COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILIES ABOUT THEIR CHILD’S CHALLENGING BEHAVIOR

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Department of Human Services
  • Division of Child Care
  • Division of Behavioral Health
  • Division of Child Welfare

The Colorado Health Foundation
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Learning Objectives

• Participants will receive strategies on how to establish a foundational relationship with families.

• Participants will learn how to approach families on addressing their child’s challenging behavior observed in a child care or school setting.
Communicating with Families about their Child’s Challenging Behavior

National Center for Health Statistics

- Between 2001 and 2011, the percentage of children (4-17 years) with serious emotional or behavioral difficulties remained at about 5 percent.

- In 2011, the percentage of children with serious difficulties was twice as high among those from single-mother families (8 percent) than among those from two-parent families (4 percent).

http://childstats.gov/americaschildren/health3.asp

National Center for Health Statistics

- Among the parents of children with serious difficulties...
  - 28 percent reported that their child received special education services for emotional or behavioral difficulties,
  - 46 percent reported that they had contacted a general doctor about their child’s emotional or behavioral difficulties, and
  - 53 percent reported that they had contact with a mental health professional about their child’s difficulties.

http://childstats.gov/americaschildren/health3.asp
Benefits of Partnering with Families

- Programs that demonstrate and support partnering with families tend to have families that feel more confident and comfortable in supporting their children's development (Wilcox & Weber, 2001).
- When services incorporate practices that promote partnerships with families, outcomes for family and children are improved including parenting capabilities and positive child behavior and functioning (Dempsey & Keen, 2008; Dunst, Trivette & Hamby, 2008).

Strategies for Communicating with Families about their Child's Behavior
Building the Foundation

- Welcome and invite families
- Learn about the family
- Establish a bi-directional communication system
- Communicate with families on a regular basis
- Encourage families to network with other families
- Host special events
- Celebrate accomplishments

Involving Families

- Develop goals for their child
- Ask families for input on curriculum & learning themes
- Host parent/teacher conferences
- Offer parent training
- Share information on community resources
- Provide a lending library

Starting the Conversation:
related to the parent’s child’s challenging behavior

- Organize your thoughts
- Start with something positive
- Be a good listener
- Specific describe the behavior
- Ask if they have noticed this behavior at home
- Allow time for family to process hear, feel, think and respond
- Be sure that your message was received clearly and accurately
- Provide options for support and information
Partnering with Families

- Invite family to observe the classroom or view a video
- Invite the family to be part of the intervention team
- Schedule meetings to accommodate family’s schedule so they can participate in planning meetings
- Develop a modified behavior plan for home
- Provide family with data and outcomes of the plan
- Celebrate each step

Common Concerns

- “I never get to see the parents of my students.”
- “I have asked parents to volunteer in my classroom but they don’t sign up.”
- “I am too busy to communicate with families on a regular basis.”
- “The parents don’t follow through.”

Think of a relationship with a family that you are struggling with.

- What are the barriers?
- How can you create detours to those barriers?
- Evaluate your new strategies and the effectiveness of building a relationship with the family.
Resources for Professionals

- NAEYC
  - http://families.naeyc.org/learning-and-development/child-development/observation-key-understanding-your-child
  - http://challengingbehavior.org/do/resources/tools.htm
- Zero to Three – Effective Communication with Parents
- Acknowledge, Ask and Adapt
  - http://www.pitc.org/cs/pitclib/view/pitc_res_wkshp/19
- Center for Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation – Tutorial 5: Partnering with Families

Resources for Families

- NAEYC for Families
  - Understanding and Responding to Children Who Bite
- Zero to Three
  - Toddlers and Challenging Behavior: Why They Do It and How to Respond
    - http://main.zerotothree.org/site/PageServer?pagename=ter_key_social_challengingbehavior&AddInterest=1157
  - Challenging Behaviors Tips and Tools – includes several resources of common challenging behaviors that very young children experience
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Learn the Signs – If You’re Concerned
  - http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/concerned.html

References

- Fox, L. and Duda, M. A. Complete guide to positive behavior support. TACSEI Website. Retrieved from: http://challengingbehavior.org/do/resources/tools.htm