

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).

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