Parents are an invaluable resource to teachers, providing them with information about the child’s home life, and what works best for that child in terms of learning and positive behaviour support.

Parents see themselves supporting the school in many ways through activities that provide for meaningful learning for their children, whether that is taking place at home, in a school, or in the larger community.

 Teachers in inclusive classrooms collaborate and communicate with parents and are respectful of the challenges they face. They work hard to understand and be helpful when institutional expectations cannot be met in the way we sometimes expect.

Most parents do want to be involved, and many are involved in ways not visible to teachers.

Parents want to feel welcome in the school community and in their child’s classroom. They want to have their contributions appreciated, and they want to be connected to a school community through their children.

Parents appreciate being informed about the learning of their child, and having opportunities to participate in their child’s learning.

General Synopsis
Inclusive schools welcome and embrace positive, collaborative relationships between school staff and parents in support of providing the best learning environment for a diverse population of children. In this video you will see examples of inclusive school settings that model approaches that reflect understanding, support and collaboration with all parents, including parents of children with disabilities. For more information from Alberta Education on an inclusive education system please visit http://education.alberta.ca/department/ipr/inclusion/about.aspx
Implementing a inclusive education model requires educators to show sensitivity to the culturally relevant values that influence parents’ educational priorities and demands, and recognize that cultural, socioeconomic and gender factors affect how parents participate in their children’s education.

Collaboration is enhanced by a family-centred approach: a set of beliefs, principles, values and practices aimed at supporting and strengthening family capacity to enhance and promote their child’s development and learning, recognizing parents as key participants in the education of their children.

The child is the centre of all collaborative efforts.

Teachers play a critical role in this collaboration. They offer to families:
- **Empowerment** – Teachers acknowledge and support each family to identify and communicate concerns about their child.
- **Enablement** – Teachers assist the family to acquire the skills and resources to help address their concerns.

As children successfully learn and develop, teachers, parents and children can celebrate the progress, and appreciate the collaboration that achieved the learning outcomes.

Parents are powerful partners as we move toward one inclusive education system where each student is successful.

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For further information on this topic, please see Tip Sheet - Positive Parental Partnerships and Strengthening Collaboration Between Schools and Families.
Continuing the Conversation: Questions for Discussion

For all children, including children with disabilities, parents are an invaluable resource to teachers, providing them with information and insight about the child, and what works best for that child in terms of learning and positive behaviour support.

1. What words caught your attention in this statement?
2. What was your first reaction?
3. From your own experience, can you recall an example of effective collaboration with a parent in support of student learning? If so, tell the group about it.
4. What values are implicit in this statement?

For parents, a critical issue may be whether their child and they, as the child’s parents, feel they are welcomed, accepted and respected as part of the school community, as illustrated in the video.

1. What were some observations you made in the video clip that would illustrate this statement?
2. In your own experience, what welcoming examples have you seen or been part of?
3. Think of something you could do in your own class, or throughout your school, that would enhance welcoming behaviour.

Parents in the video said that the more contact they had with the school, the more they felt they were able to provide support for their child’s learning at home. By being in the school, they picked up subtle and direct cues about how to help their child. By talking with the teacher, they could ask questions and get information about what was being worked on in class.

1. What are the implications of more contact with parents for teachers, classrooms and schools?
2. What trends do you see emerging?
3. What change, if any, is needed?
4. What are your next steps?

Families may experience a sense of loss and grieving about their child’s disability. They may experience a number of conflicting emotions as they anticipate what the future will be like for their child, and how the disability could affect their child’s daily life, relationships and future aspirations.

1. What did this bring to mind as you read it?
2. In working with parents, when have you experienced something like this?
3. What is the insight here?
4. How could this statement be helpful in working with parents in the future?
Research References


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Guiding the Conversation

Respecting Cultural Diversity
Learning Guide
This learning guide is designed for use by Professional Learning Communities, instructional/learning coaches, teacher-leaders or as a self-paced study to enhance and support instruction, conversation and critical reflection about creating inclusive learning environments. This conversation guide is intended to be used after viewing the video clip entitled Respecting Cultural Diversity on this website: http://www.inclusiveeducationpdresources.ca/collaborating_with_parents.php

General Synopsis
This video supports the concept of traditional inspiration/cultural perception to strengthen self-esteem, trust and mutual understanding for positive learning supports.

Key Understandings

- The child is the center of all collaborative efforts.
- Resolving differences involves creating an environment that shares knowledge, supports cooperation, communicates, tolerates, provides positive emotional expression and conflict resolution.
- Collaborative solutions and practices bring out the value of diversity and diverse perspectives as we learn from each other.

Continuing the Conversation: Questions for Discussion

Facilitators: Working in table groups, post these questions before viewing the video so people know what they are watching for/reflecting upon. You may choose some or all of the questions for discussion. A jigsaw strategy could be used to process: each table is given a number and assigned the corresponding question (1-3) to discuss for 10-15 min, then people are moved so that each table now has members who have discussed each of the questions. At this point they can lead/share the discussion that their first group had around their question. Question 4 is a personal response type of question and could be done as a large group activity where volunteers share their thoughts or as an individual writing activity.

1. Which examples of strength-based approaches stood out for you in this video? What did you observe about the ways in which the family collaborated with the school to find solutions to potential learning issues?
2. What are some examples of strength-based approaches that you currently use or have previously used with children that you could share?

3. What processes does your school community have in place to identify a student’s strengths and build on them? What new processes could be put into place?

4. *Live in the present. Celebrate successes, big and small. The more we begin to focus on successes, the more we’ll experience. Celebrating success has a snowball effect.*

As you reflect upon this statement, think about how you apply this in your own setting. What recent successes have you had that you can share? How did you celebrate them? What activities/practices do you currently have in place for sharing success?

**Scene Explanations and Key Messages:**

A teacher is reprimanding a FNMI student for he is making his classroom students laugh. *(Illustrating what the student believes as an everyday practice - using his gift to make others feel better by promoting laughter)*

The teacher walks him to the principal’s office and calls him a “class clown”. *(Illustrating teacher misunderstanding to a positive culture/family value. Demonstrates conflict between the cultural teachings she has grown up with and what she has been taught is mainstream approach to classroom management)*

Since this is reoccurring behaviour, the principal decides to call in the parents. *(Illustrating family support system and cultural kinship ties, community working together as positive behaviour supports)*

Community Elder is invited to meet with all to provide cultural and spiritual wisdom. He explains that their child has received the ability to make people laugh from the Creator. At home and in other public areas, he is encouraged to use this gift/talent to make people happy. *(Illustrating community involvement; respect for sense of humour related to student’s way of life)*

Rather than suppress this gift/talent the school/parents problem solve and agree to a solution. *(Illustrating building of mutual understanding and using strength-based collaborative approach to problem solving)*
Further Explanation of Cultural Implications:

Student is not "disciplined" or "punished" in the more traditional sense; rather he is counselled about the proper use of his gift in a good way.

Student shares his perspective when he is called into the office and at home with his family. During the final meeting, he respectfully listens and learns while his extended family advocates on his behalf and the Elder provides him with cultural teachings that will help him use his gifts respectfully.

The young teacher listens to the Elder and is able to reconnect with her earlier cultural teachings. She begins to see how to situate her indigenous view of holistic pedagogy with her work with students in the classroom, blending traditional FNMI teachings about people’s gifts with contemporary knowledge about teaching and strength-based approaches.

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Trust is important in building and maintaining relationships and resolving conflict.

- Some of the personal qualities and attitudes that contribute to trust are: reliability, competence, honesty and openness.

- As parents deal with the many school-related transitions for their children with disabilities, they may experience a range of emotions. Fathers and mothers may react differently, simply because they are different people. They may have different ways of coping with feelings of grief or loss related to their expectations for their child.

- Teachers can use specific strategies to help build a positive and mutually rewarding working relationship with parents:
  
  - Use terminology in clear, everyday words rather than educational jargon.
  - Listen to what parents have to say.
  - Accept feelings that are expressed.
  - When information is new or more complex, parents may need more than one opportunity to discuss it. Introduce a new idea and give parents time to think about it. Follow up with a phone call or meeting a week later to continue the discussion.
  - Communicate frequently, and ensure the communication is two-way.
  - Be accountable. Only promise what you can deliver. Follow through on your commitments to parents.
  - Respect each parent’s right to choose his/her own level of involvement.

- Trust in interpersonal relationships between parents and teachers develops when:
  
  - Both teachers and parents are seen as knowledgeable and competent.
  - All decisions are made based on what is best for the child.
  - All parties honour their commitment to supporting the child’s success.
Children benefit when their parents and teachers respect each other, communicate openly, and share common goals for the learning and development of the child.

Regular and ongoing communication between parents and teachers is helpful in discovering strengths about the child, and maintaining high expectations for the child’s learning success. Active listening promotes a strong relationship based on mutual respect and trust. It helps establish the shared purpose that is necessary for a productive parent-teacher relationship.

Active listening helps the teacher to develop a clear understanding of the parent’s concern, and communicates to the parent that the teacher is interested in the message.

Listening actively can help a teacher to:
  o understand parents’ perceptions of their child,
  o understand parents’ expectations for the educational program, and
  o build a working relationship with the parents that will support strong collaboration between the home and the school program.

For further information on this topic, please see Support for Implementation Tip Sheet: Active Listening.
Continuing the Conversation: Questions for Discussion

In the video Active Listening is summarized to be:

a. Rooted in attitudes  
b. Building positive working relationships  
c. Supporting strong collaboration between the school program and home  
d. Creating mutual respect and trust  
e. Listening for feelings  
f. Listening for meaning  
g. Asking open ended questions  
h. Focusing on the Issues

1. Discuss examples of Active Listening you saw in the video? What did you like/not like? Why?

2. Discuss examples of Active Listening that you presently use/see in your school?

3. Identify areas of strength and areas for growth in your present Active Listening?

4. What do you or your school do to help parents feel like they are being listened to and are valued for their contributions?

5. From the discussion, or from your own thinking about active listening, what are the implications for your interactions with parents? Students? Educational Assistants?

Here are some activities you may find helpful in practicing/reflecting on the skill of active listening.

**Practice Active Listening**

**Intent:** The ability to listen actively increases communication and builds relationships and trust.

**Objective:** Practice active listening skills through accurate paraphrasing, empathy and appropriate nonverbal cues.

- There are four steps in active listening:
  - **Listen, empathize and communicate respect**
  - **Ask questions and ask permission to take notes**
Focus on the issue
Find a first step

**Time:** 60 minutes

**Techniques / Equipment:** Personal experience. Observer feedback grids (below).

**Process:** In triads:

- Split into groups of 3 with a speaker, a listener and an observer.
- Choose a “real” situation that involves Active Listening *(for instance: a strong personal experience, a position on a controversy, etc.)*.
- The speaker will explain the “situation” for three minutes.
- The listener will practice active listening using paraphrasing, empathy and nonverbal cues.
- The observer will take notes on the skills that the listener is practicing.
- The observer will give constructive feedback and share their notes with the speaker and the listener. Complete the cycle twice (six speakers).

**Group Success:** Everyone in the group has participated actively.

**Debrief:** How did the feedback affect your ability to listen actively?

**Active Listening Observer Feedback Grid**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>First Time Listening</th>
<th>Second Time Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate Tone of Voice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accurate Paraphrasing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonverbal cues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging Words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Link to the Inclusive Education Implementation Support website for PD resources at: www.inclusiveeducationpdresources.ca

For further information on learning opportunities to support implementation visit: www.arpdcalb.ca
Paraphrasing

**Intent:** Active listening helps to assure others that they are being heard and ensures that what is heard is understood.

**Objective:** Practise paraphrasing with active listening.

**Time:** 30 minutes

**Techniques / Equipment:** Personal experience.

**Process:** In the whole group:
- Brainstorm a list of a dozen topics to use in practicing active listening. The topics would be those that have an interest to the participants/that are pertinent to their work.
- Form triads:

**Active Listening.** Rotate speaker, active listener and observer.

**Speaker**
- Choose a personal experience to share with your listener.
- Spend four minutes communicating your thoughts and feelings about the experience.

**Listener**
- Spend four minutes actively listening to your partner.
- Use only paraphrasing and empathy.
- Add no new content
- No questions, no advice, no opinions!

**Observer**
- Focus on paraphrasing and empathy skills of listener.
- Attend to body language of listener and speaker.
- Keep track of time.
- Debrief your observations for three minutes.
- Sandwich your feedback (positive, negative, positive).

(Activities from Cooperative Learning Group Activities for College Courses A Guide for Instructors prepared by Alice Macpherson Coordinator, The Centre for Academic Growth, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, and used under terms of Creative Commons License)
Research References


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Conflict develops when people interact and perceive incompatible differences or threats to their resources, needs or values. Differences of opinion, or even conflict, are not in themselves a problem. What is important is how the conflict is handled when it arises, in order to avoid collateral damage. It has been suggested that up to 90% of parent-teacher conflict is due to differing views of a child, or of a child’s needs. An important skill to learn is how to narrow this gap in perceptions. Good partnerships are a result of good communication and withstand questions, conflicts, debates, and disagreements; provide structures and processes to solve problems and are strengthened when differences have been resolved. When working through a parental disagreement listen for concerns and, discuss the issue confidentially with someone. Seek advice from your school administrators. If appropriate, recognize if you made mistakes apologize and try to correct. When it is over, move forward, forgiving yourself and others and using the lessons learned to improve your teaching. Share knowledge and seek collaborative solutions and practices. Resolving differences involves creating an environment that shares knowledge, supports cooperation, communicates, tolerates, provides positive emotional expression and conflict resolution. Collaborative solutions and practices bring out the value of diversity and diverse perspectives as we learn from each other.

General Synopsis
Inclusive schools recognize the importance of welcoming and embracing the involvement of parents in their children’s education. Conflict is inevitable and can actually be beneficial. It can lead to brainstorming creative strategies and a better understanding of individuals and their strengths. This video portrays a scenario where parents and school staff are able to communicate about a challenging issue faced by a student, and collaborate to come up with a mutually beneficial solution.

Key Understandings
- Conflict develops when people interact and perceive incompatible differences or threats to their resources, needs or values.
- Differences of opinion, or even conflict, are not in themselves a problem. What is important is how the conflict is handled when it arises, in order to avoid collateral damage.
- It has been suggested that up to 90% of parent-teacher conflict is due to differing views of a child, or of a child’s needs. An important skill to learn is how to narrow this gap in perceptions.
- Good partnerships are a result of good communication and withstand questions, conflicts, debates, and disagreements; provide structures and processes to solve problems and are strengthened when differences have been resolved.
- When working through a parental disagreement listen for concerns and, discuss the issue confidentially with someone. Seek advice from your school administrators. If appropriate, recognize if you made mistakes apologize and try to correct. When it is over, move forward, forgiving yourself and others and using the lessons learned to improve your teaching.
- Share knowledge and seek collaborative solutions and practices. Resolving differences involves creating an environment that shares knowledge, supports cooperation, communicates, tolerates, provides positive emotional expression and conflict resolution. Collaborative solutions and practices bring out the value of diversity and diverse perspectives as we learn from each other.
For further information on this topic, please see Support for Implementation Tip Sheet: Resolving Differences Through Collaboration.

Continuing the Conversation: Questions for Discussion

1. How did you feel about the situation portrayed in this video clip?

2. Think of a time when a challenging situation/potential conflict arose in your work environment. What did you do to diffuse it? Think about how easily these types of situations can become “stuck” or stalemated, and consider how you would use the key understandings as a means of getting “unstuck. Looking back, what would you/could you have done differently?

3. Consider the statement. Differences of opinion, or even conflict, are not in themselves a problem. What is important is how the conflict is handled when it arises..., Considering skills such as communication, listening and knowledge sharing with the purpose of coming to a collaborative solution. Discuss examples of how you/your school currently demonstrate those skills, and/or what you could do to build on them that support collaboration.

4. This video also deals with the theme of collaborating for smooth transitions. In the video clip, the beginning teacher wanted to set a certain tone and get the year off to a good start for all his students, unaware of how his approach would affect his student with high anxiety. Had he come to you seeking help prior to the beginning of the school year, how would you have advised him to prevent the conflict as demonstrated in the video?

Collaborative Practices is a term used by Alberta Education to describe many different activities that support a culture in which children and youth are equipped to overcome challenges and experience success in school. The success is apparent when schools, school authorities and their partners work together to provide supports and services in a way that is timely, culturally sensitive and responsive.
Based on an extensive literature review, a provincial research project, and input from teachers, administrators, parents, youth and other education stakeholders, eleven wraparound principles were identified that reflect the Alberta context. Focusing on Collaborative Practices based on these wraparound principles helps schools, authorities and their partners gain an understanding of how to build a culture that supports collaboration, as well as how they can coordinate and access supports and services that address the needs of children, youth and their families within the context of the school and community. For more information and a complete description of the eleven wraparound principles: http://ideas.education.alberta.ca/hsc/current-projects/collaborative-practices

Research References


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Transitions through the school years may lead to parents, including parents of students with disabilities, feeling that they are "starting all over" each time their child moves to a new grade, a new class or a new school. It is helpful for a teacher to understand some of the common transitions, and the needs of parents at each stage in order to best support both parents and students (see Tip Sheet “Collaborating for Transitions”).

Understanding the changing needs of parents at different transition points can help teachers to meet these needs of parents, assisting them to manage the transitions of their children effectively.

Teachers and schools can be agents of change in helping parents engage in their child’s education and become members of a school community.

The school can play an important role in explicitly clarifying for parents, and for their children, that parents are welcome and specifying ways in which parents can be directly involved, or can easily contact teachers to discuss concerns.

When a student comes to a school, there is a “process of joining” in which teachers play a major role by:
  o WELCOMING students and parents,
  o HONORING the knowledge parents have about their child, and
  o CONNECTING with parents to focus together on the child and learning.
Key Understandings

The keys to successful transitions are:

- Planning for change or transition,
- Including parents in the planning process,
- Establishing at least one individual who the parent can feel comfortable approaching, and with whom a closer relationship will be established,
- Ensuring that people have an opportunity to meet each other prior to the transition occurring,
- Providing opportunities for parental peer support by linking parents to parents of older children,
- Using multiple modes of communication, and
- Celebrating successful transitions by recognizing the roles parents and teachers have played in meeting student needs through collaboration.

For each student, both parents and teachers are working toward increased self-determination, and increased self-sufficiency.

For further information on this topic, please see Support for Implementation Tip Sheet: Collaborating for Transitions.

Continuing the Conversation: Questions for Discussion

1. What transitions did you see occurring in the video?
2. What transition(s) for students do you most commonly see in your role/school?
3. What do you do at your school to avoid parents feeling like they are "starting all over"?
4. From the discussion, or from your own thinking about this, what is one thing you could add to what you are already doing that would help students and their families with transitions?
Research References


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Learning Guide – Solution-focused Collaboration

This learning guide is designed for use by Professional Learning Communities, instructional/learning coaches, teacher-leaders or as a self-paced study to enhance and support instruction, conversation and critical reflection about creating inclusive learning environments. This conversation guide is intended to be used after viewing the video clip entitled Solution-Focused Collaboration on this website.

General Synopsis
Solution-focused collaboration between parents and teachers focuses on building solutions together from a strength-based approach, rather than merely ‘solving problems’. In this video we see several examples of using a strength-based approach, in which parents and teacher have collaborated to focus on the child’s strengths in support of his learning.

Key Understandings

- Solution-focused collaboration is a powerful strategy for teachers to use in working with all parents, including parents of children with disabilities.

- Successful collaboration is based on understanding the point of view of the other person. Teachers can then have a clearer understanding of how parents see their own situations.

- In this context, solution-focused collaboration is an interactive process in which individuals with varied life perspectives and experiences join together in a spirit of willingness to share resources, responsibility, and rewards in creating an effective educational program and environments for students with unique learning capacities and needs.

- Solution-focused meetings are collaborative meetings that emphasize building solutions together rather than solving problems.

- An important focus to give to parents is to ask them to simply “keep the change happening.” The more often a positive behaviour or learned response can occur, the more likely that it will successfully replace what preceded it.

- Successful collaborators look for what is happening when the problems is not occurring and shares those observations.
Key Understandings

- A strength-based approach keeps a strong focus on setting a child up for success by focusing on interests and strengths.

- A solution-focused collaboration between teachers and parents can help them both to:
  
  o **Keep their own perspective by focusing on strengths** --- observing what the child can do, setting new goals, and tracking progress.
  
  o **Have the conviction that they can make a difference** --- committing to teaching, learning and supporting changes.
  
  o **Dwell in the present** --- finding the best in each day and celebrating whatever growth each day brings.
  
  o **Solution focused collaborators share and celebrate successes**

For further information on this topic, please see *Support for Implementation Tip Sheet: Solution-Focused Collaboration*.

**Continuing the Conversation: Questions for Discussion**

1. Which examples of a strength-based approach stood out for you in this video? What did you observe about the ways in which the family collaborated with the school to find solutions to potential learning issues?

2. A key to a strength-based approaches is to identify a student’s strengths and interests. What are examples of ways that you currently use or have previously used to identify your student’s strengths and interests in your classroom? What new processes could you put in place?

3. Once you have identified student strengths and interests what are ways you incorporate them into the day to day operation of the school day? What new ways could you implement?

4. Live in the present. Share and Celebrate successes, big and small. The more we begin to focus on successes, the more we’ll experience. Celebrating success has a snowball effect. As you reflect upon this statement, think about how you apply strength in your school. What recent successes have you had that you can share? How did you celebrate them? Do you currently have any activities/practices in place for sharing success?
Research References


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