

# Developing the parent-teacher relationship



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

## Initial Thoughts

1. What do teachers need to understand about working with families who have children with disabilities?

- There are several aspects that a teacher must understand about working with families who have children with disabilities. First and foremost, teachers need to understand the *family composition*. If a teacher wants to learn how to support and include families and is determined to find ways that will help them become involved, they must recognize that the families of children with and without disabilities differ. Teachers must familiarize themselves with the level of diversity in their student's population and among their families. The families of their students bring a variety of perspectives, languages, traditions, and educational levels. In addition, the composition of families consists of income, culture, and size. The framework of diverse families varies and might include step-parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. On the other hand, for some students, the framework of diverse families may include neighbors or anyone who is an active participant in the child's life. Therefore, teachers need to gravitate from the "ideal" family, which consists of a mom and dad and other children. Teachers need to understand that family is anyone who is associated with caring and providing support to their members. Secondly, teachers need to educate themselves on the challenges that families face when it comes to having a child with a disability. Teachers must familiarize themselves with the issues that the families of children with disabilities have to endure in addition to the roles

associated with parenting. One of the challenges is dealing with grief. Parents of children with disabilities have to cope with the loss of their hopes and dreams for their child. Teachers who are aware of how grief plays a part in the family's experience, will become more sensitive. Moving forward, families of children with disabilities may encounter the following emotional states: *Denial, Guilt, Anger, Depression, Anxiety, And Fear*. These states are present when a child's experiences or should be experiencing key milestones. In like manner, parents of children with disabilities also experience strength, joy, and love. For example, most families can be impacted positively in a number of ways such as increasing their ability to accept differences, giving them a greater sense of pride in their child's accomplishments, and allowing parents to have more patience, tolerance, and understanding. Therefore, it is very pertinent for teachers to take heed and understand that the parents of children with disabilities are more likely to experience a wide range of emotions. As a result, teachers will understand that each family is unique in how they cope with their child's disability and become accepting of families. Among the many challenges faced by families who have a child with a disability is adopting new roles and the amount of time that goes along with them. There are many roles that most parents will have to fulfill such as *case manager, parents oversee their child's education, health, and related services; medical expert, parents need to understand the medical issues or medical condition that relates to the child's disability, advocate, parents have their child's best interest at heart, inclusion specialist, parents ensure that their child is included in all activities*

*and daily routines, transition specialist, parents make the transition between grades, schools easier, and personal planner, parents assist in planning for their child's future. School personnel including teachers can help families by familiarizing themselves with what the family's concerns are and find ways to alleviate the stress that they may experience.* In addition to dealing with emotional issues and filling multiple roles, families of children with disabilities may encounter challenges related to daily living. Although education is important for parents, it will not become a priority due to the fact that the family needs to fulfill other obligations. Some of the common challenges are high divorce rate, lack of help, financial struggles, healthcare costs, and accessibility issues. Parents genuinely care about their child's education, in spite of the stressors. Lack of involvement does not necessarily mean that parents are not supportive, but they may be facing multiple challenges.

2. What are some ways to go about building positive relationships with families?

- There are several ways to go about building positive relationships with families. To build positive relationships, teachers should encourage family involvement, respect families, and acknowledge the family's strengths. Creating an accepting and supportive environment will help students succeed in school. There are a few ways to build positive relationships between schools and families. For instance, a middle school holds "Parent Night" on the last Friday of each month. During "Parent Night", they serve dinner and allow parents to explore the

media center, computer lab, and parent resource center. In the media center, parents and students can check out and return library books, in the computer lab, parents and students can work on upcoming projects and assignments, and in the parent resource center, parents can receive support, information, and attend workshops. Another way to build a positive relationship between schools and families is having a principal greet students and wish them a good day as they arrive and leave school.

Secondly, family involvement increases academic achievement and fosters higher education. Teachers should realize that families of children with disabilities can demonstrate their involvement in a number of ways and must be willing to adapt to work with families. Parental involvement can be categorized into six involvement types: *parenting*, *communicating*, *volunteering*, *learning at home*, *decision making*, and *collaborating with the community*. *Parenting* is developing environments at home that will support their child as a student. For example, holding parent workshops that are of interest to the family and visit the family at home. *Communicating* is informing the child's parents of their performance, school policies, and programs. For example, teachers can inform the parents of their child's performance by communicating with them through emails, notes home, phone calls, and bulletin boards. *Volunteering* is the recruitment of families to help support students and programs within the school. For example, the school can invite parents to serve as room parents or crossing guards. *Learning at home* is the involvement of families in their child's learning at home. For example, families will be provided with information about skills

and strategies being addressed in the classroom and families will be allowed to set goals for their child and plan transitions. *Decision making* is including families in school-related decision making. For example, parents can be encouraged to join PTA/PTO meetings. Last but not least, *collaborating with the community* is strengthening family and student support by connecting the family to the community. For example, parents can receive information on community workshops and attend parent workshops that focus on community health and other programs.

It is important that a school makes an effort to make families feel welcomed and showing proper respect. Many parents often feel that they do not feel respected by school personnel. To avoid this, teachers can ask parents how they would like to be addressed, for example, Mr. Mrs., Ms. or by their first names and their preferences on communicating. For instance, some parents may prefer communicating by notes home, phone calls, emails or parent meetings. In addition, teachers can also show respect by honoring parents as decision makers and respecting their points of view. Dependability and confidentiality are two major aspects of respect. These two aspects can foster positive and trusting relationships with families. Some ways a teacher can demonstrate dependability is by returning phone calls and emails in a timely manner and following through on a task. To demonstrate confidentiality, teachers should not share or relay any personal information about the family without the parent's consent. Additionally, it is important that teachers develop an awareness of how ethnicities and cultures view disabilities. Some cultures may view disability as shame or pity to families, a spiritual event or occurrence, or as a gift or a blessing. Teachers must

understand that parents from some cultures take on the role of active parents, whereas, in some cultures, parents believe that teachers or schools are experts and should assume a deferential posture. Some of the things teachers can do if they have a child with a disability from a minority or ethnic or cultural community in their classroom by researching the family's culture to understand how they view disabilities, learn about the family's values and expectations for their child's educational needs, and familiarize themselves with the differences in the educational system and services.

Another way to build a positive relationship with families of children who have disabilities is by acknowledging the strengths of children. Teachers need to focus on the child's abilities and talents, rather than, focusing on their weaknesses, deficits, or challenges. It is equally important that teachers have high expectations for families. For instance, are knowledgeable about their child's disability and knowledgeable about the strategies that are successful with their child. This will provide a foundation between schools and families. As a result, teachers will be able to meet the educational needs of the child.

### Assessment

1. Describe the range of emotions associated with being the parent of a child with special needs. Select two emotional states and describe how you as a teacher would you work with a parent experiencing these emotions.
  - The range of emotions that are associated with being the parent of a child with special needs is *Grief and Joy* . When it comes to grief, the

majority of parents of children with disabilities are likely to experience the loss of their hopes and dreams of their child. In like manner, it is comparable to families who have to cope with the loss of a loved one. In addition, grief is coupled with, denial, guilt, anger, depression, anxiety, and fear. *Denial* is when the parent denies that their child possesses any disabilities, *guilt* is when the parent feels that they are responsible for the disability or the situation *anger* is when a parent may take their frustration or anger and direct it towards another person, *depression* is when a parent experiences uncontrollable sadness and feelings of hopelessness, *anxiety* is when a parent's attitudes, values, beliefs, and routines are affected, and *fear* is when a parent becomes overprotective of their child and is concerned about letting their child with a disability do certain things. Secondly, when it comes to joy, parents of children with disabilities express positive feelings such as pride, desire, and love. In addition, families are impacted positively in various ways by increasing their ability to be accepting of others, strengthening family ties, and teaching them to enjoy the little things in life.

The two selected emotional states are fear and guilt. When it comes to fear, it brings out the fight or flight reaction. The flight drives you into denial and the fight gives families the energy to generate new dreams. Families fear the unknown and fear of the future. Parents may ask themselves, "*Will my child ever learn?*", "*Will my child go to college?*", "*Will my child be capable of loving and living happily?*" "*What will happen when my child is five years old, ten years old, or twenty-one years old?*". To help parents who



experience fear, teachers can help parents by focusing on the positive. Teachers can help parents embrace the darker aspects of their situation, as well as, shed light on how to be positive. Being positive is having hope and confidence in one's ability to cope with what is tough, coupled with, remembering that everything does not have to be negative. The more parents of children with disabilities practice positivity, they will become resilient in difficult situations. Also, there is always a "bright side" to every situation. Although a child may have a disability, they can be healthy as well. In addition, it diminishes the negatives and makes life easier.

Secondly, when it comes to guilt, it is often presented in the form of questions. Parents will assume that they are responsible for their child having a disability. For instance, "Did I do something wrong?", "*Am I being punished?*", "*Did I take care of myself properly when I was pregnant?*". In addition, guilt can lead to self-remorse, "*Why me?*", "*Why does my child deserve this?*" As a teacher, to help a parent cope with guilt is simply by helping the parent understand that they should confront their beliefs about what caused their child to have a disability. Parents should understand that their beliefs do not have an effect on the past or the future. Also, teachers can help parents realize that they are not responsible or the cause of their child's disability.

2. Identify and describe three roles that a parent of a child who has a disability might undertake that are unlike the roles typically associated with parenting.

- The additional roles that are adopted by families may last a while, as well as, a lifetime depending on the severity of the child's disability.

For many families, acquiring additional roles can be time-consuming and frustrating. It is with utmost importance that the school personnel help families understand the roles so that they can play the roles well. This is crucial because it is how a parent view themselves in terms of the job that has to be done. School personnel can assist families by finding alternatives to alleviate stressors that the families may encounter such as familiarizing themselves with healthcare, education, and social services.

The three roles that a parent of a child with a disability might undertake that are unlike the roles typically associated with parenting are *case manager*, *medical expert*, and *advocate*. As a *case manager*, parents oversee their child's education, health, and related services. For example, parents make sure that their child's special education services and supports are in place. Also, parents ensure that the services and supports that are being provided is indicated in their child's plan. Also, parents take on the responsibility as a *medical expert*, parents understand the medical issues or medical condition that relates to the child's disability or medical condition . Parents attain more knowledge in regards to their child. Parents are their child's first caregiver. When raising a child with a disability it requires complex care and at home care. A child may have a lifelong disability which involves ongoing assistance. For example, if a child is diagnosed with autism, parents are aware of associated medical conditions such as feeding disorders, seizure disorders, asthma, and etc. and parents can relay certain information to teachers and others regarding their child's condition. Last but not least, parents take the role of being an *advocate*, parents have their child's best

interest at heart . Parents are natural advocates for their children. In addition, parents are actively and continuously involved in their child's life and learning. Parents understand what important services are needed for their child to help them become successful. As a parent of a child with a disability, parents ensure that the school provides their child with a free appropriate education that implements specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of their child.

3. Reese is a young girl with cerebral palsy. Her primary means of mobility is a manual wheelchair, though she is also able to take a few independent steps. Reese's parents have recently separated and are in the process of divorcing. Reese, her mom, and two older siblings have temporarily relocated and are now living in the upstairs of her grandparents' house. As a result of the move, Reese has transitioned to a new school. Although her mom is generally very involved with her child's education, there are currently many stressors in her life. Describe at least two of the stressors, besides divorce, that Reese's mom might be experiencing and explain how you think they might affect her time and involvement with the school.

- First and foremost, stressors are something that causes emotional or physical tension. It can arise from any event or thought that makes someone feel frustrated, angry, or nervous. Two of the stressors besides divorce, that Reese's mom might be experiencing is *accessibility issues* and *lack of support* . While coping with emotional issues and assuming multiple roles, families of children with disabilities may be faced with challenges relating to daily living that may outweigh

school-related activities. Even though parents are faced with multiple stressors, parents care about their child's education. It is important that teachers understand that education is important to parents but, it may not be their first priority. When it comes to *accessibility issues*, Reese, her mother, and two older siblings have temporarily moved into the upstairs of her grandparents' house. Finding houses that are accessible may require Reese's mother to relocate, renovate their existing house, or build a new house. For example, Reese's means of mobility is a manual wheelchair and she may have difficulty maneuvering herself around her grand-parents house and utilizing the stairs. If the proper accommodations cannot be made within the home, Reese's mother will be subjected to physical challenges such as injuries and pain from persistently lifting, transferring, and carrying Reese. Some accommodations consist of stair lifts, ramps, roll-in showers and etc. Secondly, there is a lack of support. Families who have children with disabilities may receive little support from their extended families because of a lack of understanding and other factors. In light of this case, Reese's mother may experience a lack of support from her ex-husband due to the fact that they are going through a divorce. In addition, Reese's mother may not receive emotional support or financial support. For instance, Reese's mother may struggle to pay for childcare, housing, or medical bills.

4. Imagine you are a teacher in Reese's new school. Describe three ideas you have for building a relationship with Reese's family and how you would go about making the family feel welcome in your school.

- Creating an accepting and supportive environment will help students succeed in school. The three ideas I might have for building a relationship with Reese's family and making the family feel welcomed is by encouraging Reese's family involvement, respecting Reese's family, and acknowledging Reese's family strength. First and foremost, family involvement is a vital aspect of ensuring a child's success in school. Also, family involvement strengthens academic achievement.

First of all, the No Child Left Behind law, define parent involvement as the participation of parents in regular and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities. one way to get Reese's family involved is by volunteering. *Volunteering* is the recruitment of families to help support students and programs within the school. For example, the school can invite Reese's family to serve as room parents or crossing guards. In addition, I can accommodate Reese's family schedule and preferences and include her family on school committees. Teachers must realize that families who have children with disabilities can demonstrate their involvement in a variety of ways. In addition, the must understand that they must be willing to adjust with all families.

Secondly, I would be respectful of Reese's family. In an effort to make Reese's family feel welcomed, I might begin asking parents how they will like to be addressed (e. g. Mr., Mrs., or, Ms.) and their means for communicating (e. g. phone calls, parent teacher-meetings, and email). Additionally, I will recognize Reese's mother as a decision maker and respect their point of view. Respecting Reese's family is acknowledging them as decision-makers on behalf of their child. Parents of children with disabilities are actively

involved in their child's lives, as well as, their adulthood. Next, I would be respectful of Reese's family cultural viewpoints. For example, I can learn about Reese's family values and their expectations for their child's educational needs and communicate with Reese's family in ways that are respectful. It is important to develop an awareness of how people of different cultures view disabilities. Some cultures may view disabilities as a spiritual event, a gift or a blessing, or stigma. Also, as Reese's teacher, I must respect the fact that some cultures assume the role of active partners with the school, whereas other parents from other cultures may not. The best source of information regarding Reese's family is the family itself. Teachers who familiarize themselves with their own culture and beliefs will become easier to understand how these influence how they view others.

Last but not least, as an educator, I must acknowledge strengths. In order to build a relationship with Reese's family is by acknowledging Reese's strengths. When it comes to discussing a child who does not have a disability, teachers will become attentive to the child's abilities, talents, and progress. But, when teachers discuss a child who has a disability, they will focus on their weaknesses or challenges. It is equally important for teachers to have the same high expectations for families of children with or without disabilities. Families of children with disabilities acquire the knowledge of their child's disability and what strategies are helpful for their child. As a result, this will provide a meaningful relationship between Reese's family and the school. Therefore, if I acknowledge Reese's strengths she will perform better academically and accordingly.

5. Imagine that you, as Reese's new teacher, have just returned from a visit to Reese's grandparents. During your home visit, Reese's mother vented about her failed relationship with her husband and the reasons for their divorce. Now the teachers in the teachers' lounge are pushing you for the juicy details. What is your responsibility in this situation and why?

- In light of this case, Reese's teacher should keep all information regarding Reese's mother failed relationship along with the reasons for their divorce confidential. First and foremost, teachers have an obligation to protect confidences. In addition, teachers have the obligation to act professionally amongst students, parents, and co-workers. Confidentiality is the obligation to not disclose information willingly that is obtained in confidence. Therefore, any information that is disclosed without consent will be a breach of confidentiality. Sharing information should be done in a manner that upholds the dignity of the student and parent.

Confidentiality is very important because it establishes and maintains a strong teacher-student relationship. In addition, it is important that teachers familiarize themselves with the rights of individuals to privacy and respect confidential information regarding their students. Information about a student or their family that is not publicly available has the potential to cause harm or violate the privacy rights of Reese or her family. For example, sharing information with others who are not directly related to Reese's situation will result in distrust and skepticism. Also, there is a risk of others sharing the information. Confidential information may include physical,

mental, or emotional abuse; family issues; and illnesses. Reese's mothers shared her personal information with the expectation that confidentiality will be maintained. As a result, Reese's teacher must respect the confidential nature of information regarding Reese and relay information to authorized personnel that is directly concerned with Reese's welfare.

### Wrap Up

Teachers and parents have one goal in common and that goal is helping their child succeed in school. There is a strong relationship between parental involvement and a child's academic success. In order to ensure the success between schools and parents, teachers should realize the emotions associated with parents of children with disabilities. The two emotional challenges are grief and joy. When it comes to grief, the majority of parents of children with disabilities are likely to experience the loss of their hopes and dreams of their child. In like manner, it is comparable to families who have to cope with the loss of a loved one. In addition, grief is coupled with, denial, guilt, anger, depression, anxiety, and fear. Secondly, teachers must acknowledge that the parents of children with disabilities assume various roles. There are many roles a parent adopts such as a case manager, medical expert, advocates, inclusion specialist, transition specialist, and personal future planner. Additionally, teachers should try and understand the parents of children with disabilities and realize that everyone has different needs. Parents and families know their children very well, and teachers must respect families. As a result, teachers will be able to educate their children properly. Doing so, will foster parental involvement and make the family feel welcomed. Families of children with disabilities have children with different



disabilities or abilities, therefore, teachers need to acknowledge that and try to offer different resources that will help them become a stronger family. By doing so, teachers will establish positive relationships, which is crucial to ensuring the success of students and the involvement of families. Creating a positive relationship with families grants teacher the opportunity to meet the unique needs of children.

## References

- Collaborating with Families. (n. d.). Retrieved from <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/fam/#content>