

*When families
and
professionals
work well
together,
children win!*

Building Winning Partnerships

Families and professionals must team up to meet the needs of children. Good communication is an important step on the road to collaborative relationships.

Families look to educators, health care providers and other professionals to provide information and support that will help their children to learn, grow, and succeed. With strong parent-professional collaboration, you play a critical role in your child's education, health care, development, and overall well-being. When doctors, school administrators, teachers, therapists, coaches, and others are sensitive to your family's needs and communicate clearly with you, you are in a better position to help your child. Here are some ways for professionals and families to overcome some of the most common barriers to successful partnerships.

Family Engagement: What Professionals Can Do

Build Trust

Family engagement and parent-professional partnerships will look different for each family. Successful partnerships often depend on the professional's ability to develop relationships with your family and child which are based on trust. To build trust, professionals could:

- Link you with others who have had similar experiences or with a parent support group.
- Give you on-going information and opportunities to gain new knowledge and skills.
- Use the school's guidance counselor or a social worker, who may be associated with your family's health care provider, as a family support person.
- Have a welcoming place to meet.
- Begin conversations or meetings with positive statements about your family and child.
- Recognize and respect you as the expert on your child.
- Ask you to provide valuable information and insight on your child.
- Welcome and encourage your questions and participation in all meetings or discussions concerning your child.
- Recognize and encourage your family and child's interests, strengths, and skills.
- Create an atmosphere in which your family's cultural traditions, values and diverse background is acknowledged and honored.



Vermont
Family
Network

We are happy to hear that our materials are appreciated and used by others. To order copies of this fact sheet, or to learn more about VFN's materials and services, please contact us at:

1 800-800-4005

Published
May 2014

Transportation and Child Care

You may need some help getting to and from meetings with professionals and with arranging child care. To help overcome these barriers, professionals could:

- Connect you with support groups or agencies in the community that provide transportation and child care services.
- Provide you with school-supported transportation and child care.
- Hold meetings in your home at times that are convenient for your family and child.
- Use alternative methods to hold meetings such as teleconferencing or Skype.

Family Engagement: What Families Can Do

You know your child better than anyone and remain a constant influence in his education, development, and well-being. A parent-professional partnership is a two-way street. Here are some suggestions on how you can use your knowledge and skills as a member of any team working with your child. To build winning partnerships, you could:

- Let professionals know that as a parent, you expect to take an active part in making decisions about your child.
- Respect the knowledge and skills that professionals can bring to the relationship.
- Recognize that you are an equal member of any team with important information to share.
- Stay in frequent contact with your child's teachers, doctors, therapists, tutors, coaches, or other professionals.
- Share with professionals your ideas about your child. Make comments in a clear and positive manner. Offer facts to support your point of view.
- Ask for clarification or request more information, or help in making difficult decisions or choices.

- Get to know the people working with your child.
- Let professionals know how you feel. Tell them when they are doing a good job as well as when things aren't going well.
- Keep in mind your child's needs. Try to work out disagreements through discussion and compromise.
- Help your child develop a positive attitude toward the programs and professionals with whom she is involved.
- Be committed to the plan developed for your child and family by doing your best to follow through on your action items and responsibilities.

Through good working relationships based on shared responsibility and mutual commitment to children, families and professionals can improve their whole community.

Resources

[The National Center on Dispute Resolution in Special Education \(CADRE\)](#)

Resources and tools for using mediation and other collaborative strategies to resolve disagreements about special education and early intervention programs.

541-686-5060

[Parents as Collaborative Leaders](#)

Resources and training modules which you can use to support leadership development among families of children and youth with disabilities. The modules present leadership through a collaborative lens, taking the approach that every parent can be a leader.