

Linda Warren: Just as mentor-coaches and protégés work to build trusting and strong relationships, protégés and parents need to build trusting relationships to support children's development. Susan and Carol, what are some of the ways protégés can build a relationship with parents and how do you support protégés with this?

Susan Fordice: I think one of the most important ways to develop a relationship with parents is to be positive in your interactions as much as possible and to keep the communication regular. You don't want to wait until there's a crisis in the classroom. You want to be in continual communication either by phone or by note or just as the parents are picking up and dropping off the children so that you actually build trust over a period of time.

And also I think it's key to accept the parents where they are in their level of parenting skills and in their parenting style. And that also carries over to the mentor-coach and the protégé relationship. We need to show mutual respect and accept each other where we are and then help the parent build on their strengths; help the protégé build on their strengths just as we have to build on our own strengths.

Carol Bellamy: I think so too. One thing we do at my program, we send home a weekly parent update so our families know what, what the classroom is doing. And on that parent update is an individual note about each child – what they're doing in the classroom and what the parents can do at home to extend the learning.

Another thing we try to do, we try to have activities where we involve our families. For example, we might have something called alphabet soup for lunch and we invite parents to come in and read, share lunch with our children. It's a very relaxing time for parents and the children enjoy it as well too.

Linda: I know, Carol, you reminded us last night that, or put this in the forefront at dinner, that Head Start is a parent-run program and we can't forget that and what you're sharing reminds us you know, and reinforces this notion that from an assessment point of view, assessment does engage parents in the development of their children and it helps parents to understand the program's outcomes as well as their child's progress. Very important critical points that you're making once again, thank you. One last point is that teachers may sometimes ask more of families than they can provide.

For an instance, a teacher may encourage adults to read more to their children at home. The teacher might support this by organizing a lending library in her room. But providing books may not be enough, particularly if the parent or guardians, excuse me, are self-conscious about their reading skills or need other assistance. A teacher may need to recognize this and provide additional support. Mentor-coaches can offer guidance and suggestions in cases like these including linking parents with Head Start's family literacy services.

Discussing children's progress with their parents is an important part of relationship building and ongoing assessment. We are going to Oregon to see how a teacher, Linda, uses portfolio materials during a meeting with Alyssa's parents.

[Video begins] Narrator: Alyssa is in Head Start at the Confederated Tribes of Umatilla Reservation in Pendleton, Oregon. Her teacher, Linda Sampson, meets with her parents to discuss her progress.

Linda Sampson: Oh it's nice to see you guys today, both of you. We will discuss a few things and if you guys have any concerns or any comments that you'd like to make now of what you guys felt. Did her year go well? Since we're right at the very end of school and...

Mother: Last year I used a lot of time away from work to participate in the Head Start programs and then I think this year her dad did a lot more than I did this year. So I was glad to see that too both of us could participate and do that well.

Linda Sampson: So we've seen a lot of change, I've seen big growth in this year. So and that's really what we came to talk about, as to where we got and where we started and where we're at now.

And so we've all discussed all about needs at both conferences that we went through, and that's really where I can see the big improvement in Alyssa. It, it ties to the developmental continuum that we work with but it really comes down to, "What do I see with Alyssa?" And we said we wanted her to count to twenty, we wanted her to know some things. But we set her a higher standard; we went up the next level. Now, she's counting to 100 in order.

Dad: The sooner you start them the better. She started when she'd go to the babysitter, counting horses and cows. I think the first letters she's reading is probably a stop sign. Linda and Mom: Yep, yeah.

Linda Sampson: And that's environmental print so I would encourage that even from here on out. And if she's sitting down looking at a cereal box for breakfast and she wants to sound something out or read it, and there's some pretty large words when she gets into niacin and potassium and some of those things. Go ahead and encourage her to do that. Those are the environmental prints that you can be doing with her anywhere and everywhere.

Mom: Well, when I've start reading to her at nights, it seemed like, because my life is -- I have to work all day and I have her and our extra youngster to take care of, I was going through the book so we were reading very fast. And I wanted to read them, look at the picture, okay see it, you see the cow, cow, great.

Okay, okay what color's the sky? It's blue, okay let's go, you know? It was one of those things and the she insisted that I stop and go slower. So now we stop and it's taking us forever to get through a book -- but she's reading the words. And the words she doesn't know, we sound out like you talked about earlier. So I...

Dad: She's always trying to get into books that are over her head too. Linda Sampson: Is that what you think? Dad: Yep, printed books. Mom: But that's I think this is Alyssa though, she's wanting to grow up right now. Dad: Yeah.

Linda Sampson: I think now that some of the things that that I could suggest that you work on with her at home is when it's time to write a note, like today, she had a note and she wanted you to write the note. So maybe we can try to challenge her as to she should write the note that day -- we only have a few weeks left of school and it's kind of something that you could carry over into kindergarten... Mom: Yeah.

Linda Sampson: ...is you write the note to the teacher. We'll let her practice writing that and putting it into that and sentence structure, some of those things aren't really going to be that important in the beginning, which is just teaching her that to write the note. Or maybe if there's a grocery list or a camp list that she needs to write on or maybe you can have her write me a postcard this summer that says she's off at the ocean. 'Cause I know you guys go a lot, or something like that.

Mom: Yeah, okay. Linda Sampson: So that way we can kind of keep in contact cause I'm gonna miss them, I'm gonna miss her dearly when she transitions out of our class and into kindergarten. So I'm pretty excited for it, so I thank you both for coming today.

Mom: Great, thanks Linda. Dad: Thanks for all your work. Mom: Yep, really appreciate it. Linda Sampson: You're welcome, she's a joy, you should both be very proud of her and I'm glad that she has both of you in her life so...

Mom: Well, Head Start has helped us to be involved with her education so it's been a real it's been an education experience for her and for me too. Dad: Yeah, me too. [Video ends]

Linda Warren: We have seen that Alyssa's parents are very knowledgeable about her developing literacy skills. The portfolio items that Linda showed them helped to keep the conversation going and their ideas flowing. Susan, since you know Linda well, what methods do you and your protégés use to engage parents in their children's growth?

Susan: Well, again, it goes back to that ongoing communication from the beginning of the school year -- throughout the school year. And the parent/teacher conference is a very big piece of that, but also as as Carol mentioned earlier, having the parents involved with activities at home and active at school as well. In our program we have "Mommy and Me Day", a "Daddy and Me Day", a "Grandparent's Day" every month where the teachers plan special activities to do

with the kids if a parent comes in. And the parents look forward to that.

They know that they can come in and that gives the teachers a chance to support the kids as well and the parents and their interactions. And, of course, the kids love it when mom and dad or grandma come in, and so we use that activity as well. Reflecting back to the video, I, I think you could see with Linda and and the two parents there that she was accepting both of them in their own parenting, parenting styles.

And even the activities that she offered, the mom could help her have Alyssa write a shopping list and the dad could help her help to do a camp list. So she was accept accepting both parents where they were and understanding that they both had different ways of interacting with her — with Alyssa -- and both of those ways were okay.

Linda: That was particularly striking to me as well when I saw, they seemed as if they were having a conversation and I, I know that it was because they were so accepting of one another and where they were. And everything that the father talked about, Linda was able to integrate into some suggestions and ideas for doing things over the summer. And the mother's ability to share where she was going with books and where she had been was really important. Carol, I know you were going to add a few things here.

Carol: Yes, I think sharing a portfolio a child's portfolio with the family is wonderful but once a parent sees all of the things that the child has done, it's always always good to add and ask if the parents have any concerns about their child's development. Maybe there's something they see at home, or they have a concern that has not been addressed, so it's a good time to ask those questions.

Also, just like Susan said, send home some activities that the child could do at home and also, once again, we send home a parent update letting the parent know, "These are things that your child is doing, these are some things you can do at home to extend the learning."

Linda: Perfect. Now, stop the tape to take some time to discuss your experiences in building relationships with parents. You can resume the tape when you finish your discussion.

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