TIPS TO BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES

1. Communicate openly and listen actively.
   - Encourage families to tell their stories.
     ✓ Listen to identify unique hopes, dreams, strengths, needs, and preferences.
     ✓ Ask open-ended questions about the people, places, and activities that are important to them.
     ✓ In conversations with families, refer to stories they have shared in the past to let them know you have listened and are taking into consideration what they have shared with you.
     ✓ When discussing challenging issues with families, encourage them to share additional family stories that relate to the challenging issue.
   - Reframe differences of opinions, values, or perspectives without judgment.
     ✓ When you have opinions that differ from those of families, listening to their perspectives first without sharing your own opinions.
     ✓ Seek to find common ground with families.
     ✓ When dealing with challenging issues, seeking families’ input on topics – especially when there are substantial differences that need to be openly addressed.

2. Be confident in a child’s and family’s future possibilities.
   - Use a strengths-based approach, focusing on what the child does well and enjoys doing.
     ✓ Ask families what they see as their child’s strengths and share your observations.
     ✓ Tell families that by focusing on the child’s strengths, you are better able to meet their needs.
     ✓ When sharing difficult news, remind families of their own and the child’s strengths that will help them through this difficulty.
   - Convey to families your beliefs about the significant goals the child will be able to accomplish in the future.
     ✓ Celebrate with families as their child meets milestones.
     ✓ Give families information about research-based interventions that have been used to help children in similar circumstances succeed.
     ✓ Let families know that the timeline for reaching some of the anticipated goals will likely take longer than expected, but that you remain firm in your belief that their child will be able to be successful in the long-run.
3. **Respect families and demonstrate this through actions and words.**
   - *Identify and incorporate the family’s cultural values* into decision-making.
     - Listen to families, paying attention to what they share with you as it may reflect their family cultural values.
     - *Ask families what is important to know* about their culture, celebrations, and customs. Show genuine interest.
     - Examine how cultural differences may be contributing to differences of opinion about the child’s behavior or program. Discuss ways to find options that are responsive to families’ cultural values.
   - *Identify the family’s preferences for interaction* and interact with the family accordingly.
     - Ask how you should address members of the family.
     - Make joint decisions about how often to communicate with the family regarding child progress, the program in general, and the home setting.
     - If communication breaks down, let families know you have not been receiving responses and discuss a different form of communication.

4. **Demonstrate your commitment to the family and child as more than just a “job.”**
   - *Be flexible* in accommodating the changing needs of the family and child.
     - Hold meetings at times and places suited to families’ needs and availability whenever possible.
     - When addressing challenges, explore mutual changes, both at home and in the program, which may be influencing the situation.
     - Demonstrate how disagreements or differences in opinion do not interfere with your commitment to the family or child.

5. **Give families equal power as partners in decision-making.**
   - Share power by *supporting families as equal partners* in helping their child to be successful now and in the future.
     - Ask families’ opinions about goals for their child.
     - Brainstorm a wide range of strategies for achieving goals with the family. Make decisions that will meet the unique needs of their child.
     - Involve families in all decisions about the child (for example, the decision to refer the child for evaluation).

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Based on Handout 4.1 from *CONNECT Modules* (2010), FPG Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina