Change: Conversations That Help

Learning Objectives

Participants will

- Gain increased understanding of factors that make it difficult for families to engage in Early Head Start/Head Start
- Gain strategies for improving their ability to develop positive relationships with families
- Gain strategies for having more-helpful conversations that facilitate growth

Agenda

- When conversation works well
- Family engagement and barriers to engagement
- Perspective taking
- Partnering with families
- Exploring change
- Summary-wrap-up

Toughest Conversation: Pair Discussion

- Reflect on the toughest successful conversation you ever had with a family.
- What did you do to contribute to the success of the conversation?
- What did the family do after the conversation that let you know that it was successful?

When a Conversation Works Well



http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/resources/training_infant.html

Discussion

- How did this caregiver engage the family?
- What was the experience like for the family?
- What was the experience like for the child?
- How might this interaction help to build the relationship with the family?

Family Involvement and Family Engagement

Family Involvement

- A necessary first step to engagement: families have to show up to have interactions that lead to engagement

Family Engagement

- Can lead to more involvement (that is, more showing up)
- With engagement, the quality of involvement changes, which in turn creates the potential for change, for new behaviors beyond just showing up

Engagement Is a Relational Process

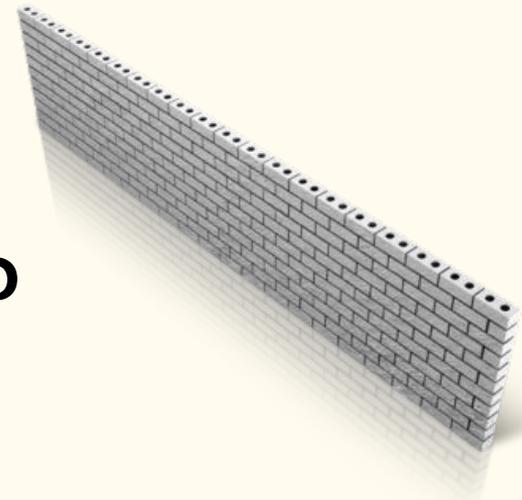
- Engagement is relational.
- Engagement includes specific qualities of the relationship—safety, trust, encouragement, mutual respect and caring, and hope.
- The experience of engagement leads to changes in attitude and motivation and to a sense of positive possibility.
- The experience of engagement leads to changes that promote positive family and child outcomes.

When We Actively Engage Families, All Will Benefit

- **Children** will be healthier and more ready for kindergarten.
- **Families** will be more engaged in your program and in the public school.
- **Programs** will achieve higher levels of quality.
- **Communities** will provide stronger support to the next generation.

Family Involvement and Family Engagement

What are the barriers?



Barriers to Involvement and Engagement Are Different

Barriers to Involvement

- Lack of transportation
- Lack of child care
- Work obligations
- Scheduling conflicts
- Bad weather

Barriers to Engagement

- Fear
- Distrust
- Feelings of being unwelcome, disrespected, or at risk of being overpowered
- Misunderstandings
- Cultural beliefs about parent and teacher roles
- Power imbalance

Other Barriers for Families

- Poverty
- No maternal or paternal leave
- Little support from other family members or neighbors
- Challenging relationships with their own families
- Domestic violence
- Mental health concerns
- Substance abuse

Depression: A Major Barrier

- More than half (52 percent) of Early Head Start mothers reported enough symptoms to be considered depressed.
- A substantial percentage (18 percent) of Early Head Start fathers also reported enough symptoms to be considered depressed.
- More than 20 percent of Americans will experience a depressive episode in their lifetime.

[“Depression in the Lives of Early Head Start Families.”](#)

Impact of Depression

“Children of depressed parents are at increased risk for cognitive and language problems, insecure attachments, difficulties with emotional regulation, social competence, and behavioral problems.”

Gladstone & Beardslee, 2002

What Does Depression Look Like?

- Depressed or irritable mood
- Decreased interest, pleasure, or both
- Significant weight change
- Changes in activity level
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Difficulty sleeping
- Feelings of guilt or worthlessness
- Concentration problems
- Suicidal thoughts

How Depression Can Impact Family Engagement

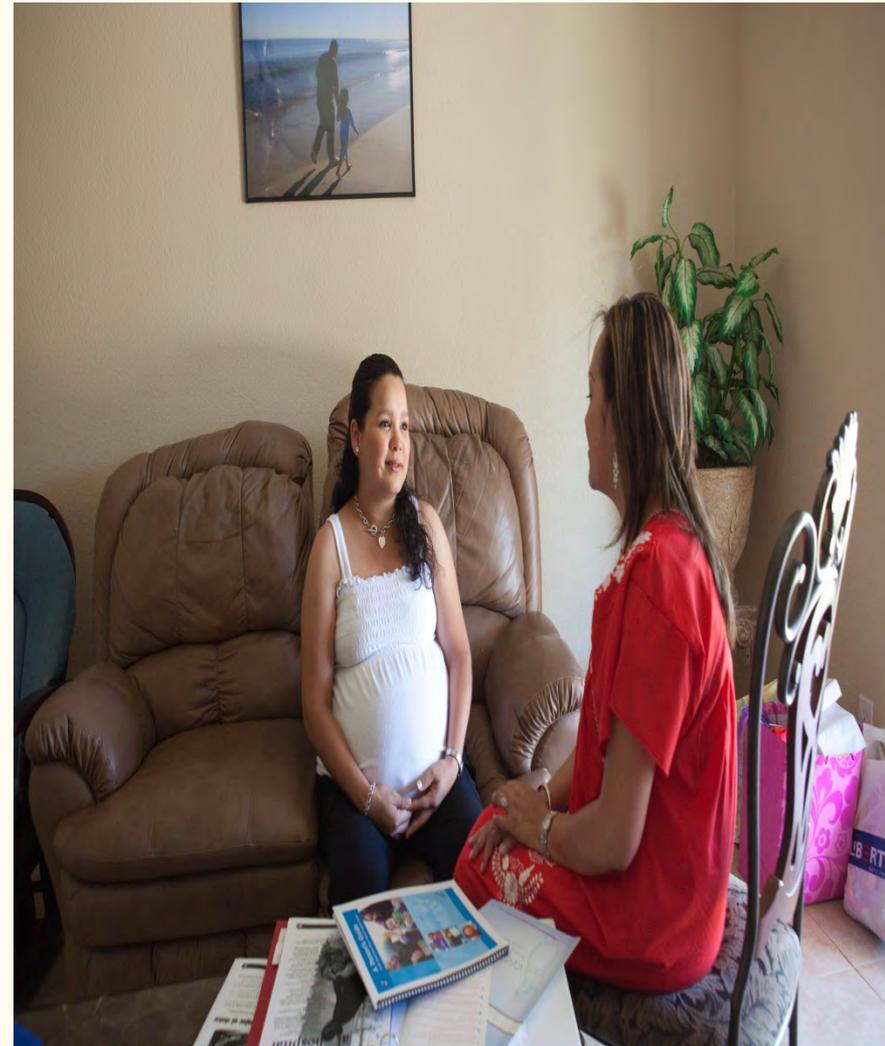
Depressed parents may

- Have low energy, feel tired
- Have low self-esteem
- Appear “checked out,” as if they do not care
- Isolate themselves—not attend meetings, socializations, or appointments
- Reject your attempts to engage

Using Your Relationship

- You do not have to be a therapist to be therapeutic.
- Re-think the “expert role.” In order to teach someone, we must first learn from them.

Gerard Costa



What Caregivers and Staff Can Do

- Learn to recognize the symptoms of depression.
- Know about the circumstances of the families in the program.
- Get support if you have concerns about a family or child.
- Provide a high-quality Early Head Start/Head Start program.

Exploring Perspective



<http://www.wikiwand.com/en/Phoropter>

Perspective Taking



A blue speech bubble with a white outline and a white drop shadow, containing text.

What do
you expect
from
parents?

A purple speech bubble with a white outline and a white drop shadow, containing text.

What do
parents
expect from
you?

Digging Deeper into Relationships Is Central to Partnering with Parents

- All relationships involve intimacy.
- Our work relationships are often in some way “forced relationships”—that is, they involve forced intimacy.

Digging Deeper into Relationships Is Central to Partnering with Parents for Change

- It is natural for people to feel ambivalent about relationships, even those they have chosen, but it is especially common to feel ambivalent about relationships that were not chosen.
- Our past experiences with helpers will effect our current experiences with helpers.
- Present experiences with helpers will, in turn, affect future experiences.

Discussion

- Think of a time when you changed your behavior, attitude, or perspective.
 - What helped you make the change?
 - What did not?

Principles for Partnering

- Collaborate
- Learn from parents
 - See them as the experts
 - Ask what they want to know or do
- Recognize their autonomy
 - Parents will make the decision

Strengths-Based Attitudes

- Families are the first and most important teachers of their children.
- Families are our partners and have a critical role in supporting their child's development.
- Families have expertise about their child.
- Families have something valuable to contribute.

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family>.

Digging Deeper into Change

Abandon your impulses to

- Give advice
- Solve the problem
- Be the expert



Stages of Change

- Precontemplation
- Contemplation
- Preparation
- Action
- Maintenance

Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983; Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992).

Most People Are Wary about Change



Roll with Resistance



Digging Deeper into Change: Strategies That Help

Empathic listening

- Is other-directed
- Is nondefensive
- Involves imagining others' perspectives
- Involves showing a desire to listen as a receiver and understand the other

Podsen, India; Denmark, Vicki. *Coaching and Mentoring First Year and Student Teachers*. 2nd edition. New York, NY: Routledge, 2013.

Listening Exercise

- Spend 90 seconds talking about something important to you while your partner listens without responding.
- Then spend 90 seconds listening to your partner talk, without responding.



Reflective Listening

- So you feel...
- It sounds like you...
- You're wondering if...



Reflective Listening

“Reflective listening is the key to this work... The best motivational advice we can give you is to listen carefully to your clients. They will tell you what has worked and what hasn't. What moved them forward and shifted them backward. Whenever you are in doubt about what to do, listen.”

Rosengren, D.B., & Wagner, C. (2001)

Digging Deeper into Change: Strategies That Help

Summarizing

- Let me see if I understand this so far...
- Here is what I heard. Tell me if I missed anything.
- On the one hand...On the other hand...

Digging Deeper into Change: Strategies That Help

Soliciting permission

- Would it be okay if we talked about [tooth brushing, follow-up dental visits, your child's nutrition, your child's attendance]?
- What have you heard about tooth brushing for 2 year olds?
- Would you like to hear more about tooth brushing and its benefits?

What If Parents Say No?

- This does not happen very often.
- The parent may not be ready for advice (he or she may be in the precontemplation stage).
- Ask permission to check back.

Examples of Open-Ended Questions

- What is most important to you right now?
- How would you like your life to be in the future?
- What might happen if you make this change?
- What might happen if you do not make this change?

Examples of Open-Ended Questions

- Tell me about what has been happening since we last talked.
- Given all that you have been going through, how have you been able to _____ (e.g., find strength)?
- What are the good things about _____ and the not so good things about _____?

Examples of Open-Ended Questions

- How would you like things to be different?
- What if anything have you tried before related to _____?
- Tell us about your experience in the program?

Activity

- Convert closed-ended questions to open-ended questions



Practice

Strategies

- Ask open-ended questions
- Listen reflectively
- Summarize



How Conversations Help Make Connections

- No interaction is without consequences; all interactions have effects. Conversations can leave people feeling open, hopeful, and engaged or nervous, shut down, and defensive.
- All conversations are subject to unspoken rules about who can say what, who has power, who needs to be silent, and what is okay to say and what is not.

How Conversations Help Make Connections

- Many conversations contain traps for the participants, moments when we can briefly get caught up in a negative interaction that moves us away from our hopes and from how we would like to be with others.
- We can do more to avoid these traps.

Wrapping Up

- What stood out for you among the things you heard or experienced today?
- What excites you or concerns you about what you learned?
- Did you gain any insights from the session?
- How might you use what you heard today?



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