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**The Family Partnership Process: 7 Steps - Engaging and Goal Setting with Families Guidance**

***Our programming is grounded in being attuned, sensitive and aware of families’ experiences and histories; many families have had ongoing trauma. We can offer much support to families through our listening, our calm responses and protect ourselves by not taking things personally. We don’t have to fix things, but instead, listen, be compassionate and affirm what we hear. By doing so, we are buffering trauma. We may be the only people who has offered this! We don’t have to have all of the answers, yet through this communication style and recognizing strengths ongoing, we are being trauma sensitive. If families are open, we can connect them to mental health supports.***

***This process is what NMCAA Head Start and Early Head Start Child Development Programs strives for, and is based upon and summarized from the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement.***

*The respectful partnerships you develop over time with families, positively influences family well-being and family goal setting. Positive, successful and goal-oriented relationships require strong, authentic and meaningful partnerships between staff and families. This process grounds us in a strength-based approach, helping families identify and reach their goals, which gives them the best chances for success in school and life. The process requires us to identify and celebrate strengths, even small steps in growth. Successful partnering with families involves several necessary stages for positive outcomes of the Family Partnership Process:*

* Learning about families; their progressing strengths, challenges and priorities
* Building trusting and respectful goal-oriented relationships develops over time, and requires open & honest communication
* Staff communicate their sense of shared responsibility for child and family growth
* Engaging families in effective goal-setting
* Gathering meaningful information about families to complete a Family Partnership Plan

***The process of developing successful partnerships with families is broken up into 6 phases that begin when we have our first contact with families during the enrollment process. The six phases are in blue font.***

*It is important to understand that the fourth phase of the process called “Goal Setting with Families” has been broken down into seven steps. We will use these seven steps when we develop goals with families. These seven steps will help us to guide families to create attainable goals by helping them to identify obstacles and then resources and strategies that can help them to overcome identified obstacles. The seven steps also identify action steps that will help families know what they can do to reach their goal. The steps also help us to track progress and recognize the importance of celebrating successes!*

***A successful Partnership Process is dependent on practicing a relationship-based approach, valuing different perspectives and involvement, exploring choices and opportunities, while honoring all types of family progress*.**

***Phase 1 ~ Recruitment Specialists & Orientations ~ Gather and use the information that families share*** ~ we begin to establish partnerships in the enrollment process, and offer many opportunities to learn about families’ strengths, hopes, challenges, and what they want from our program. Let families know that we want them involved in our program. Establish a partnership through:

* Approaching families with respect and care
* Learning about families, their children, culture, and language
* Talk with families about their strengths
* Help families find and complete required paperwork
* Talk with families about program requirements and opportunities
* Connect families to other community resources
* ***Once enrolled, we celebrate their accomplishment of enrollment.***
* ***“Congratulations for reaching your goal of being enrolled in our program!”***

***Phase 2 ~ Family and Child Assessment***

**Learn more about the child and family ~ Practice attentive listening with families**. We ask families to share their stories - what they want, need and hope for, so we can gain an overall perspective to help us guide the goal-setting process. Family and child assessments are opportunities and tools we can use to:

* Learn what matters to families and what they hope to accomplish
* Learn the services families are receiving or services they may need
* Learn what child and family goals they may already be working on.
* ***See “Tools and Talking Points…..”*** *(This is on the back of the Family Outcome Tool and Family Partnership Goals and the Head Start Family Partnership Agreement and Goals.)*

**Phase 3 ~ Communication with Families**

**Develop a deeper understanding of strengths, hopes and challenges**

**After giving reasoning behind the Family Partnership Process, practice “*Inviting*” *questioning*:** “Have you had a chance to think about what you’d like to focus on this year for your family?” Or “I’d like to hear about your hopes and dreams for yourself, your family and your child.”

* + Take a moment to think of the open approach above **versus** “What is a goal you’d like to set?”
* **Practice Deep and Active Listening** ~ Show genuine interest, respect and compassion for families’ stories without interrupting
* We can ask to take notes so we remember
* We must honor where each family is at and where they have come from without showing judgement

**Examples of Active Listening Strategies**

* **Be affirming and validating** ~ Acknowledge willingness and courage to be open in sharing personal information. Ex – “Thank you for trusting me; I heard you say \_\_\_\_\_; would you like to share more?”
* **Show sensitivity and compassion ~** Show empathy when a parent is vulnerable or emotional. It’s powerful for anyone to hear an empathic response from someone rather than someone “trying to fix.” Ex – “That sounds so difficult; that is a lot to go through.” Etc.
* **Ask clarifying questions** shows you are interested and engaged. Ex – “You seem to be saying \_\_\_\_\_, is that correct? OR Thank you for trusting in me to share, are there ways can I help?”

**Over Time…goals & the relationship evolves….**

**Phase 4 ~ Goal Setting with Families**

***Use Seven Steps for Setting and Reaching Goals with Families ~ There are 7 essential steps in establishing positive goal-oriented partnerships with families:***

1. **Set a Goal**
2. **Identify Skills**
3. **Assess Strengths**
4. **Examine Stressors**
5. **Explore Action Steps and Strategies**
6. **Determine Support and Resources**
7. **Track Progress and Celebrate Successes**

**Step # 1 - Set a Goal: *Families choosing their own direction with staff support increases their sense of ownership and motivation for reaching their goal.***

* Goal setting is often unfamiliar for families and can feel overwhelming.
* Stressors make it more difficult for families to set and accomplish goals.

*Staff and families review the information gathered about the family from enrollment; Family Outcome Tool (child and family assessment); and conversations about family strengths, skills, needs, interests and challenges.*

* Use this information to ask the family what is most important to the family for setting between 1-3 goals. *Start with family priorities*.
* Families with more stressors may want to focus on 1 goal.
* Staff reflects on what they have learned about the family from interactions.
* The Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework Outcomes (The FOT is divided into PFCE sections) and *The Your Journey Together and Protective Factors* may help as a guide to generate ideas and strategies to meet goals. See ***“Tools and Talking Points…”***

**Step # 2 - Identify Skills: *Talents and abilities that both the family and staff have and share within the partnership are related the family goal progress.***

* Skills develop over time with practice, experience and training.
* Skills can be specific, such as carpentry, painting, computers, knitting
* Skills can be broader, such as problem solving, coaching, and project management.
* Staff can think about utilizing their personal skills to acknowledge and support families in their skills to reach their goals.

**Step # 3 - Assess Strengths: *Strengths are our* *Personal and unique qualities that positively affect our lives.* *When staff and families share stories and regularly communicate, they learn about the others skills and beliefs.***

**Strengths help us:**

* Make decisions
* Adjust to new changes
* Reach goals
* Create the life we want
* Cope with stress and/or trauma

**Step # 4 - Examine Stressors: *Events, people and other circumstances that make families feel worried or anxious. Programs can support families by creating environments that welcome all family dynamics and backgrounds.***

* Stressors often create challenges to goal setting.
* Families coping with the stressors of daily life can find it difficult to plan ahead and set goals.
* Families experience multiple stressors living in poverty; living with illness, lack of health care; financial insecurity; unsafe neighborhoods; unsatisfactory living conditions; trauma

**Examples of specific family circumstances affecting goal setting, which families may feel judged or experience prejudice**

* Language barriers
* Undocumented immigration status
* Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender

**When families have many stressors**

* Staff can help them identify short-term goals and work to address immediate needs.
* Once the family is more stable, families can better focus on longer-term goals.
* Staff plays a critical role in paying attention and respecting how stress affects each family and their ability to set and accomplish goals.

**Staff also experience stress and limitations**

* It is necessary for staff to realize and accept their own limitations when dealing with stress related to a family’s goal.
* Staff getting support to manage their own stressors, are better able to help families. *(NMCAA has support for staff via EAP and Mental Health Consultants, and Reflective Supervision)*
* If a staff person is experiencing a specific stressor, which related closely to what a family is experiencing, it may be better for a different staff person to work with the family.
* There is a balance between being human and sharing with families, while also maintaining boundaries, and not sharing too much.

**Step # 5 – Explore Strategies / Action Steps:  *Strategies are the action steps or methods used to achieve family goals.***

* After the first 5 steps above – discussing and identifying skills, strengths, stressors, supports, and resources, families can together decide on strategies / action steps needed to achieve family goals.

**Step # 6 - Determine Support and Resources: *Help and assistance is necessary to achieve a goal. Both staff and families need support to do their best work and make progress towards family’s goals.***

* Support can be from friends, other families, church, cultural organizations, neighborhood connections, professionals, agencies, schools, health care, organized sports, etc.
* When families enroll, they may also be receiving support from any of these sources.
* We collaborate with family support agencies, schools, and, mental health, and health care to not duplicate services, and enhance family progress towards meeting needs and goals.

**Staff needs support also**

* ***Staff can also receive empathic support from mentioned resources, their supervisors, Coaches, teams, professional development, EAP, Mental Health Consultants, and Reflective Supervision.***
* ***Support resources are important for staff who feels the challenge, stress, and secondary trauma from working with families with high needs.***

**Step # 7 - Track Progress and Celebrate Successes: *Achieving something desired.* *Success can mean different things to different people. Understanding how a family views their success can help us honor them and celebrate with them.***

* Asking a family how things are going and learning about their viewpoints of success, helps us learn about their ideas, experiences and views related to goals. ***We ask, without judgment.***
* Motivation and appreciation are two important factors for success. Families who experience motivation and appreciation or celebration from staff, are more likely to repeat patterns of meeting goals.
* ***Relationships that are positive, ongoing and goal-oriented, requires honoring, and celebrating the success of small steps of meeting goals.*** Meeting a goal usually happens in stages.
* A family may feel victory, and we may way feel disappointment that the family has not furthered their goal. Being successful in supporting families requires us to be flexible and accepting, while celebrating small steps of progress families make.
* Flexibility may require us to adapt our own definitions of success so that we can truly honor families where they are.
* Noticing and honoring families’ small successes supports their self-esteem and growth. ~ Think of how we do this for children…it is also the best way of working with adults!

**Phase 5: Follow-Up and Review –** *The follow-up and review phase creates an opportunity to look more closely at what the family decides is progress and growth in meeting goals. Plans and goals work best when we honor the dynamics of a changing family and support families where they are.*

* Through the 7 Steps for partnering with families, setting and reaching goals, we celebrate small steps and big accomplishments.
* Staff and families may repeat the follow-up and review process several times because families change, grow or even have setbacks.
* Along the way in the relationship, or at a Teacher’s last Home Visit, staff finds out from the family the progress they have made. This is when the Family Partnership Agreement Goals are reevaluated or finalized. “How ***do you feel*** things are things going with…?”
* ***Questions for staff to keep in mind when reviewing with a family****: Has the family met their goal? What small steps has the family made? Does the family want to change anything? Do goals or strategies need adjusting to make additional progress? What will be in their own personal Family Partnership Plan?*
* Families can modify goals if they want or need. Staff can support families by saying, “It’s okay if you are continuing with this goal.” Or, staff can recognize small steps of success and may have the chance to ask about, or point out another goal for the family that they have worked on without realizing. ~ Listening carefully to what families are experiencing and doing helps staff recognize the steps they take along the way that also may be a goal.

**Phase 6: Continues Program Improvement: *The process of family goal-setting and family successes can inform our overall program planning and program goal setting, and ongoing quality improvement.*** *The Family Outcome Tool (FOT), Family Surveys, ChildPlus Family Services, Referrals/Direct Services, Mental Health Referrals, PIR, and Parent Gauge provide data.*

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