



National Center for **Research** on
Rural Education (R²Ed)

Handouts to Accompany

**Family-School Partnerships in Rural Schools:
Engaging Families to Promote School Success**

Susan M. Sheridan

Amanda Witte

Bret Schroder

Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools &
National Center for Research on Rural Education

Webinar Presented for the US Department of Education's
Office of School Turnaround/Office of Rural Programs

May 21, 2012

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Communication Tips to Encourage Partnerships with Families

- ***Ask open ended questions as a form of structuring “help.”***
 - Cannot be answered “yes” or “no” or with a one-word response. Usually elicits a more elaborate response. Examples are:
 - “What is it you want to see for your child?”
 - “What do you hope for your child?”
 - “How can we work together so that your child can accomplish this?”
- ***Actively listen to families’ needs, goals, desires and communicate that understanding.***
 - Repeat in your own words or those of the parent what the parent says as a way of letting them know you are listening to them and hearing them.
 - Responding as an attentive and interested partner to encourage ongoing dialogue. Some examples include:
 - “So you are saying that homework time is particularly difficult for your family.”
 - “So you would like to see Nan get along better with other children.”
 - Often nonverbal actions such as nodding and using good eye contact shows active listening.
- ***Remain focused and provide structure to the dialogue.***
 - Remain focused and help parent stay focused on the main needs or concerns.
 - Assure an understanding of what the parent tells you so that you have a shared conversation. Examples are:
 - “Are you saying you want him walking more or that you are concerned that when he is independently walking he may hurt himself?”
 - “Tell me what you mean by...”
- ***Affirm parents’ competence.***
 - Communicate belief and trust in parent’s abilities; show value for them as a partner and capable parent.
 - Comment on what the parents have done to support their child thus far. Examples are:
 - “Sammy really enjoys it when you read together!”
 - “I can tell that your morning routines are going well. Rachel is so much more organized and happy when she gets to school!”
 - “I think your idea to try pennies during homework time is what made Rachel do so well.”

Guidelines and Practices for Effective Communication with Families

Guideline	Possible Practices
Strive for a positive orientation rather than a deficit-based or crisis orientation.	<p><i>Good news phone calls.</i></p> <p><i>Invite and incorporate parent reactions to policies and practices.</i></p> <p><i>Contact parents at the first sign of a concern.</i></p> <p><i>Communicate an “optimistic” message about the child.</i></p>
Consider tone as well as content of your communications.	<p><i>Reframe language from problems to goals for child.</i></p> <p><i>Focus on a parent’s ability to help.</i></p>
Develop and publicize regular, reliable, varied two-way communication systems.	<p><i>System-wide family-school communication/assignment notebooks.</i></p> <p><i>Shared parent-educator responsibility for contacts.</i></p> <p><i>Handbooks.</i></p> <p><i>Newsletters.</i></p> <p><i>“Thursday folders” including relevant home and school information.</i></p> <p><i>Telephone tree.</i></p> <p><i>Electronic communication technology such as email and text messages.</i></p>
Use effective conflict management strategies.	<p><i>Discuss and focus on mutual goals and interests.</i></p> <p><i>Use words such as “we,” “us,” and “our,” vs. “you,” “I,” “yours,” and “mine.”</i></p>
Keep the focus of communication on the child’s performance.	<p><i>Bi-directional communications regarding classroom activities, progress, suggested activities for parents</i></p> <p><i>Home-school notebooks/notes.</i></p>

Ensure that parents have needed information to support childrens' educational progress.

Family-school meetings with children present.

Shared parent-educator monitoring system (e.g., educational file, contract).

Several orientation nights with follow-up contact for nonattendees.

Parent support groups to disseminate information on school performance.

Home visits.

Home-school contracts with follow-up.

Curriculum nights.

Monthly meetings on topics of mutual interest.

Create formal and informal opportunities to communicate and build trust between home and school.

Multicultural potlucks.

Grade-level bagel breakfasts.

Family fun nights.

Committees designed to address home-school issues.

Workshops where parents and school personnel learn together.

Principal's hour.

Underscore all communication with a shared responsibility between families and schools.

Communicate the essential nature of family involvement.

Share information about the curriculum of the home.

Discuss co-roles (e.g., co-communicators) and implement shared practices (e.g., contracts, common language about conditions for children's success).

Back to School Night.

Goals and Objectives of Conjoint Behavioral Consultation

Goals

1. Promote academic, socioemotional, and behavioral *outcomes for children* through joint, mutual, cross-system planning.
2. Promote *parent engagement* wherein parental roles, beliefs, and opportunities for meaningful participation are clear, within a developmental, culturally sensitive context.
3. *Build capacities* of participants (families and educators) to make data-based decisions, use evidence-based interventions, and strengthen relationships between home and school.
4. Establish and strengthen *home-school partnerships* on behalf of children's learning and development, immediately and over time.

Problem-solving Objectives

1. Obtain comprehensive and functional data over extended temporal and contextual bases.
2. Establish consistent treatment programs across settings.
3. Improve the skills, knowledge, or behaviors of all parties (i.e., family members, school personnel, and the child-client).
4. Monitor behavioral contrast and side effects systematically via cross-setting treatment agents.
5. Enhance generalization and maintenance of treatment effects via consistent programming across sources and settings.
6. Develop skills and competencies to promote further independent conjoint problem-solving between the family and school personnel.

Relationship-building Objectives

1. Improve communication, knowledge, and understanding about family, child, and school.
2. Promote shared ownership and joint responsibility for problem solution.
3. Promote greater conceptualization of needs and concerns, and increase perspective taking.
4. Strengthen relationships within and across systems.
5. Maximize opportunities to address needs and concerns across, rather than within, settings.
6. Increase shared (parent and teacher) commitments to educational goals.
7. Increase the diversity of expertise and resources available.

Conjoint Behavioral Consultation Research Archive

Books

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Web Resource

Future of School Psychology Task Force on Family-School Partnerships:
http://fsp.unl.edu/future_module3.html

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