



Meaningful Parent Leadership: ***A Guide for Success***



**FRIENDS National Resource Center
for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention**
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Dear Child Abuse Prevention and Family Support Colleagues,

Parent leadership is not new; parents have long advocated for their children. Families, however, have become more mobile and extended families are more difficult to easily access, often not live in the same city or state. Parent's need for support from other resources has increased. Parents often know best what is needed for their families. Having appropriate services that meet the needs of families is essential for parents to maintain or achieve stability and knowing that help, truly relevant to their needs, is available where they live. Parents serve as resources, advocates and experts for their own family, neighborhood and community.

The value of having parent leaders involved on every organizational level is incorporated into federal legislation under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, Title II, Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Program¹ (CBCAP). Child abuse prevention and treatment organizations that receive this federal funding are expected to involve parents in meaningful ways, such as on boards (both governing and advisory), planning committees, and as part of efforts to evaluate programs.

For parents to become effective parent leaders, they need to be empowered with knowledge to exercise their voices in meaningful ways, and they need to join together. This requires time and effort from organizations they represent, as well as parents. As parent leaders ourselves, we understand the commitment that is critical to the success of this effort. We received training and opportunities for our voices to be heard and know the effectiveness of using our parent voices. Most of us started out on a local level by becoming involved with small nonprofit organizations or with our children's schools. As opportunities arose, we collectively made commitments to serve on various board and committees; to receive training to be trainers and to co-train with practitioners; to create workshops to present at conferences; and to speak publicly on behalf of various organizations.

This guide to parent leadership is designed to encourage organizations working in the area of child abuse prevention and family support to include parents in their program planning, implementation and evaluation activities. It is also intended to motivate parents to take these opportunities seriously and use their voices with purpose and positive intent. Together, parent leaders, agency staff and organizations themselves will make the lives of families, and the neighborhoods and communities in which they live, safer and more stable, nurturing and positive.

-The FRIENDS Parent Advisory Council

¹ U.S. Department of Health and Human services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, Office of Child Abuse and Neglect, The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act as amended by the Keeping Children and Families Safe Act of 2003, June 2003.

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Introduction

The primary purpose of this guidebook is to provide a roadmap to State Lead Agencies seeking to enhance their engagement of parents as stakeholders and leaders within their programs and organizations.

Our Goal

Parents and child abuse prevention agency staff will form partnerships of shared responsibility for the design, implementation, and evaluation of child abuse prevention programs.

Our Objective

This document was created as a practical guide for practitioners. It presents information, strategies and tools important to developing successful models of parent leadership and partnership with practitioners at the national, state and local levels. This guide is applicable for working with parents across a broad range of unique family circumstances including biological, foster, adoptive, community/tribal elders, and kinship parents, as well as those with children with disabilities, cultural and linguistic differences, and from under-represented or underserved populations and locations.

Imbedded in this guide are specific strategies to help practitioners:

- Build cross-cultural inclusive relationships
- Recruit, retain, train and celebrate parent leadership
- Provide organizational and staff readiness through assessment, preparation and training
- Develop and sustain parent leadership roles in service development, implementation and evaluation.

Target Audience

This guidebook was developed for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) State Lead Agencies, and other child abuse prevention, family support and child welfare programs and organizations.

Legislative Mandate

Title II of the 2003 Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) Community-Based Grants for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, requires community-based child abuse prevention (CBCAP) State Lead Agencies “demonstrate a commitment to meaningful parent leadership”² and have a “demonstrated ability to work with other State and community-based agencies to provide training and technical assistance, and [have] the capacity and commitment to ensure the meaningful involvement of parents who are consumers and who can provide leadership in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs and policy decisions of the applicant agency in accomplishing the desired

² Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, Sec. 201(b)(1)(G)

outcomes for such efforts”³. As part of their annual reports, CBCAP State Lead Agencies must document their activities, including training and technical assistance, to ensure the leadership of parents in the ongoing planning, implementation, and evaluation and oversight of CBCAP programs. As appropriate, they also need to describe how their efforts in parent leadership and family involvement were evaluated and the impact these efforts had on the work of the CBCAP Lead Agency during the reporting period.

³ Ibid. Sec. 202(1)(B)

Why Involve Parents?

There are many benefits of parent leadership for programs and agencies that take the time to define what parents have to bring to their work. Parents identified as stakeholders are people with a vested interest in the outcome of the work and need to be involved in program planning, implementation, and decision making. We know this is easier said than done. Often agencies and parents themselves limit the parent role to that of consumer or client; they view parents as receivers of services developed and provided by professional practitioners. This kind of thinking needs to be transformed to create partnerships that work differently and are authentic and long lasting. Think about your own organization, agency, and/or programs and how you frame the relationships between your system and parents. Do you accept and value parents as full partners in the work, or do you believe their role is limited to accepting services that they have had, at best, an advisory role in developing? This guidebook will help you examine your own beliefs and practices around sharing leadership with parents, and will help you move toward more authentic partnerships.

"Parent leadership is being recognized by more and more states every year as an effective tool to prevent child abuse and to strengthen families. I'm proud to be part of this continuing trend to get more parents involved in meaningful leadership roles".

*Art Hernandez
FRIENDS Parent Advisory Council and
Parents Anonymous® National Leadership Team*

Benefits of Parent Leadership

When parents see themselves as stakeholders, and when organizations change the way they view parents and families, many benefits are possible. Partnering with parents promotes mutually beneficial relationships between families and the child abuse prevention field. The authors and contributors to this guidebook believe that everyone benefits from parent leadership.

Benefits for Parents

When parents see that agencies are serious about inviting them in to leadership positions, they and their families, benefit in many ways. Active participation in policy and program development, advocacy, and decision-making builds knowledge and skills that are transferable to other professional and personal areas of life. It can:

- increase a sense of personal achievement;
- open doors for employment;
- offer a leadership role model for other families; and
- provide a model of community involvement and empowerment for the parent's children and family.

Parent involvement, awareness and acceptance of responsibility begin when a parent enters a program and evolve over time. By recognizing a parent's leadership skills and partnering with him/her the organization helps strengthen the parent as an individual and improves outcomes for the family and children.

Successful partnerships that strive for this kind of environment on the local, state and federal levels promote a positive self-concept that helps parents

- manage stress;
- maintain positive self-esteem;
- feel in control of their lives;
- improve their sense of competence in parenting; and
- develop an increased desire to give back to their community.

Benefits for Children, Families and the Community

As parents strengthen their own confidence and competence through knowledge and skills-building, they improve their ability to be active forces for positive change in their own families and in their communities. Initiatives such as Strengthening Families⁴ promote parent-provider partnership as a strategy to strengthen families and reduce the risk of abuse and neglect. The Strengthening Families approach seeks to implement five protective factors that support leadership development among parents. These factors are⁵:

- 1) **Parental Resilience:** Parents' coping and problem-solving skills affect their ability to deal effectively with everyday stress or a major crisis. Recognizing the signs of stress and knowing what to do about it can help parents build their capacity to cope.
- 2) **Social Connections:** Parents with an extensive network of family, friends, and neighbors have better support in times of need.
- 3) **Concrete Support:** Parents with access to financial, housing and other concrete resources that help them meet their basic needs can better attend to their role as parents.
- 4) **Knowledge of Parenting and Child and Development:** When parents learn what to look for at each age and how to help their children reach their full potential they enhance their parenting effectiveness.
- 5) **Social and Emotional Development of Children:** Parents who are able to develop their children's ability to interact positively with others and to communicate their emotions in an effective way contribute to the health of their own and other families.

As these protective factors build strong families, parents are well-positioned to transfer new experiences, knowledge and skills to other families and have meaningful impact on the programs, agencies and organizations designed to support them.

⁴ The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) developed this initiative in early child care and education programs. It is now being spread through a National Network of partnering organizations. See <http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net> for more information.

⁵ The Center for the Study of Social Policy. (2008). *Protective factors*. Retrieved March 15, 2010 from http://www.strengtheningfamilies.net/index.php/main_pages/protective_factors

“Simply put, the meaningful inclusion of parents in family support policy and program development is good business. How else can practitioners, who rarely walk in the same shoes as the families they seek to support, fully grasp the true nature of family needs and devise the most culturally appropriate strategies to address them? Partnering with parents, valuing their input, creating a shared vision and engaging in consensus decision making with them is more likely to produce best practices in service delivery and achieve successful outcomes to prevent the abuse and neglect of children. More importantly, it gives us reason to celebrate the most important goal – parents empowered as leaders of their families, as leaders within their communities, and as leaders committed to the well-being of children and families nationwide.”

*Cynthia Savage
CEO Circle of Parents*

Benefits for State Lead Agencies

Agencies that embrace parents as experts, leaders and partners facilitate the development and implementation of programs and policies that can create positive change in the lives of not just the parent partners, but of agency staff and the parents served by the agency in the community.

- Parent leaders bring an understanding of their cultural heritage to the table, as do agency staff. This can create an environment for cross-cultural learning, increase an appreciation of diverse cultures and ensure that programs and services offered by the agency are culturally relevant and appropriate.
- When parent and agency leaders work from a position of equal responsibility and commitment, the CBCAP Lead Agency can
 - model partnership and collaborative leadership through agency policy and practice that can be duplicated on a local level;
 - meet the needs of families and recognize and eliminate barriers to positive outcomes through agency policy and mandates;
 - encourage and recognize successful partnerships between practitioners and parents; and
 - develop a base of parent representation on statewide governing bodies that can positively influence multiple systems impacting children, families and communities.

As parents build trustful relationships with practitioners in respectful and inclusive environments where they learn and practice new skills and share their experiences, they gain a sense of empowerment. This can lead parents to extend their leadership capabilities beyond themselves and their own families and become partners with the programs in which they are involved. Inclusion and integration of their “parent voice” becomes a strategy for enhancing program effectiveness.

- Organizations and staff who work directly with parents and families in the community will find that sharing leadership with parents can
 - enhance relationships between families and providers;
 - improve the quality of programs and services;
 - develop a fresh perspective on how services should be delivered;
 - increase visibility of and respect for the program in the community;
 - contribute to the stability of the community; and
 - improve communication skills and increase self-sufficiency in families served by trained parent leaders
- Engaging parents in leadership activities can help organizations
 - offer family support services that are more relevant to the needs of families;
 - institute a culturally relevant and appropriate service delivery system;
 - improve efforts to recruit and retain participants;
 - achieve better outcomes for families and communities; and
 - produce sustainable programs.

Definitions

Parent Leaders

A parent leader is someone who represents the needs and perspectives of many parents without speaking or acting in a staff role for an organization or institution. Parents become leaders when they actively participate in the development and successful implementation of services to help them in their parenting roles and as leaders of their own families. Typically, parent leaders are current or former participants in family support and/or child abuse prevention programs. Using their experiences as participants, coupled with a desire to “give back,” parent leaders build upon the knowledge and skills they gained to take on meaningful leadership roles within programs, agencies, and communities. They serve as a “parent voice” to help shape the direction of support services for other parents and families. Parent leaders can be biological parents, stepparents, grandparents, foster or adoptive parents, community elders, or others who are in primary care-giving roles for children.

The more we have come to understand that prevention of child abuse and neglect is about strengthening families, the more we have come to appreciate the need for parent leadership. When parents are empowered to take the lead within their families, child care centers, and the community at large, they begin to reshape the environment for children at all those levels. We are only beginning to see the possibilities as we engage in the first steps of building parent leadership.

*Roger Sherman
Idaho CBCAP State Lead Agency
Idaho Children's Trust Fund*

Practitioners

Practitioners are paid or voluntary staff employed by an agency/organization involved in providing services for parents, children and families. A person working in or associated with agency services such as a social worker, nurse, counselor,

parent educator, support group facilitator, home visitor, or family support worker is referred to as a practitioner in this guide.

Meaningful Parent Leadership

Parent Leadership is a strengths-based approach to family support founded on the belief that parents are most knowledgeable about their families and communities. They can provide valuable insight into programs and community efforts that will benefit all children and families. Parent leadership begins when organizations support the development of leadership skills in parents at the initiation of services and promote active parent participation in the organization's program planning, program implementation and continuous quality improvement activities.

Parent leadership is meaningful when parents and staff throughout the organization work together as equal partners to 1) make decisions about programs, policies, and practices that affect families and communities, and 2) share responsibility, expertise, accountability and leadership.

Family Support Principles

Key elements of partnerships with parents come from the fields of family support and family-centered practice. The National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections of Hunter College School of Social Work⁶ offers the following principles relative to family engagement and parent leadership:

- **The family unit is the focus of attention.**
Family-centered practice works with the family as a collective unit, insuring the safety and well-being of family members.
- **Strengthening the capacity of families to function effectively is emphasized.**
The primary purpose of family-centered practice is to strengthen the family's potential for carrying out their responsibilities.
- **Families are engaged in designing all aspects of the policies, services, and program evaluation.**
Family-centered practitioners partner with families to use their expert knowledge throughout the decision- and goal-making processes and provide individualized, culturally-responsive, and relevant services for each family.
- **Families are linked with more comprehensive, diverse, and community-based networks of supports and services.**
Family-centered interventions assist in mobilizing resources to maximize communication, shared planning, and collaboration among the several community and/or neighborhood systems that are directly involved in the family.

⁶ National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections. (2009). *Family-centered practice and practice models*. Retrieved February 19, 2010 from http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/family-centered-practice.html

Principles of Collaborative Leadership

Collaborative leadership is a representative decision-making process characterized by collective empowerment. It moves away from the theory that there are a few “experts” (leaders) who have all the answers. In collaborative leadership, the decision-making process is open to all, built upon consensus, and respects and reflects the points of view of all stakeholders.

Collaborative leadership requires a basic commitment and is often an acquired skill for practitioners, other organization staff, board members, and key partners who want to effectively engage parents as leaders in their programs or organizations. It occurs when an organization works within the framework of family support principles. This work calls for a willingness of the traditional leader to give up control and model the behaviors crucial to engaging all. Collaborative leadership involves a true partnership between parents and practitioners who take equal responsibility for the process and accountability for the outcome of the work of the organization. It occurs when parents and practitioners are respectful of each other’s expertise and experience as they make decisions that affect families and communities.

Collaborative leadership among parents and practitioners operates best in organizations that are building towards or already have a collaborative culture where relationships are characterized by a common vision, open-mindedness and inclusiveness. A collaborative culture⁷ includes:

- Trust and respect in everyday interactions;
- Egalitarian attitudes among members at all ranks;
- Power based on expertise and accountability;
- Shared leadership where all members take initiative;
- Valuing of diverse perspectives;
- Commitment to the success of other members, rather than just one’s own
- Valuing of truth and truth telling;
- Commitment to continuous improvement of the whole organization;
- Active learning; and
- Personal responsibility.

⁷ As described in Beyerlein, M.M., Freedman, S., McGee, C., and Moran, L. (2003). *Beyond Teams: Building the Collaborative Organization*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass

Tip from a Parent Leader

If parents are to feel valued and respected, the culture of the organization must allow their ideas to be seriously considered. Without this, they will know parent leadership is not a genuine opportunity for them and they will lose interest. It can sometimes seem like parents come up with “off the wall” ideas, or in strengths-based language, they think “out of the box.” Everyone’s careful consideration of new and fresh ideas creates a positive flow of energy and may lead to changes in an original idea that satisfy everyone. The atmosphere of the conversation must be supportive for all members of the partnership.

Elements of Success

A basic premise of parent leadership and effective parent-practitioner partnerships is that no single person has all the solutions to the numerous needs and problems an organization must address. Elements that contribute to success include:

Shared Vision: A vision is an overall picture of the future – where an organization wants to be, and what it will be doing, at some unspecified point in time. As described by Peter Senge, “People learn to nourish a sense of commitment in a group or organization by developing shared images of the future they seek to create...and the principles and guiding practices by which they hope to get there.”⁸

There are several approaches to developing a shared vision. It is important to understand the different ways parent leaders and practitioners can accomplish a shared vision. One is the Appreciative Inquiry process, which looks for what works in an organization and in families. It takes the challenges of working across differences and enables diverse constituencies to join forces to move forward when they are ready for growth and change. For more on Appreciative Inquiry, visit the Appreciative Inquiry Commons website, hosted by Case Western Reserve University at <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>

Shared Goals: Goals are the specific, time-oriented outcomes that need to be accomplished in order for a shared vision to become a reality. To achieve a successful program everyone has to start on the same page. Whether it is striving for the success of your program or bringing important resources to the community, everyone needs to agree on the same goals. It may be challenging at times to reach consensus on what the goals should be, but listening, being open-minded to varying perspectives, and always keeping the shared vision in mind creates a learning environment that eventually produces goals that are meaningful to everyone. All participants, parents and practitioners alike, are more likely to support the process of implementing solutions once they have reached consensus on the vision and the goals.

⁸ Senge, P. (1999). *The dance of change*. New York: Doubleday. p.32.

Collaborative Leadership: Through the principles of collaborative leadership (described above), parent leaders and practitioners use their collective resources, ideas, and wisdom to implement common plans to achieve shared goals. They also share accountability for the outcomes of their decisions.

Shared Reflection: Know yourself. Spend time getting to know the parent leaders. This may include some soul searching on the part of both practitioners and parents. The biggest challenges will be the prejudices and preconceptions each parent and practitioner brings to the table. To overcome these barriers, each person must be allowed to voice her or his concerns, expectations, and individual reality while working together to plan, implement, and evaluate program and policy decisions. Facilitated small group discussions with peers are a safe environment and go a long way in debunking myths, understanding motivations, conquering fears, and clearing the air for positive interactions within the larger group. For some strategies that help to effectively engage parents and practitioners in self- and shared reflection, see *A Guide to Engaging Parents in Public-Private Child Care Partnerships*⁹

Resources and Constant Change: Support and training go hand in hand and cannot be separated. For collaborative leadership to succeed parents and practitioners must have the skills and tools they need to meet the challenges they face as they work as equal partners to create effective child abuse prevention and family support programs and policies. Emotional, financial, and moral support are all necessary parts of the equation. Practitioners, who are already compensated, gain extra value in their work by partnering with parents. On the other hand, parents should be offered financial support to cover their expenses and as compensation for the skills and expertise they bring to the process.

Parents also need emotional support to become more self-confident as they grow in their leadership role. This is a continuous component of parent involvement in program and policy development, and practitioners need always to check in with parents. Seemingly confident parents may be plagued by family circumstances, concerns about how they fit in with others in the organization and questions over whether their contributions and accomplishments are meaningful and recognized. Kind words of encouragement are always appreciated.

⁹ Zimmerman, E. (2000). *A guide to engaging parents in public-private child care partnerships*. Fairfax, VA: National Child Care Information Center. Retrieved February 17, 2010 from <http://one.center-school.org/download.php?ID=114&name=/ChildCare.pdf>

How Do We Achieve Meaningful Parent Partnerships?

As stated previously, the primary purpose of this guidebook is to provide a roadmap to State Lead Agencies seeking to enhance their engagement of parents as stakeholders and leaders within their programs and organizations. We have described eight steps we believe are essential to creating a culture of true parent leadership, in which parents are engaged with practitioners as equal partners. Your agency may have initiated some or all of these steps, which brings you further along the road to success in meaningful parent leadership. However, wherever you currently stand, we believe that success is a process, not a destination. Each step should be visited and revisited as you seek continuous quality improvement in your agency's efforts.

Parent leadership is the gift of education the parents give the program staff in building trust in the parents' capabilities and strengths. You can teach it in staff training and school courses but in the community it becomes real. The "we" and "them" becomes "us".

*Roberta Henry Baker
Indiana CBCAP State Lead
Indiana Department of Child Services Prevention Unit*

Step One: Assessing Agency and Staff Readiness

Is your organization and staff ready to meaningfully engage parents?

Understanding your own personal values and those of your organization are the first steps in creating an environment where meaningful parent involvement and partnership can take place. Partnering is seldom successful without buy-in from the top-down and the bottom-up, or without sufficient investments of time and resources.

The questions below are intended to help shift your practice and way of thinking when engaging parents in your work. If you are the lead of a state agency, director of an organization or a program manager, you may not often have relationships with or even come into contact with parents often. Staff reports on program outcomes may come to you as written documents focusing on numbers served, goals accomplished, cost-effectiveness, or other data-driven results. This kind of information, while useful, is not the only way to learn about your effectiveness and impact. Forming relationships, developing partnerships and engaging in respectful dialogue with your primary stakeholders – the parents and families your organization supports – provide an even broader perspective of whether your services are having the intended impacts.

Begin by asking realistic questions about your personal readiness to involve parents in a meaningful way.

Personal Values

- ❑ Do you and your colleagues believe that all parents want to do the best for their children and can make important contributions to their children's well-being?
- ❑ Do you consistently value the comments and insights of parents and make use of their knowledge about their children and about the needs of and what works for children and families and the community?
- ❑ Do you value parent input in evaluating such things as the quality of services provided, hiring and training of staff, and how programs are designed?
- ❑ In communicating with parents through words, eye contact, and posture, do you signal that you respect, listen to and value their insights?
- ❑ Do you go outside of your comfort level to understand how different cultures and languages influence the parent/practitioner relationships?
- ❑ Do you believe that misinformation about people of color or people with special needs is harmful to all people?
- ❑ Do you avoid jargon or acronyms, make sure you are understood, and invite questions and feedback when speaking with others?
- ❑ Do you share information completely and freely so parents are fully informed and participate in decision-making?
- ❑ Do you work to build meaningful relationships in your personal life?
- ❑ Do you work to deepen relationships with your professional colleagues?

If you answered "no" to any of these questions, consider exploring the issue of partnering with families on a personal level. Begin with the Provider Self-Assessment for Parent-Professional Partnerships in Appendix A.

The Child Welfare Information Gateway provides multiple resources on its Partnering With Families and Youth Page:

http://www.childwelfare.gov/highlights/engaging_families/partnering.cfm

Organizational/Agency Values

An organization functions based on a shared set of values which are operationalized through its actions and interactions with other organizations, its stakeholders, and the community. Organizational values may reflect the personal values of current leaders and staff, but they may also be legacies of the past. Questions such as the following can help you examine the way your organization's actions reflect its values around parent partnerships:

- ❑ Is there a stated commitment to support parent involvement and leadership roles and is this reflected in program policies and the operations of the organization?
- ❑ Are staff members trained and dedicated to building trusting relationships with parents?
- ❑ Are staff members willing to learn from others and encouraged to change their behavior and practices because of what they learned?
- ❑ Do parents participate in the hiring and training of staff as well as in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs and services to ensure culturally responsive and appropriate service delivery?
- ❑ Do job responsibilities include adequate time for staff to provide logistics necessary for parent participation, such as reminder calls, confirmation of child care needs, transportation, and time to prepare and debrief parents before and after meetings?
- ❑ Is there a written Parent Involvement Policy, developed in partnership with parents, that reflects a genuine interest in and support for working cooperatively with parents and the community?
- ❑ Does your budget reflect the needs and requirements of parent leadership policies?
- ❑ Are you following the federal legislation, nationally-recognized standards of service and principles of family support that promote the involvement of parents and families?
- ❑ Do your policies include timely reimbursement for parents' costs (including gas, tolls, transportation, meals, and child care) using an easy-to-understand method for submitting expenses?
- ❑ Is there a consultant fee policy that allows family members to be offered a stipend for service and time spent at meetings or trainings – time taken from their normal daily activities, families and jobs?
- ❑ Is there an orientation for staff and parents that describes governance structures, a requirement for parent participation, guidelines for parent engagement and their roles and responsibilities?
- ❑ Is there a plan that enables the organization/agency to provide and maintain training for parents as leaders?

It is important to understand the current culture of your organization. If your organization does not have a process in place to allow for parent/family partnerships at all levels of the organization, you and others may need to advocate for changes or secure commitments from the executive administrators and managers before inviting parents to participate. You may find that these leaders, often the final decision makers of the organization, need a better understanding of the value of parent engagement, involvement and leadership.

To assess how well your organization's values, policies and practices reflect a readiness to embrace parent leadership, see the following tools in Appendix A:

- Checklist of Policies that Support Parent Involvement and Leadership Roles
- Parent Leadership Development Self-Assessment
- Standards for Parent Participation
- Checklist for Involving Families as Advisors and Consultants
- Is Your Organization Family Friendly?

Public Policy Values

In addition to having a critical influence on how you plan, develop, and implement your organization's programs and policies, parent leaders can be strong partners in helping to solidify and maintain public support and investment in your work. Consider your organization's beliefs and practices regarding parent involvement in public policy.

- ☐ Have you created opportunities for professionals and parents together to learn the details of policy development and the legislative process?
- ☐ Are parent advocates briefed on your organization's/programs' public policy platforms or agenda? Have they had a hand in the development of those platforms?
- ☐ Have you provided facts, figures, and follow-up contacts to parents in writing?
- ☐ Do you have a plan for parents to testify at hearings?
- ☐ Have you invited parents to tell the story of the organization in a way that staff could not?

Parents and professionals can yield amazing results when they work together on public policy. As parents and staff gain a greater understanding of each other's perspective, they learn to respect each other's roles and knowledge of the community and public policy. Professionals and parents can divide specific roles. When parents are prepared with fact sheets and other written information to give to policy makers, they can then tell their personal stories without needing to be an expert on public policy or funding formulas. Although public policy discussions take time, energy, and effort, the results can be life changing for parents – and for the organization.

Step Two: Improving Agency and Staff Readiness

Wherever your organization and staff fall on the continuum of “readiness” for parent leadership, your next step will be to facilitate forward movement that will enhance your agency’s ability to partner effectively. Specific actions you can take to do so are:

- **Inform:** With parent leaders, write a one-page description of the parent leadership plan, including information about how parents can help your programs achieve better outcomes. Share this with the decision makers in advance of a meeting.
- **Explain:** Set up a meeting with decision makers to discuss the parent leadership plan. Develop the meeting agenda with parents. Be ready to share specifics of your parent leadership plan including who will do what and when. Focus on the expectation that all programs built on the principles of family support must include parent leadership.
- **Explore:** During the meeting, find out the decision makers’ interests, needs, and fears. What is their history with parent leadership? Look for ways this effort can help meet their interests and needs. Address their concerns and look for ways to give them different perspectives.
- **Partner:** Together, decision makers and parent leaders should identify others they should or must partner with in this effort to make it successful, including key staff, policy makers, funding sources, partner agencies and family/consumer groups.

Make sure no one promises or commits to more than can be delivered. Becoming an organization that embraces parent leadership is a journey. Creating a culture of effective parent engagement and leadership takes time. Take it one step at a time so relationships and partnerships can form. If the decision makers have resources to support a limited number of parent leaders at the start, that is all right. The outcomes achieved through partnerships are not based on numbers but instead on relationships.

- **Budget:** Consider creating budgets in partnership with the decision makers and parent leaders to understand all that is necessary to support parent participation. Once your budget is developed, encourage parents and others in the community to contribute monetary or in-kind resources to help support the cost of parent leadership. Parents and community leaders may be able to provide such resources as space, food, materials, child care and translation for meetings and events.
- **Plan:** Work with the decision makers and parent leaders to create a policy outlining how the responsibility and accountability for success of the parent leadership plan will be shared. Each step in developing the plan may be a new life experience for all involved, especially the parents. Creating a budget, participating in business meetings, setting goals, using outcomes to determine new strategies, and speaking in public may be skills that many parents are

exposed to for the first time. They are also skills that parents can transfer and use successfully in their family life. You and the decision makers are important models for these skills.

- **Train:** Offer an abbreviated training with identified management and direct service staff, board members, key partner organizations, funding sources, and parents, focusing on family support and the benefits of parent leadership. Use the outcomes of this training to develop more in-depth training and preparation for people positioned to fully implement parent leadership policy and practices.

Step Three: **Identifying Potential** **Parent Leaders**

There are several reasons parents may be motivated to become partners and leaders. Many want to help other parents overcome challenges similar to their own and are eager to volunteer. Some may want to become parent leaders as a way of giving back to the program that supported them during their time of need. Others want to help the organization offer culturally responsive and appropriate programs and services.

There are a number of signs that a parent may be ready for a leadership role in helping to develop and improve the organization and services. Look for parents who:

- Show initiative and don't shy away from asking for help
- Ask questions about the mission, policies, and/or operation of the agency
- Volunteer to take on more tasks or responsibilities
- Ask about other parents or families involved in the agency
- Voice another family's concerns and/or goals
- Notice and encourage progress and growth within themselves and others
- Share ideas for activities, fundraisers, or other projects
- Share information and resources with others in their family or community
- Encourage other parents to take advantage of opportunities
- Respect and model the rules or policies of the program
- Take on leadership roles in the community or at other programs or agencies

Some parents may not see themselves as leaders until someone else does. They may need encouragement to take on a leadership role. One strategy is to ask a parent to volunteer taking on a specific role that is compatible with what you know about his/her individual expertise and skills. Another is to ask parents to elect other parents for leadership roles.

Regardless of whether parents voluntarily step into a leadership role or need a bit of encouragement to do so, the parent leaders and practitioners contributing to this guidebook identified the following list of traits they have observed among parent leaders:

- Enthusiasm
- Confidence
- Acceptance
- Ability to listen
- Ability to think analytically
- Commitment to excellence
- Caring
- Ability to inspire
- Competence
- Willingness to help others

Step Four: Recruiting Parent Leaders

Some parents may take the first step in seeking a leadership role in your organization. For others, you may need to initiate the relationship by recruiting them into partnering with you. Once you have identified individuals who demonstrate qualities that set them apart as potential parent leaders, use some of the following strategies to encourage their participation:

- Spend one-on-one time with parents to define their individual interests. Ask what drives them to want to become more deeply involved. Understand what they are passionate about.
- Give parents compelling reasons to become involved and to believe their involvement will be effective and personally rewarding.
- Whenever possible, approach parent leaders at the initiation of a project or as a new policy or procedure is being considered. Avoid recruiting parents to simply “rubber stamp” decisions already made.
- Provide a written job description or explanation to give parents an idea of what is expected of parent leaders in your organization.
- Provide parents with information about the culture of the organization and discuss openly with them the similarities to and differences in their own family culture.
- Prepare parents in advance of the first meeting by briefing them on who will be there, what will happen at the meeting, and what their role will be.
- Provide a mentor who can provide an informal orientation and training about the process of meeting and tasks to be accomplished by the group.
- Give parents a written explanation of acronyms and plain language definitions of words used at the meetings or within the system.
- Invite at least two parents to become parent leaders in any setting or group to avoid a lone parent feeling outnumbered or being perceived as the “token” parent.

Step Five: Providing Appropriate Roles for Parent Leaders

The role of a parent leader is constantly evolving. A leadership role can begin within a parent support group, parent education class, a home visit or a community awareness program. Through nurturing, support, and training it can evolve into a larger role within the organization, the community, and even at the state and federal level. A parent leader may eventually advocate for systemic change on behalf of children and families. Some specific roles a parent leader may assume are listed below.

Within a program, parent leaders can:

- Take calls from prospective participants, introduce new participants during group meetings and events, and provide new participants with information about the program and resources.
- Take responsibility for the physical setting of the meeting or event, including securing the space, setting up the room, making sure resource materials are available for participants, and breaking the room down afterwards.
- Make participants feel welcome by greeting each parent who comes to an event.
- Start a group activity with icebreakers or other get acquainted activities.
- End a group activity by summarizing what happened or setting dates or times for next steps.
- Make sure everyone has transportation to and from the meeting or special event.
- Take attendance and keep notes of meetings.
- Share responsibility for a children's program or child care.

Within the organization/agency, parent leaders can:

- Draft, review and provide input for development of parent materials.
- Contribute to the design of new programs and services.
- Take part in training group facilitators, home visitors, parent leaders, volunteers, children's program leaders, or child care providers.
- Participate in the hiring and training of staff.
- Contribute their skills and time to planning and running local events and fundraisers.
- Participate in outreach activities to attract families to programs.
- Mentor and become advocates for other families enrolled in programs.

- Participate in the design and implementation of evaluation tools and satisfaction surveys.
- Participate on peer review teams.
- Act as members of task forces, advisory councils, or boards of directors.
- Attend meetings with funders and partners with staff and administrators.

Within the community, parent leaders can:

- Generate public awareness about the importance of family support programs.
- Serve on community councils and advisory boards.
- Volunteer in local events for child abuse prevention month and other special events throughout the year.
- Advocate for family support programs and prevention services.
- Submit letters to the editor and editorials on the importance of parent leadership and involvement with their children.

Step Six: Addressing Culture, Diversity and Special Needs

Title II of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), Community-Based Grants for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, requires State Lead Agencies to “demonstrate a commitment to meaningful parent leadership, including among parents of children with disabilities, parents with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, and members of other under-represented or underserved groups.”¹⁰

Both that legislative mandate and an understanding of culturally relevant practice demand that an authentic, successful model of meaningful parent involvement must include a commitment to respect and appreciate differences in race, culture, abilities/disabilities, and social and economic backgrounds of the partners. Recognizing differences is important to the effectiveness and relevance of the work. Practitioners must learn to respect families and their struggles as well as their successes. The culture of the organization must include policies and procedures, practices, attitudes, and structures that are culturally inclusive and relevant to the families being served.

Working Toward Cultural Relevance

Achieving culturally relevant practice is a process that begins with each individual and includes every aspect of an organization’s activities. Each of us – practitioner

¹⁰ Sec. 201(b)(1)(G).

and parent alike – brings our own personal perspective to the work, informed by our personal experience and cultural heritage. No-one can perfectly bridge the gap between our own world view and that of another, but everyone can engage in the journey that brings us all closer to approaching each person and each family with respect, inclusion, and understanding.

As a practitioner, explore your own beliefs and behaviors.

- Do you have the desire, knowledge, and skill to integrate culturally relevant considerations into your work?
- How do your own cultural experiences and values impact the way you work?
- Do you continuously engage in an open and honest dialogue about culture and diversity with varied groups of people?

As an organization, consider incorporating the following ideas to help guide you toward cultural competence and work effectively in both service delivery and partnerships with parent leaders:

- Conduct cultural self-assessments with the entire organization, families, and the larger community
- Respect families as the primary source for defining needs and priorities.
- Be mindful of families who may need additional support while receiving services.
- Explore different values, beliefs, and attitudes that exist throughout the organization.
- Adapt service delivery to diversity within and between cultures.
- Host social events at which music, food, and entertainment reflect cultures represented.
- Recruit and hire staff and leaders that reflect the community's cultural diversity.
- Partner with cultural organizations and institutions.
- Study and learn from the participation and satisfaction rates of culturally diverse families served by the organization.
- Continuously examine program practices, activities, and services.
- Create program environments and décor that celebrate the cultures of your family participants and partners.
- Periodically review and revise the organization's mission and objectives, with an awareness of the diverse cultures in your community.
- Evaluate whether current staff can lead the organization to cultural competence

Culture is inherent in family support practice. It informs our understanding of when support is needed, it influences how and from whom we seek support and it influences how we provide support. When culture is ignored, families are at risk of not getting the support they need, or worse, receiving assistance that is more harmful than helpful.

FRIENDS National Resource Center for CBCAP. (2006).
Introduction to Cultural Competence: A Training Tool.

Addressing Special Needs – Working with Parents with Disabilities

While individuals with disabilities have the ability and opportunity to parent, information and resources to guide them are often limited. Parenting is considered uncharted territory for individuals with disabilities both by the parents themselves and the people around them. As parents with disabilities assert their right to parent it is clear that they share a common goal with their non disabled peers of providing the best parenting possible to their children. However, parents with disabilities account for 15% of all parents and are less likely to be married or employed and more likely to have a disabled child or spouse.¹¹ In addition, they have a lower income than non disabled parents. The largest majority of parents with disabilities have sensory impairments such as loss of vision or hearing followed by parents with physical, psychiatric and cognitive disabilities. Parents with disabilities seek to experience healthy, positive relationships with their children and ideally the community around them. However parents with disabilities often report experiencing:¹²

- high costs of parenting with a disability
- lack of awareness of or connection to other parents with disabilities
- a learned dependency on formal and informal service systems
- a lack of problem solving skills
- feeling stigmatized and unequal to parents without disabilities
- receipt of information and resources that are not understandable or accessible
- unreasonable service goals and expectations as well as consequences in comparison to their typically developing peer parents

These life experiences of parents with disabilities can have negative consequences over time, especially if people have devalued their roles as parents. Sometimes our concerns about a person with a disability's capacity to parent are rooted in stereotypes and lack of information. However, with awareness and understanding, practitioners can offer support and resources to parents with disabilities in ways that augment their parenting skills, encourage parent / professional partnerships

¹¹ National Center for Parents with Disabilities. (2009). *Parents with disabilities*. Retrieved March 9, 2010 from: <http://lookingglass.org/parents/>

¹² Toms Barker, L. & Maralani, V. (1997). *Final report: Challenges and strategies of disabled parents: Findings from a national survey of parents with disabilities*. Berkeley, CA: Through the Looking Glass.

that ultimately support the welcoming and inclusion of their family in the community and promote overall family health and well being.

Addressing Special Needs – Working with Parents of Children with Disabilities

When a parent learns that their child is diagnosed with a disability they begin a different parenthood journey that is filled with challenges, joy, tough decisions, and an ongoing need for information, professionals and resources. Families of children with disabilities often describe challenges to parenting that include:

- The initial reaction to the diagnosis, resulting shock and periods of grief
- The subtle devaluing by others of the child with a disability
- Minimal support and education regarding care for the child's disability specific needs
- The strain on siblings, extended family and support network
- The ongoing costs of caring for the child at home
- The feelings of loss when developmental milestones or transitions are not met
- The "unknowns" about the disability, the resources needed and the future

Disabilities often fall in a range or a spectrum such as mild, moderate to severe. Children at one end may need help with all of their daily living skills, require adaptive equipment or have limited ability to communicate. Children at the other end may have limited interruption to their daily activities and require minimal support or assistance. In order to build a partnership with parents, practitioners should strive to balance the degree of disability that the child is experiencing while realizing the unknowns that may come with the diagnosis as well as the potential for growth.

Engaging Parents with Disabilities and Parents of Children with Disabilities in Parent – Professional Partnerships

Professionals: As practitioners, how we view individuals with disabilities will ultimately determine our ability to provide services to the children and parents. Consider the following:

- ❑ Reflect on your personal views or experiences regarding individuals with disabilities as citizens, peers and parents. Do you see individuals with disabilities as fully participating members of the community?
- ❑ Examine how you respond to individuals with disabilities. Do you see the whole person or their needs? Are you motivated to act and improve their lives out of a sense of pity and charity or a call to action?
- ❑ Evaluate your beliefs. Do you believe parents with disabilities hinder their typically developing child? Do you believe that a child with a disability is a burden to their family?
- ❑ Employ Person First Language. Ask yourself "would I use these terms to describe my child, my friend, myself?" A disability diagnosis is a medical

descriptor. Person First Language respectfully puts the person before the diagnosis.

- ❑ Follow the ten commandments of communicating with people with disabilities¹³. Are you aware that there are strategies to insure effective parent / professional communication when one of the individuals is disabled?

Organizations: Organizations should also evaluate how individuals with disabilities are included as fully participating partners. It is important for an organization to identify socially valued roles for individuals of different abilities through partnering. Doing so will promote a climate that is conducive to growth and appreciation of difference regardless of disability. Consider the following:

- Insure that materials are available in a variety of formats including pictures, symbols, on CDs or in Braille.
- Offer resources that support but don't try to "fix" the person. Individuals with disabilities are not broken.
- Provide services in accessible and inclusive settings: access to a building that goes beyond ramps and includes activities / attitudes to promote welcoming and engagement. True inclusion of adults and children with disabilities involves open doors and open minds.
- Observe ways that the parent may be adapting to meet their own or child's needs. An appreciation of a parent's experience doing a childcare activity where a disability is involved may differ considerably from an observer's initial impression.
- Provide access to adaptive equipment. Research has shown that such equipment can have a positive impact on parent/infant interaction, in addition to reducing difficulty, pain, and fatigue. By reducing the physical demands of care-giving, the equipment can also be instrumental in preventing secondary disability complications. (Through the Looking Glass, 2000)
- Link parents to a peer mentoring and resource networks such as Parent to Parent which connects families with other parents caring for a child with the same disability for support and information (<http://www.p2pusa.org/>) or Through the Looking Glass which links parents with disabilities to parents with similar disabilities. (www.lookingglass.org)
- Utilize parent networks, blogs or lending libraries where resources can be shared, swapped or replicated such as individual state assistive technology resource centers or the National Center for Parents with Disabilities.
- Accept parents with and caring for children with disabilities for their ideas and experience.
- Develop a multidisciplinary team of service providers to create Medical Homes that address the parent or child's special needs as well family issues which may include medical, developmental, educational and child welfare professionals.

¹³ Ward, I. (n.d.). *The ten commandments of communicating with people with disabilities*. Sylvania, OH: The Ability Center of Greater Toledo. Retrieved March 9, 2010 from <http://www.abilitycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/tencommandments-09.pdf>

- Provide real and meaningful ways for parents with disabilities or caring for children with disabilities to serve on advisory boards, gather consumer feedback and provide input to shape organizational and public policy. For example:
 - Independent Monitoring for Quality (IM4Q) monitors the satisfaction and outcomes of people receiving services by using community members with and without disabilities to gather information from the individuals receiving services and their families. (<http://disabilities.temple.edu/programs/im4q/>)
 - Partners in Policymaking is a leadership training program designed for adults with disabilities and for parents of children with disabilities. Participants are educated and receive training about best practices in the field of disability, and the competencies of influencing and communicating with policymakers. The program teaches leadership skills, and the process of developing positive partnerships with elected officials and other individuals who make the policy decisions about services which individuals with disabilities and their families use. (<http://www.partnersinpolicymaking.com/>)
- Employ individuals or family members with disabilities or partner with agencies that utilize people with disabilities in staff roles.

Step Seven: Retaining Parent Leaders

Successful parent leadership does not end with recruitment; that is just the beginning. Building lasting and successful partnerships takes time and is based upon effective, open and honest communication as well as mutually-earned trust. Strategies such as those below help to keep parents involved and committed to sharing leadership with you:

Tips from the FRIENDS Parent Advisory Council

Sometimes parents may think they should know what you are talking about but they don't and are afraid to ask because they may feel "stupid." Make sure there are NO STUPID QUESTIONS in your organization. The only "stupid" question is the question NOT ASKED. This is more difficult than one might think. It involves promoting an atmosphere of acceptance for everyone: practitioners and parents, front line workers and directors, clients and providers of resources alike. The language you use (Spanish, Chinese, Portuguese, Haitian, or system talk) is equally important. It shows respect and that you value the other's culture. If you do not speak parents' language make sure there is someone available who does.

- Secure and maintain appropriate resources and funding to help parents overcome barriers to participation by assisting them with such things as child care, transportation, translators, financial assistance to replace income lost from their participation, or other identified needs.
- Engage more than one parent on committees, boards, task forces, peer review teams, evaluation teams and other groups, so that parents have immediate access to other parents for support during their involvement.
- Be clear and honest in your commitment to parents, making sure those commitments are in writing and are upheld over time. Consider developing a job description.
- Avoid assigning more tasks and responsibilities to parents than they can handle and be mindful of always engaging the same parents in leadership roles. Give others a chance.
- Include initial and ongoing formal orientation and training on the program(s), the mission and values of the organization, terminology common to your work, and the committee, planning or governance body that the parent will be involved with to ensure the parent's participation can be helpful and meaningful.
- Use strategies and techniques that engage parent leaders in the process of expanding meaningful and authentic partnership with your organization. One model, used by the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds is the Community Café. These are a series of guided conversations based on the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework leadership development and parent partnership (see page 5). These conversations are hosted by parent leaders who use the World Café technique to increase community wisdom, build parent voice and facilitate action to improve lives for children. It is a process that is designed, planned and implemented by parents, working with their community partners. For more information, visit the Community Café section of the Alliance's website at <http://www.ctfalliance.org/>.
- Hold meetings at a time convenient for parents. This may require meeting at times other than typical office hours.
- Ask parents if they have e-mail access and how often they check it. Some parents may not check e-mail daily. You may need to call to let them know about meeting times and that you have pre-read materials. Allow additional time to send materials by mail if necessary, or make other arrangements to supply information on time.
- Hold pre-meetings to see if parents have questions prior to a meeting or activity. Follow-up calls build relationships.
- Reassure parent leaders that their views are being heard with verbal acknowledgement and documentation of their input in the written proceedings of meetings.
- Use commonly understood terminology. Avoid using language, acronyms, and other short cuts to words and phrases that may only be familiar to your

organization or practitioners. This can make parents feel left out and unable to give input in decisions being made.

- Don't take it personally when parents express anger at the program or system or voice complaints. Parents should feel free to express their own opinions. View this as an opportunity to correct a parent's misperception of a policy or to reflect on your program's effectiveness and commitment to continuous quality improvement.
- Hold post-meetings with parent leaders to see whether they have questions and to make sure they understand what happened, when and where the next meeting is going to be held, and how they will continue to be involved.
- Always be sensitive to and accommodating of the parent's unique communication and learning styles or abilities, during and in-between meetings.
- Respect the parent leader's right to confidentiality. Parents should not be expected to speak about their own personal experiences unless they express a willingness to do so.
- Pay attention to what is happening in a parent's personal life. It will affect his or her ability to participate. Offer resources as needed and allow parent leaders the time and space to address their own needs as you would any employee or volunteer. Reassure parents that it is not a failure if they begin to face new challenges or old ones re-surface. A major key to retaining parent leaders is by establishing a belief system that creates a culture of mutual respect that values parents as partners and resources on every level and at all times. Help each and every staff, collaborating partner and key stakeholder of the organization understand, embrace, and implement the principles of parent leadership. Be sure to routinely ask parents for honest feedback about your agency's performance in parent engagement; listen to the feedback and use it to improve performance together.

Training as a Retention Tool

Training is a critical component of retention for anyone working in family support and child abuse prevention, including staff, volunteers and parent leaders. For parents, training should be aligned with the parent's learning style, current knowledge, strengths and the stage and level of his/her involvement. Formal training alone is not sufficient. Mentoring, coaching, setting goals, individual needs assessments, and performance evaluations are all valuable methods of ongoing training. Formal or informal, training should be provided at times and locations and with supports that make it easy for the parent to participate without competing concerns and distractions.

While not always feasible or appropriate, it is helpful to provide joint training for parents and practitioners. In this way, the program or activity receives the optimal benefits resulting from parent leaders and practitioners learning, growing and developing policies and practices together. Transformational change happens best when partners are connected on all levels, including having the same information at the same time.

In addition to training on specific information, topics or issues relevant to the tasks of the program planning, advisory, governance or other group, to maximize the benefits of parent and practitioner partnerships, both could benefit from developing together their personal leadership skills in the areas of:

- ❑ Public speaking
- ❑ Advocacy
- ❑ Coalition building
- ❑ Conflict resolution
- ❑ Personal growth
- ❑ Thriving and working with diversity
- ❑ Use and misuse of power
- ❑ Assessing and defining problems
- ❑ Critical thinking
- ❑ Media relations
- ❑ Maximizing use of community resources
- ❑ Civic engagement

Step Eight: Recognizing the Contributions of Parent Leaders

To create a culture that embraces parent leadership it is important for the organization and practitioners to recognize the contributions parent leaders make to decisions about program planning, implementation, and evaluation activities. There are many ways, both formal and informal, in which practitioners and other agency staff and key stakeholders can recognize the contributions of parents:

- Give parents the opportunity to speak in meetings. Although this sounds simple, it often takes a genuine commitment to parent leadership principles before this becomes second nature for parents and practitioners.
- Listen carefully and restate for clarity if needed but avoid inappropriate reframing. Often practitioners restate what is heard based on their own thoughts and beliefs and not those of the parents. Practitioners should remember to distinguish between their self interest, the interest of the program or agency and the parents' self interest.
- Follow up on what parents say. Voice support for promising suggestions. Engage in discussion that explores alternate solutions. Explain why an idea will not or cannot work.
- Maintain an open mind. If parents are to feel valued and respected, the culture of the organization must allow their ideas to be seriously considered. Without this, they will know parent leadership is not a genuine opportunity for them and they will lose interest. It can sometimes seem like parents come up with "off the wall" ideas, or in strengths-based language, they think "out of the box." Everyone's careful consideration of new and fresh ideas creates a positive flow of energy and may lead to changes in an original idea that satisfy everyone. The atmosphere of the conversation must be supportive for all members of the partnership.
- Invite parent leaders to workshops, conferences, and other educational opportunities to learn new things along with you.
- Make sure parents have access to community resources to develop their talents, including those that are important to their leadership development, even if not immediately important to your organization's success.
- Provide a leadership development ladder that includes different roles parents can move to as their leadership skills progress. This could mean speaking in public, presenting at a conference, serving on committees or task forces, participating in staff interviews and training, planning special events, or joining the board of directors.
- Encourage parents as public speakers. Parent leaders and practitioners can go on the road to present the project to stakeholders. A parents' story or passion about a project has a powerful effect, and many people have been won over with one presentation by a parent. However, a parent may need some training

and practice in public speaking first.¹⁴ Setting up opportunities for parents to present to friendly audiences (like a support group) helps build confidence and self-esteem and inspires other parents in the group.

- Encourage parents to use their experiences to build a resume for advancement in their lives through continuing education and employment.
- Hire parent leaders as staff or consultants.
- Provide frequent positive feedback and respectful, constructive criticism.
- Plan events that provide a more formal opportunity to recognize the contributions of parent leaders.
- If your organization celebrates other volunteers who contribute their time you should include a special recognition for parents and their families also. Nominations for awards could describe such accomplishments as the nominee's contribution to developing national/state/local policy, participation in legislative advocacy, efforts to build a local constituency, activities to mentor and support other parents, and participation on program planning committees. It is important to include parents in developing the nomination and review process.
- Recognize and include the families of parent leaders. Families support parents to take time away from home to participate in helping your programs and organization.
- Recognize the contributions of parents on an ongoing basis. Just as with staff, make sure parents routinely receive credit for contributions as they occur. If an idea is originated by a parent or a group of parents, and it will be implemented, make sure that not only the source of the idea gets credit but also that parents learn about the outcome and success (or failure) of their contributions. This will empower parents, encourage their long-term commitment to the program, and further strengthen their partnership with the organization.

The Center for the Study of Social Policy, Strengthening Families Through Early Care and Education is an initiative that promotes parent-provider partnership as a strategy to implement five protective factors important to strengthening families and reducing the risk of abuse and neglect. These factors support leadership development among parents and include:

- 1) **Parental Resilience** – How a parent's ability to cope and problem-solve affects their ability to deal effectively with everyday stress or a major crisis. Recognizing the signs of stress and knowing what to do about it can help parents build their capacity to cope.

¹⁴ One framework for preparing parents to use their stories for change can be found in Casey Family Programs' *Strategic sharing* booklet, available online at <http://www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/pdf/StrategicSharing.pdf>
Examples of parent stories can also be found online at <http://www.friendsnrc.org/cbcap/priority/storycorp.htm>

- 2) **Social Connections** – Identifying ways to help parents expand their social networks to build a broader source of parenting support. Parents with an extensive network of family, friends, and neighbors have better support in times of need.
- 3) **Concrete Support** – Finding out what basic resources are available in the community and how to access them to address family-specific needs. Caregivers with access to financial, housing and other concrete resources that help them meet their basic needs can better attend to their role as parents.
- 4) **Knowledge of Parenting and Child and Development** – Acquiring information about what to anticipate as children develop and strategies for effective parenting. Parents learn what to look for at each age and how to help their children reach their full potential.
- 5) **Social and Emotional Development of Children** – Developing children’s ability to interact positively with others and to communicate their emotions in an effective way.

As these protective factors build strong families, parents are well-positioned to transfer new experiences, knowledge and skills to other families and have meaningful impact on the programs, agencies and organizations designed to support them.

Conclusion from the FRIENDS Parent Advisory Council

A member of the FRIENDS National Resource Center's Parent Advisory Council is teaching her children to become entrepreneurs. They are learning one question successful entrepreneurs ask, "WIIFM?" or "What's In It for Me?" She realized this is also the question that parents and practitioners need to answer for themselves. Most successful new businesses know that payday doesn't happen overnight, and they don't expect to turn a profit for at least the first five years. It is the same for parent leadership development. A long-term, ongoing investment of time, resources, and skills is essential for success.

Parents cannot participate equally in making decisions about new program development, implementation, evaluation, and other programmatic and organizational matters if they don't have all the information others have about the issues being discussed, if they don't know the rules and regulations guiding the agency's work, if they don't understand the meaning of acronyms, and if they aren't prepared to actively participate in committee and board discussions.

For service providers who are just beginning the journey of genuine parent inclusion, begin by using existing strengths and talents to build parent leadership into the organization. Where voids exist, help is available through trainings, identifying and informing new parent leaders, using veteran parent leaders, changing programs, and including parents from the start of projects, rather than sporadically.

For those who are already on the road, with a few parent leaders already in training, it is important to make sure that training happens together so that as parent leaders grow so does the staff. Everyone should feel comfortable having involved parent leaders at staff meetings and in staff development workshops. Parent leaders are among the best resources for the organization and for their communities. Everyone's input is valuable, appreciated, and worthy of consideration when decisions are being made, even if they have a different outlook. Parents bring diverse but important perspectives into family support and child abuse prevention programs. Embracing parent leadership is about blending these different perspectives to reach an outcome everyone can support and that promises the best results for the families the program is trying to reach.

For veteran parent leaders and staff—those for whom collaborative leadership is the norm and who are the trainers and expert advisors for parent leadership—be patient with new, fledgling, or still developing parents and organizations. Work with them where they are, accept that they may have a long way to go, and know at least that they are on the right path.

Finally, this guidebook is an excellent professional resource. It may seem overwhelming if you are new to parent leadership, but it can remain an ongoing reference. Additional resources are also currently available at www.friendsnrc.org

and new resources will be added in the future. Programs, independent organizations, and networks of organizations and agencies wanting to engage parents should learn from each other what works and what doesn't. If something doesn't work out as planned, use the opportunity to discover why and re-adjust the strategy accordingly.

Don't give up. Train, inform, train, inform, train, inform and—don't forget—evaluate!

What's In It For Me (WIIFM) —Practitioners, Agencies and Programs?

Service that fit parent's needs and strengthen families.

What's In It For Me (WIIFM) —Parents?

More stable, secure, nurturing relationships in their families and communities.

Positive outcomes for both! This Parent Leadership Guidebook will help you achieve these goals.

Resources

- Commonwealth of Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Department for Community Based Services. (2007). *Parent advocacy program evaluation*. Anchor site: Jefferson County, Kentucky.
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Appendix A:

Tools to Assess Personal and Organizational Readiness

- Provider Self-Assessment for Parent-Professional Partnerships
- Checklist of Policies that Support Parent Involvement and Leadership Roles
- Parent Leadership Development Self-Assessment
- Standards for Parent Participation
- Checklist for Involving Families as Advisors and Consultants
- Is Your Organization Family Friendly?
- Parent Leadership Checklist

Provider Self-Assessment for Parent-Professional Partnerships

Parents and professionals must work in partnership to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect. Practicing partnership requires professionals to commit to the values and principles of family support, collaborating with parents, and reflecting on their own practices. Providers may find the following self-assessment statements useful.

A	S	R	PARENT-PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIP
			I assume that all parents want to do their best for their children and can make important contributions to their safety and well-being
			I really believe that parents are equal to me as a professional and, in fact, are experts on their child.
			I consistently value the comments and insights of parents and make use of their knowledge about their child.
			I listen to parents, communicating with words, eye contact and posture that I respect and value their insights.
			I work to create an environment in which parents are comfortable enough to speak and interact.
			I strive to achieve cultural and linguistic competence and understand how culture and language influence each child, parent, and family.
			I speak plainly, avoiding jargon and making sure I am clear by inviting questions or getting feedback.
			I make a consistent effort to consider the child as part of a family, consulting parents about the important people in the child's life and their roles and relationships.
			I make every effort to build on the strengths of parents and families and actively seek their perspective and input on any goals, recommendations, education and intervention plans.
			I see my interactions with parents as a deliberate dialogue through which the goal is mutual understanding of a problem so that we can take action as a team.
			I share information completely and freely so that parents can be fully informed and participate in decision-making.
			I value and encourage parents to take on leadership roles in order to expand their influence in my organization or practice.
			I view parents as allies with concerns for children as valuable as my own.

A= Always, S=Sometimes, R=Rarely

Adapted from: Borden, J. R., & Finde, G. Z. (1995). *Parent/professional collaboration: The current reality and challenges for the future*. New Hampshire Family Voices.

Adapted with permission from: Hepburn, K.S. (2004). *Families as primary partners in their child's development & school readiness*. Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation. Retrieved March 9, 2010 from: <http://www.aecf.org/upload/PublicationFiles/families.pdf>

A Checklist of Policies that Support Parent Involvement and Leadership Roles

A commitment to support parent involvement and leadership roles is reflected in program policies and practices. National policies and standards can provide specific requirements and guidelines, but community-based agencies, organizations, and early care and education services must operationalize policies and practices to meet these requirements. The following checklist offers examples of specific policies with practice implications that can maximize parent involvement and parents in leadership roles.

To support family involvement as decision makers and in leadership roles, we have...

YES	NO	POLICY CONSIDERATION
		A written Parent Involvement Policy, developed in partnership with parents, that reflects a genuine interest in and support for working cooperatively with parents and the community.
		A policy that describes governance structures, a requirement for parent participation, and their roles and responsibilities.
		Realistic reimbursement policies to reimburse parents for expenses (including gas, tolls, transportation, meals, and child care) in a timely fashion in a method that is easy to understand and submit expenses.
		A consultant fee policy that allows family members to be offered a stipend or consultant fee for service and time spent at meetings.
		A policy or clear guidelines for accountability and reporting back requirements for parents who represent other parents or participate in policy group work.
		A policy for hiring practices that gives hiring parents a priority whenever their skills, interests, and abilities fit the job requirements.
		A policy that asserts that parent's are the primary decision maker for their child's early care, education, or services.
		Grievance procedures that are clearly communicated to parents and encourage deliberate dialogue and conflict resolution.
		Staff and volunteer training and development policies that enable us to provide and maintain training for families as leaders.
		A review committee that includes parents to review policies and practices specific to parent involvement in decision-making and leadership roles.

Adapted from:

Family Support America (2002). *Shared leadership: Forging a consensus to strengthen families and communities* (Executive summary). Chicago, IL: Family Support America

Popper, B. (1997, October). Enhancing family roles in EI Programs. *Early Childhood Bulletin: News by and for Parents and Parent Members of State Interagency Coordinating Councils*. Retrieved February 20, 2010, from: www.nectac.org/~pdfs/topics/enhanfam.pdf

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Schumacher, R.. (2003). *Family support and parent involvement in Head Start: What do Head Start program performance standards require?* Retrieved February 10, 2010, from: <http://www.clasp.org/admin/site/publications/files/0127.pdf>

Reprinted with permission from: Hepburn, K.S. (2004). *Families as primary partners in their child's development & school readiness*. Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Casey Foundation. Retrieved March 9, 2010 from: <http://www.aecf.org/upload/PublicationFiles/families.pdf>



National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Programs

PARENT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SELF-ASSESSMENT

This questionnaire is solely for your own use.

Think about these questions with regard to your network and its parent leadership readiness. Rather than thinking in terms of yes or no, your answers may be placed on a continuum. The second question is a clarifying question and may help you decide how to position your responses.

	To What Extent Does your Network Maintain Parent Leadership-Friendly Policies?	Always/yes	In progress	In the plans	No, not yet
1A	To what extent are there defined roles in your network for parent leaders? • <i>What are they?</i>				
1B	Are your policy manuals reflective of the responsibilities and benefits for parent leaders? • <i>Is input encouraged from parent leaders as well as staff?</i>				
1C	Is there a meaningful career ladder within the network for board members? Staff? Parent leaders? • <i>Do you see evidence of movement and longevity within the network?</i>				
1D	How useful is your mechanism to provide for special needs of parent leaders such as stipends, assistance with transportation, child care and how are parent leaders apprised of this in a respectful way? • <i>Do you see that there is increased parent participation because of it?</i>				
1E	How successful are your internal and external resources to help parent leaders develop and maintain their skills, and assistance in accessing them? • <i>How are they kept timely and relevant?</i>				



National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Programs

PARENT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SELF-ASSESSMENT

		Always/yes	In progress	In the plans	No, not yet
1F	To what extent are parent leaders provided with mentoring and/or shadowing opportunities? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Is this a formal or informal process?</i> 				
1G	How effective is your structure to support and supervise parent leaders and give them regular feedback on their performance? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>How do you get feedback regarding this?</i> 				
1H	How frequently are parent leaders given the opportunity to participate in staff enrichment workshops or in-services offered by the network? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>How are parent leaders made welcome by staff when they do participate?</i> 				
1I	Are you kept informed of the means by which parent leaders from your network are encouraged and supported to move into other community activities? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>How is this followed up?</i> 				
1J	To what extent are parent leaders regularly and publicly recognized for their contributions? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>How is this information captured and shared within your network?</i> 				
	To What Extent Does your Network Practice Shared Leadership?	Always/yes	In progress	In the plans	No, not yet
2A	To what extent are discussion and inquiry common and accepted practices at all levels of the network? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>How is participation supported and encouraged?</i> 				
2B	Is information shared and decisions made together? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>What is the forum for this?</i> 				
2C	Are problems solved collaboratively? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Can you cite an example?</i> 				



National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Programs

PARENT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SELF-ASSESSMENT

		Always/yes	In progress	In the plans	No, not yet
2D	Is the network open to multiple approaches and solutions rather than reliance on single answers and past practices? • <i>How does this evidence itself?</i>				
2E	Do you see evidence that leaders try to gain many points of view before solving important problems? • <i>By what means is this accomplished?</i>				
2F	Is it customary that decision-making is consensual and inclusive as opposed to top-down and non-participatory? • <i>How does that impact working with or within hierarchical organizations?</i>				
2G	Do leaders provide formal and informal means for all members of the network to raise and solve problems? • <i>How is this done?</i>				
2H	To what extent do you feel that leaders accept conflict as "normal" and use it as a stimulus for change, rather than view it as "bad" and something simply to be controlled? • <i>By what means have you ascertained this?</i>				
	How Does your Network Welcome and Encourage Shared Leadership?	Always/yes	In progress	In the plans	No, not yet
3A	How effectively do all parts of your network-- board, staff, planning committee, network members, funded programs and parent leaders – work together to define a shared purpose and vision that incorporates parent leadership? • <i>How do you know this?</i>				
3B	Do parents have equal input to professionals and other volunteers in all levels of your network? • <i>How is that assured?</i>				
3C	To what extent is this shared vision seen and recognized in your state? • <i>How do you know this?</i>				



National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Programs

PARENT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SELF-ASSESSMENT

		Always/yes	In progress	In the plans	No/not yet
3D	Does your network communicate its values of shared leadership and mission in the things it does, how it spends its resources and what it considers important? • <i>By what means?</i>				
3E	Do your board, staff, planning committee, network members, funded programs and parent leaders take collective responsibility for the principles under which you operate? • <i>How is this practiced?</i>				
3F	To what extent is your agency one that empowers rather than uses power to coordinate the activities of the network? • <i>How is this carried out?</i>				
3G	Does the organization chart show hierarchy and power rather than lines of communication? • <i>Why?</i>				
3H	Are there sufficient and varied opportunities for everyone in the network to facilitate, guide, and coach others to adopt practices that reflect the goals of your CBCAP plan? • <i>What are they?</i>				
3I	Does your network maintain a culture that supports risk-taking and encourages innovation? • <i>How is that accomplished?</i>				
3J	Rate how your network empowers parent leaders and other stakeholders to help shape the direction of your CBCAP activities. • <i>How is this accomplished?</i>				

Some ideas used in the creation of this document were taken from <http://www.ncrel.org/cscd/pubs/lead21/2-11.htm>
 This material was developed and shared by Circle of Parents® for the FRIENDS National Resource Center on CBCAP



Standards for Parent Participation

WHY PARENT INVOLVEMENT?

Questions for systems/organizations inviting parents to participate:

Why have you determined parents should be involved with your work?

Internal assessment questions:

- Does your funding depend on it?
- Are you mandated to have parent involvement?
- Do you want to move towards a more inclusive process of shared decision making?
- Do you understand ‘*Family Support Principles’?
- Do you have resources or flexibility to incorporate strategies to engage parents in meaningful ways?

What is the composition of your group and what perspective do you expect parents to bring?

Internal assessment questions:

- Who is the parent representing, i.e., a geographic area, economic status, ethnic culture, self, a program, disability, gender?
- How many parents can your group recruit and sustain?

What expectations do you have for parent representatives to exchange information with their constituents or community?

Internal assessment questions:

- Have you recognized ways you can enhance parent's leadership skills by providing opportunities to exchange information with different groups?
- Have you provided a role and responsibility in-service with the parent?
- Have you matched the parent with a mentor from the organization?
- Have you created ways parents can meet other parents involved?

**Family Support-Intentional incorporation of family strengths as empowerment in all aspects of programming as a way to enhance child development. Strategies can emerge from principles developed to differentiate family support programs from other services for families.*

Parents as Civic Leaders

Circle of Parents® is a program of Prevent Child Abuse Minnesota

1821 University Avenue West, Suite 202-S, Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104 office (651) 523-0099 toll-free (800) 621-6322 fax (651) 523-0380 www.pcamn.org

“Circle of Parents® is a national network of mutual support and self-help programs in partnership with communities.”



Standards for Parent Participation

	Very Good	Just Okay	Not at All
ORIENTATION			
We have a clear vision of what we want to accomplish and share it with parents in a way that asks them to help us further shape our vision			
We are very clear in how we communicate expectations and intended outcomes of participation, including asking for feedback			
We ask parent participants to help us create ground rules and ways of operation that contribute to their comfort and trust of us and each other			
We are deliberate in wanting our program to help support families' informal support networks			
LEARNING EXPERIENCE			
We make sure to work with parents to deliberately identify and build on the strengths of each family			
We ask participants to critique our materials for appropriate content, readability and cultural sensitivity			
We organize our program so that parents learn from each other			
We encourage honest feedback and work to use conflict as a positive communication tool			
EMPOWERMENT/EVALUATION			
We regularly use methods of gathering parent satisfaction and suggestions			
We give parents the information they need about our program, its funding and policies in order for them to fully understand the issues we face			
Parents tell us in words and deeds that they feel ownership in our program			
Parents involve other parents (particularly those who may be initially more reluctant)			
RESPONDING TO INPUT			
We change the way we do things as a result of parent involvement and input			
We acknowledge parental partnership publicly as well as privately			
Parents tell us they use the involvement skills learned here in other areas of their lives			

Sources: Minnesota Parenting Association
& Community Connectors Institute

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Standards for Parent Participation Parent Involvement Checklist

	Very Good	Just Okay	Not at All
OUTREACH			
We know our parent audience:			
— where they shop			
— what they do for fun			
— where they live			
— what matters to them			
We work to create approaches that appeal to the diverse population of parents in our community			
— voluntary organizations (churches libraries, scouts, etc)			
— businesses			
— institutions (schools, hospitals, clinics, etc)			
We use staff development time to learn more about the issues, lifestyles, hopes and dreams of parents			
ONE ON ONE			
We employ staff (or recruit volunteers) who are from the community and relate to our audience to do outreach and help accomplish the program practices			
We have a variety of ways to offer participation so that people can do a "test run" with us			
We use ritual, tradition, eating together, and other social gatherings to build trust			
We find out what parents are good at and what they want to contribute to our success			
We are deliberate about listening to what parents are really interested in and communicate that to our program planners and funders			
We examine individually and as a staff our own biases and value systems in order to lessen their impact on our ability to create deep relationships with parents			

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Standards for Parent Participation

GUIDING PRINCIPLES for MEANINGFUL PARENTAL SUPPORT/INVOLVEMENT (cont'd)

Staff and families work together in relationships based on equality and respect.

Staff enhance families' capacity to support the growth and development of all family members—adults, youth and children.

Families are resources to their own members, to other families to programs and to communities.

Programs affirm and strengthen families' cultural, racial and linguistic identities and enhance their ability to function in a multicultural society.

Programs are embedded in their communities and contribute to the community-building process.

Programs advocate with families for services and systems that are fair, responsive, and accountable to the families served.

Practitioners work with families to mobilize formal and informal resources to support family development.

Programs are flexible and continually responsive to emerging family and community issues.

Principles of family support are modeled in all program activities, including planning governance and administration.

Guidelines for Family Support Practice (1996 Family Resource Coalition)

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Standards for Parent Participation

GUIDING PRINCIPLES for MEANINGFUL PARENTAL SUPPORT/INVOLVEMENT

*The following inclusive practices are standards for
parents to participate in program development.*

Parents invited to participate will have a clear understanding of their defined roles and responsibilities.

Parents will understand the process put in place by the agency or group for parent recruitment, selection and orientation.

Parents interests and experiences should align themselves with the goals and missions of the agency or group. A mutual understanding of the perspective a parent brings to the table will be established.

Parents will have a clear expectation of their responsibility for reporting to and bringing back information from the communities they represent.

Parents will have structured opportunities to communicate and network with other parents within the agency and group.

Parents will know what supports will be available to allow them to participate, i.e., reimbursement or services child care, transportation, mileage/travel, parking, meals, lodging, honorarium, per-diem.

Parents will understand the terms of their commitment, including length of term, dates and times of meetings, sub-committees exceptions.

Parents will understand their responsibility for canceling child care, transportation or any other arrangements in a timely order.

Parents should not incur any out of pocket expenses to serve on the team.

Parents schedules should be carefully considered when meetings are scheduled.

Parents as Civic Leaders

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Checklist for Involving Families as Advisors and Consultants

This checklist is a tool to help think about ways that families are participating as advisors and consultants at the policy and program level. Rate each item and then cite specific examples that illustrate how the program is involving families. Use this tool to initiate new opportunities to work in partnership with families or to expand on current activities.

PRACTICES	Not doing well	Doing okay	Doing very well	EXAMPLES
• We recognize and respect the expertise of families as policy and program advisors.				
• We are vigilant about seeking opportunities to involve families in advisory activities.				
• We seek to involve families who reflect the racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity of families currently served by the program.				
• We use a variety of strategies to identify and recruit families to serve in advisory roles.				
• We demonstrate appreciation for the contributions that families make to policy and program development.				
• We have developed both short term and long term advisory roles for families.				
• We create opportunities for families to participate that are consistent with their cultural practices and individual personalities.				
• We have developed a range of ways for families to participate as advisors including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Participating as trainers in staff orientation and in-service programs – Reviewing written and audiovisual materials developed by the program 				<i>Continued</i>

Parent Involvement and Leadership Roles

Checklist for Involving Families as Advisors and Consultants (Continued)

PRACTICES	Not doing well	Doing okay	Doing very well	EXAMPLES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Conducting evaluation activities – Participating in focus groups – Serving as members of committees, boards, and task forces – Reviewing grants – Developing educational and informational materials for other families – Conducting needs assessments 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We support families serving in advisory roles by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Reimbursing their travel and child care expenses – Offering a stipend or honorarium for their participation – Providing mentors – Offering training programs and workshops – Providing secretarial support – Facilitating their networking with other families – Being aware of parental burn out 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We provide training to staff on working collaboratively with families at the policy and program level. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a paid Parent Consultant(s) on staff. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We support the Parent Consultant by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Creating flexible work schedules – Developing clear job descriptions – Ensuring access to a supportive supervisory relationship 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have a Family Advisory Council or committee. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership on the Advisory Council reflects the diversity of families served by the program. 				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Family Advisory Council reports to top level administration. 				

Jeppson, E. S., & Thomas, J. (1995). *Essential allies: Families as advisors*. Bethesda, MD: Institute for Family-Centered Care.

Reprinted with permission from: Institute for Family-Centered Care, 7900 Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 405, Bethesda, MD 20814, Phone: 301-652-0281, Fax: 301-652-0186, E-mail: institute@iffcc.org, Web site: www.familycenteredcare.org

Is your organization family friendly?

find out, with the



Family Friendly Check List

A self-assessment tool from the *Family Support Council*

Agency Edition

The Family Support Council

The Family Support Council (FSCouncil) is a group of grassroots family advocates who, in conjunction with state agency representatives, aspire to improve the family support system in Ohio by advocating for increased family involvement and participation on all levels of system design, development, implementation, and evaluation.

The FSCouncil is funded by a grant from the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council and is administered by Ohio Legal Rights Service.

For more information about the FSCouncil or this Family Friendly Check List, contact Tom Hemmert at 1 800 282-9181 or via email at themmert@olrs.state.oh.us

local contact information

A family friendly agency gives families access to the agency

- ☒ so that families can help decide how the agency runs
- ☒ so that families can help decide how the agency is designed
- ☒ so that families can help decide how the agency provides its services
- ☒ so that families can help evaluate the agency's services

Answer yes, no, or don't know to the questions in the check list below, to help you decide whether your agency's practices are family friendly. Then consider what your agency might do to increase family access and give families more opportunities to be part of agency decisions.

Together, as partners, your agency and the families it serves can use this self-assessment tool to make your agency family friendly.

I am a staff member Agency name/department:

Agency Administration

Yes No Don't know

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are families on the agency's board of directors? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency Mission Statement show that it encourages family input/participation? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are agency policies and procedures family centered/oriented? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do families write and/or approve the agency's policies and procedures on a re-occurring basis? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency train staff on the value of family input? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do families orient and train new staff? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are family members considered for employment opportunities? |

Information Sharing

Yes No Don't know

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency write documents and other family materials in plain language and in alternative formats? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency give families information regularly and whenever asked? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency talk with the family in a way they understand (e.g. in sign language or in the family's native language)? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency web site contain family friendly content? |

[more questions](#) ➔

Welcoming Environment

Yes No Don't know

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency welcome families? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency have an open door policy welcoming families at any time? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency ask families what the agency can do so that families feel safe giving comments? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is there a person at the agency families can call to discuss concerns or file a complaint? |

Family Involvement

Yes No Don't know

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency encourage and facilitate family involvement on a re-occurring basis? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency have an outreach plan to involve families? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency have a plan to address specific cultural issues if they are a barrier to family involvement? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency plan activities that are family oriented and encourage families to become involved - giving families, children and staff the chance to bond? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency give families options, on a re-occurring basis, of how to become actively involved in the operation of the agency? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are families involved in all phases of planning, delivering, and evaluating services for their child? |

Decision Making

Yes No Don't know

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are families decision makers? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency engage families in shared decision making on a re-occurring basis? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency make it possible for families to make informed decisions? |

Meetings Inclusion

Yes No Don't know

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Are families included on all committees and meetings? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do families receive meeting minutes and agendas? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency plan meetings at a time when families can attend? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency support families so they can attend meetings (travel reimbursement, child care, etc.)? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency cancel meetings if families are not represented? |

Accessibility

Yes No Don't know

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is the entire agency physically accessible? (e.g. flat surface from parking lot into building, restroom larger, hallways wider, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Is the entire agency programmatically accessible (e.g. are alternative formats, specialized software for computers, etc., available upon request?) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency accommodate for family members' special needs upon request? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency ask families, on a re-occurring basis, how to improve the agency to make it more accessible to families? |

Service Evaluation

Yes No Don't know

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency ask families, on a re-occurring basis, what they need and want? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Do families routinely evaluate services and supports? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency ask families, on a re-occurring basis, if they are satisfied with services? |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Does the agency have an evaluation form to assess family satisfaction? |

Parent Leadership Checklist

Before you take on a parent leadership role, you may want to review this checklist to be sure you fully understand the scope of the job you're undertaking and the extent of its commitment.

Know what the job is:	Yes	No	Notes
Do I have a clear understanding of the job requirements?			
Are the anticipated outcomes the ones I wish to promote?			
Will I represent a broad group of parents or just myself?			
If I represent a larger group, do I understand what is involved in communicating with my group?			
To whom will be accountable?			
Understand the personal costs:			
How much of my time will this require?			
How will the costs of communication, travel, childcare, food and lost wages be paid?			
Will this work, combined with other things going on in my life, create too much stress for my family and me?			
Do I have strong self-care skills and a personal support system on which I can rely?			
Evaluate your expertise:			
Do I need to improve my communication skills, need training in public speaking and working with the media?			
Do I need to learn more about the public policy process, and systems that serve children and families?			

It's important to consider these qualities, but unless the answers clearly reveal that this is not the right time to take on more responsibility, don't let anyone dissuade you. Skills can always be polished or learned by doing. You have your own individual gift and strengths to bring to this important job. In exchange for your leadership, you will find an opportunity for personal growth and the chance to make a difference in people's lives.

Shared by Parents Helping Parents, Boston, MA

Appendix B:

Successful State Models of Parent Leadership

The emerging body of research on parent leadership and our country's need for civic engagement to overcome its economic challenges will inform the future for working in partnership with parents and the community. Here are some examples of states engaging the parent voice to advise, plan, implement, and evaluate programs and policies to strengthen families and communities. Other models can be found on the FRIENDS National Resource Center's Web site, www.friendsnrc.org.

Kansas

Action Plan: Building on action planning undertaken at a 2007 statewide conference on systems of care, the Kansas CBCAP lead agency, Kansas Children's Cabinet and Trust Fund (KCCTF) planned to identify strengths and successes of parent leadership through publicity and outreach to other agencies. The KCCTF hosted a planning meeting with other Kansas programs to develop a strategy for reaching out to parents and addressing issues of timing, money, transportation, and parent involvement.

Progress: KCCTF joined with multiple family support and early childhood programs to co-sponsor the Kansas Parent Leadership Conference, and included CBCAP grantee parents and parents involved in child welfare. Parent Leadership Ambassador Training (PLAT) graduates and team members joined together to incorporate the newly formed 501 (c) 3 Kansas Family Action Network (KFAN). A six-hour adaptation of the PLAT training has been developed for practitioners and parents involved in child welfare.

Illinois

Action Plan: As the CBCAP lead agency, Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DFCS) planned to re-write its technical assistance grant guidelines to include financial assistance for administrative meetings to institute systems and secure funds to support the creation of Parent Advisory Groups throughout the state.

Progress: Illinois DFCS developed a logic model that includes goals, strategies, and outcomes for strengthening parent leadership at home, school, and in the community; building the capacity and resources in organizations, schools, and networks to support parents; and increasing the number of parents who are involved in community, regional, and state decision making.

New Hampshire

Action Plan: New Hampshire's CBCAP lead agency, New Hampshire Children's Trust Fund, decided to bring parents into its Retrospective Outcomes Survey process by soliciting parent feedback on its questionnaire. It also planned to enhance recognition of parent leaders during National Parent Leadership Month.

Progress: The Strengthening Families in Early Care and Education project provided some early seed funding to hire a part-time Parent Advocate. The project attracted some additional funding to help develop parent advocacy workshops, two statewide parent advocacy days in partnership with the state Head Start Parent Advisory Council, a highly successful Parent Leadership and Recognition Month (February), and a recognition event celebrating 29 parents (for the 29 days of February 2008), with the governor awarding certificates to the honored parents. It hopes to secure funding annually to secure funding for statewide recognition of February as Parent Leadership Month. Other major activities are advocacy and leadership training, recognition, and collaboration with many providers in the state. Before the Strengthening Families in Early

Care and Education Project was launched, parents were asked about their opinions, experiences, and needs. The New Hampshire Children's Trust Fund also conducts ongoing periodic surveys of agencies and parents to guide growing partnerships with parents.

Virginia

Action Plan: The Virginia CBCAP lead agency, Virginia Department of Social Services, asked parents to serve on an advisory committee to create a statewide child abuse and neglect plan. Additionally, all CBCAP grantees are to be trained in parent leadership.

Progress: Parent leaders from each of eight Circle of Parent groups formed a Parent Council, which meets quarterly to discuss ways to strengthen the program. They review brochures and posters, providing important parent perspectives on promotional pieces. They have discussed ways to market the program, and met with reporters to share their experiences. They plan joint events for families in the Circle of Parents group. Parent Leadership Workshops have been conducted for CBCAP grantees, based on the FRIENDS Parent Leadership Ambassador Training.



FRIENDS Parent Advisory Council Members

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