

Case Story:

There was a young Mother of a 4yr. old and her Mother who walked to the neighborhood preschool to register the young Mothers son. The young Mother was 17 yrs. old, so her Mother had to sign off on all the preschool paperwork. Legally, the young Mother was not old enough to sign by herself. The senior Mother had legal custody of her daughter and her Grandchild until the Mother of the 4yr. old turned 18 yrs. old. The young Mother was eager to come of age in order to legally handle her own affairs.

The preschool was a full day program. The young Mother was still in high school. The neighborhood program made it easier for her to continue school and be able to pick up her child after she got out of school for the day. The program was housed in a K-2 building, so the child would be attending that same school for a total of 4 years.

The senior Mother was very concerned about her Daughter and her capabilities (maturity) in handling her affairs, especially when it pertained to the 4 yr. old. The senior Mother was glad that the preschool program had a Parent Involvement Specialist on staff, who directly connected with the parents of the preschoolers. The Specialist conducted parent education workshops for the preschool parents twice a month and had open office hours for parents to come in and discuss their needs/concerns.

The senior Mother wanted her daughter to get involved in the parenting program so that she could learn more about being a parent and learn more about the school that her son would be attending. The young Mother was not so interested. The Senior Mother became involved in the parenting program to represent the family. The Senior Mother loved the parenting activities, speakers and program incentives for participation. The young Mother soon started attending sessions, not as much as her Mother did, but enough to make her Mother proud.

The K-2 program had a Parent Involvement Specialist as well, who did very similar activities. The young Mother became familiar with that staff person in the building, as well as having participated more with the preschool Parent Involvement Specialist. The transition for her child to Kindergarten the next school year was great and she had the opportunity to choose the Kindergarten teacher she wanted for her child.

Basic Indicators of a Quality Family Engagement Program

- Easy access to the school, walking distance or bus transportation provided within the community
- Visible security personnel
- Good safe space for families, healthy building and proper plumbing/water/heat/AC
- Good resources are made available to families and their children
- Parents interactions with staff always brings about a clear understanding of program expectations/expectations are clear
- Having a Diverse staff/ A Culturally responsive program
- Trust factors being established from the start.
- Empathetic, Sympathetic and Reflective listeners on staff
- Staff is trauma informed
- Parents are given information in writing, especially when it pertains to their children. They may need to go home and read it again for clarity or ask someone they respect and who supports them, to give them an opinion.
- Parents need to have a voice. It may be the only time that they really get to express themselves. Don't cut parents off or belittle them. Treat everyone with RESPECT!

Basic Indicators to Consider When Measuring Family Engagement

1. Environmental Factors:

- Understand the basic life style of the family.
- Where do they actually live?
- Is it safe and healthy?

2. Cultural Factors:

- Are they guarded in sharing information?
- Has the family experienced trauma?
- Is the Dad the only one who speaks for the family?

3. Educational Factors:

- What does education mean to them?
- Do the Parents have a clear understanding of what is being discussed?
- Have the Parents had positive school experiences for themselves?

Also Consider:

1. Establishing Trust from the start as best you can.
2. Be an Empathetic, Sympathetic and Reflective listener
3. Be clear about their needs
4. Give Parents information in writing after each encounter, especially when it pertains to their children. They may need to go home and read it again for clarity or ask someone they respect and who supports them, to give them an opinion.
5. Prepare to hear Parents out. It may be the only time that they really get to express themselves. Don't cut them off or belittle them. Treat everyone with RESPECT!