Meaningful Parent Leadership:

Building Effective Parent/Practitioner Collaboration

FRIENDS National Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention
A Service of the Children's Bureau and a member of the T/TA Network

Contents

Introduction

This guidebook is designed to provide guidance to CBCAP State Lead Agencies and their community partners seeking to enhance the engagement of parents as stakeholders and partners within their programs and organizations.

Our Goal

Parents and child abuse prevention agency staff will collaborate within the systems they are connected to and share responsibility for the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs, advocacy activities, and community initiatives.

Our Objective

This document was created as a practical guide for parents and practitioners. It presents information, strategies, and tools important to developing successful models of parent leadership and parent/practitioner collaboration 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.

This guide includes specific strategies to help practitioners and parents:
- build cross-cultural, inclusive relationships;
- recruit, retain, train, and celebrate parent leadership;
- provide organizational and staff readiness through assessment, preparation, and training; and
- 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 (SLA), and parents as well as other child abuse prevention, family support and child welfare programs and organizations.

Legislative Mandate

Title II of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (as amended by Public Law 111-320) includes language related to involving parents in the planning, implementation, and improvement of community-based child abuse prevention programs that builds on the strengths of families.

To demonstrate that they are meeting this requirement, CBCAP State Lead Agencies provide assurances and information in their annual applications and reports. In their annual CBCAP application, each state lead agency must sign an assurance statement that declares that the state has 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 to accomplish the desired outcomes for such efforts[1]. 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, evaluation, and oversight of CBCAP programs. As appropriate, they also need to describe (in annual reports) 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.

As we look at ways to foster parent leadership and strengthen parent-practitioner collaboration, it's important that we have an understanding of the terms and definitions commonly used in this work.

Definitions

Parent Leaders

Parent leaders are individuals who are committed to making positive changes in their family and community by using their experiences as participants, coupled with a desire to give back. Parent leaders build upon their knowledge and skills to take on meaningful leadership roles within programs, agencies, and communities. They serve as a "parent voice" to help shape the direction of services for themselves and other families. Parent leaders can be biological parents, stepparents, grandparents, foster or adoptive parents, community elders, or others who are in primary caregiving roles for children.

> *"Because what is the whole goal of an agency in the first place? The goal is to be able to help the family. I mean, if they're an agency that deals with family - whether it's through Child Welfare or whether it's through foster care and - it's really that goal is that 'I'm there for the family'. And what better way to help the family than empower the parent to have an equal partner voice?"*
>
> *Bruce Bynum*
> *Parent Leader, Texas*

Practitioners

Practitioners are paid or voluntary staff employed by an agency or 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.

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[1] Ibid. Sec. 202(1)(B)

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> *"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*
> *Practitioner, Idaho*

[Click here](#) to learn more about working with practitioners. https://vimeo.com/277683722

Meaningful Parent Leadership

Parent Leadership is a strengths-based approach grounded in the belief that parents are the most knowledgeable about their families and communities. Parent leaders provide valuable insight into programs and community efforts that benefit all children and families.

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

Why Involve Parents?

[Click here](#) to learn more about involving parents. https://vimeo.com/277674636

Parent-Practitioner collaboration has many benefits for families and practitioners. For families, the benefits include opportunities to give input in the programs and services they receive, increasing their sense of personal achievement and providing a model of leadership for their family and other families. For practitioners, the benefits are also significant. Parent – Practitioner collaboration can improve relationships between families and providers as well improve efforts to recruit and retain program participants.

This guidebook explores personal beliefs and practices around sharing leadership with parents and will help both parents and practitioners move toward more authentic partnerships.

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"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
Parent Leader, California

Benefits of Parent Leadership

When parents see themselves as stakeholders, and when organizations and practitioners create opportunities to collaborate with parents and families, many benefits are possible. Partnering with parents promotes mutually beneficial relationships between families and the child abuse prevention field.

Benefits for Parents

When parents see that agencies are serious about inviting them into 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 parents, children, and families.

Parent involvement, awareness, and acceptance of responsibility begin when a parent enters a program and evolves over time. By recognizing a parent's leadership skills and collaborating with them, the organization builds capacity while helping to strengthen the parent as an individual and improves outcomes for the family and children.

Successful partnerships that strive for parent and practitioner collaboration 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

While working toward strong partnerships between parents and practitioners, it's important to remember the role of protective factors in supporting children, families, and communities. Protective factors are attributes that strengthen families and communities and mitigate risks for child maltreatment. Building protective factors supports parent engagement and the development of leadership skills.

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Protective Factors

FRIENDS uses the protective factors framework (adapted from the Strengthening Families™ approach developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy) with the addition of a sixth factor on nurturing and attachment. The protective factors are:

1) **Nurturing and Attachment:** The emotional tie along with a pattern of positive interaction between the parent and child that develops over time.
2) **Social Connections:** Positive informal support from family, friends and neighbors that helps provide for emotional needs.
3) **Parental Resilience:** Having adaptive skills and strategies to persevere in times of crisis. A family's ability to openly share positive and negative experiences and mobilize to accept, solve and manage problems.
4) **Knowledge of Parenting and Child and Development:** Understanding and using effective child management techniques and having age-appropriate expectations for children and youth's abilities.
5) **Children's Social Emotional Competence:** Children's age appropriate ability to regulate their emotions, engage with others and communicate feelings.
6) **Concrete Support**: Access to tangible goods and services to help families cope with stress, particularly in times of crisis or intensified needs.

Applying Protective Factors in Life

Nurturing and Attachment
I have a strong bond with my child and spend time making sure my child(ren) know they are loved every day.

Knowledge of Parenting/Child Development
I am curious and responsive to what my child needs to be happy and healthy.

Social Connections
I have people who know me well, friends I connect with, and at least one person who supports my parenting.

Children's Social Emotional Competence
My child has the age appropriate ability regulate their emotions, engage with others, and communicate feelings.

Resilience
I will continue to have courage after a crisis and during stressful times.

Concrete Supports
My family has access to basic needs.

Protective factors contribute to the development of strong families. Using a protective factors framework, prevention programs can greatly enrich their services to families. Building protective factors works to buffer adverse childhood experiences which are events or experiences that are stressful or traumatic. Additional information about protective factors can be found at the FRIENDS website, https://friendsnrc.org/protective-factors.
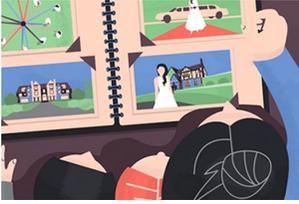
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Adverse Childhood Experiences are events or experiences that are stressful or traumatic. These include abuse, neglect, witnessing domestic violence, or experiences in the home such as crime, parental conflict, mental illness, and substance abuse. These ACEs have been found to be strongly related to challenges in development and a wide range of health problems across the lifespan.

[Click here](https://vimeo.com/278022720) to learn more about ACEs. https://vimeo.com/278022720

As we work to engage and partner with parents, knowledge about ACEs can be instrumental in developing strategies for outreach and capacity building for parent leaders. Knowledge about ACEs can be beneficial to practitioners and organizations as they develop programming to meet the needs of families in the communities they serve.

Communities across the country are exploring the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on families and communities and how reducing ACEs can help prevent child maltreatment and provide better outcomes for children and families. Additional information about ACES can be found at http://acestudy.org/ and at the FRIENDS website, https://www.friendsnrc.org/aces .

Benefits for Organizations

Collaboration between families and agencies is extremely beneficial for programs and program staff by:

- Providing an opportunity for cross-cultural learning, an increased appreciation of diverse cultures, and helping programs provide services that are culturally relevant and appropriate.
- Modeling partnership and collaborative leadership through agency policy and practice that can be duplicated on a local level;
- Meeting the needs of families and eliminating barriers to positive outcomes through agency policy and mandates;
- Encouraging and recognizing successful partnerships between practitioners and parents; and
- Developing opportunities for parent representation on statewide governing bodies that can positively influence multiple systems impacting children, families, and communities.

As parents and practitioners build trusting relationships in respectful and inclusive environments, parents expand 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

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- 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.

Principles of Family Support Practice

As previously defined by Family Support America," the primary responsibility for the development and well-being of children lies within the family, and all segments of society must support families as they rear their children". The Principles of Family Support Practice were developed by Family Support America. These principles, developed in 1996 continue to guide the family support field.[2]

- 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
- Policies and practices affirm and strengthen families' ethnic, racial and linguistic identities and enhance their ability for 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
- Practitioners work with families to mobilize formal and informal resources to support family development
- Programs are flexible and continually responsive to family and community issues
- Principles of family support are modeled in all program activities, including planning, governance, and administration

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

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[2] National Family Support Network, https://www.nationalfamilysupportnetwork.org/family-support

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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 culture[3] 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.

Parent Leaders Share

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, when really they are helping the team to 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 partnership 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

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

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."[4]

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 https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/, hosted by The Champlain College David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry in Partnership with Case Western University's Weatherhead School of Management.

Shared Goals: BusinessDictionary defines goals as observable and measurable outcomes having one or more objectives to be achieved within a fixed timeframe. Goals 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. For more on information on leadership and shared goals, visit https://www.romanpichler.com/blog/leading-through-shared-goals/

Collaborative Leadership: Through the principles of collaborative leadership, as detailed on page 10, 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 strategies that help to effectively engage parents and practitioners in shared reflection and dialogue, consider Parent Cafés (www.bestrongfamilies.org) and Community Cafés.

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

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 an ongoing component of parent involvement in program and policy development, and practitioners should always 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.

FRIENDS offers a variety of resources to support parent leadership on its website https://www.friendsnrc.org/parent-leadership.

Resources include:
- National Parent Leadership Month Resources
- Parent Leadership Development Self-Assessment
- Parent Practitioners Newsletters
- Sharing the Journey: Voices of Parent Leaders

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The BEPPC Umbrella illustrates an array of learning approaches verses a linear process focused only on training. FRIENDS offers action planning and technical assistance on a variety of topics including those listed below.

BEPPC: **Building Effective Parent / Practitioner Collaboration**

- Having Shared Language & Definitions
- FRIENDS Online Learning Center
- Building Protective Factors
- Utilizing the Theory of Change
- Facilitating Discussions with Stakeholders
- On Site Learning & Action Planning
- Assessing Readiness
- Identifying Parent Leaders & Partners
- Implementation Monitoring & Impact Evaluation

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How Do We Achieve Meaningful Parent Collaboration?

FRIENDS' Theory of Change focuses on the importance of parents and practitioners building capacity together to develop collaborative leadership skills that lead to parents becoming collaborative partners within the systems they are connected to.

FRIENDS – Theory of Change:
Parents are Collaborative Partners Within the Systems they are Connected to

Parents and Practitioners build capacity to work together as partners

Parents and Practitioners grow together and develop collaborative leadership skills

Parents become leadership models and mentors for their family and community
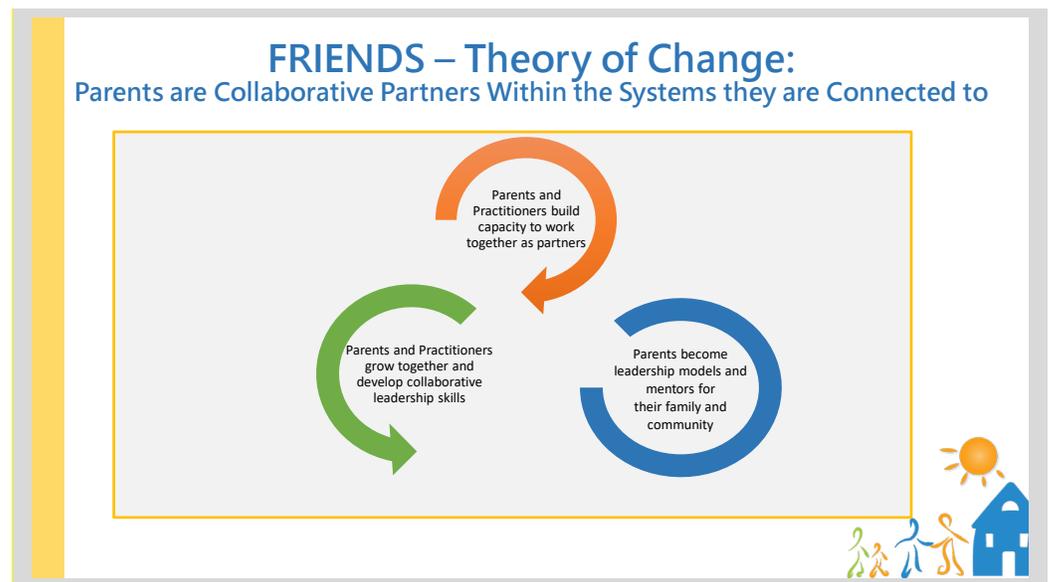
As stated previously, the primary purpose of this guidebook is to provide guidance to State Lead Agencies seeking to enhance their engagement of parents as stakeholders and leaders within their programs and organizations. We have described eight steps we believe are essential to creating a culture of parent leadership and collaboration, where 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.

FRIENDS offers resources for strengthening collaboration in the Toolkit for Collaboration,https://www.friendsnrc.org/activities-that-support-collaboration/collaboration-toolkit.

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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. 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 on page 35.

The Child Welfare Information Gateway provides multiple resources on its Parent Engagement and Leadership Page, https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/preventing/developing/parent-engagement-and-leadership/

FRIENDS provides a program assessment resource, Understanding the Role of Program Assessment in Child Abuse Prevention: Tools for Peer Review and Beyond which includes a subscale on community collaboration and a subscale on parent leadership. https://www.friendsnrc.org/program-assessment

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 (at all levels, including administration and direct service staff) 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?
- ❑ Do parents participate in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs and services to ensure culturally responsive and appropriate service delivery?
- ❑ Is the environment inviting and convenient for parents? Does the décor include pictures that represent the service population including mothers, fathers, grandparents and other caregivers?
- ❑ 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 including incentives, e.g. transportation, food, extra staff time to meet after hours, when parents are more available?

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❑ Are you following the federal legislation, nationally-recognized standards of service and Principles of Family Support Practice (page 10) 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.

The following tools may be helpful in assessing how well an organization's values, policies and practices reflect a readiness to embrace parent leadership:

▪ A Checklist of Policies that Support Parent Involvement and Leadership Roles: Parent and Community Asset Survey

▪ Provider Self-Assessment for Parent-Professional Partnerships   (See page 35)

▪ Parent Leadership Development Self-Assessment (See page 37)

▪ Checklist for Involving Families as Advisors and Consultants (See page 41)

▪ Understanding the Role of Program Assessment in Child Abuse Prevention: Tools for Peer Review and Beyond

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 local, state or federal work. It's important to consider your organization's beliefs and practices regarding parent involvement in decisions that impact policy.

❑ Have you created opportunities for practitioners and parents to work together and 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 been asked to provide feedback on how to make policies more supportive toward parent engagement/leadership?

❑ Have you provided written facts, figures, and follow-up contacts to parents so that they can better explain the goals and progress of the organization?

❑ Do you have a plan to prepare parents for what to expect when testifying at hearings?

❑ Have you invited parents to tell the story of the organization in a way that staff could not?

Parents and practitioners 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. Practitioners 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.

The Partners in Policymaking® program offers resources to help parents and advocates become active partners with those who make policy. Partners in Policymaking® was created in Minnesota in 1987 to train advocates and parents of children with disabilities to work in partnership with their elected officials, to positively change the way people with disabilities live, work and enjoy the benefits of being actively involved in their communities. The organization offers several online courses that are free and available in both English and Spanish at https://partnersonlinecourses.com

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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**: Write a one-page description of the parent leadership plan, including information about benefits of partnering with parents and how parents can help 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 the 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, explore 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 could, or must, partner with to make the effort 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, transportation, food, materials, child care and translation support for meetings and events.

- **Plan:** Work with the decision makers and parent leaders to create a policy outlining how parents and practitioners will work together and how each partner will be held accountable for designated activities. 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 identify staff that are available and positioned to fully implement parent leadership policy and practices as part of their staff role.

Step Three: Identifying Potential Parent Leaders

[Click here](https://vimeo.com/277503114) to learn more about Parent Leaders.
https://vimeo.com/277503114

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 indicate a parent's readiness 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 help identify their strengths and 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 compare similarities and differences between organizational culture and 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.
- Consider the population that is served by your program when recruiting parents. See Step Six to learn more about addressing culture, diversity and special needs.

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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 levels. 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 or revisions of existing policies, procedures, 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 coordinating 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 strengthening programs and the protective factors.
- Serve on community, state or national 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

[Click here](#) to learn more about Fatherhood. https://vimeo.com/277497775

CAPTA requires CBCAP State Lead Agencies to "demonstrate a commitment to involving parents in the planning and program implementation of the lead agency and entities carrying out local programs funding under this title, including involvement of parents of children with disabilities, parents who are individuals with disabilities, racial and ethnic minorities, and members of other underrepresented or underserved groups;" [5]

The legislative mandate, coupled with the importance of culturally relevant practice leads to the need for authentic, meaningful parent involvement that includes 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.

Refer to the outcomes of your needs assessment to help determine services based on community needs. Foster inclusiveness in your programs by partnering with organizations and institutions that serve the needs of diverse participants including families that include:

- Fathers
- Parents and/or Children with Disabilities
- Racial/Ethnic Groups and Communities
- LGBTQIA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex and Asexual)

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[5] Sec. 202 (1)(G).

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- Homeless Families
- Incarcerated Parents
- Migrants
- Refugees
- Adult Former Victims
- Tribal Communities
- Non-English Speaking Families
- Families that Represent a Variety of Faith Traditions

Collaborate with parents from diverse communities to ensure that services are responsive and reflective of their circumstances. For additional information, visit the FRIENDS website at:
https://www.friendsnrc.org/activities-that-support-collaboration/cultural-responsiveness/diverse-groups

The Importance of Culture in Collaborative Leadership

According to the Child Welfare League of America, culture is a constantly changing, learning pattern of customs, beliefs, values and behaviors, which are socially acquired and transmitted through symbols, rituals, and events. Culture includes elements such as gender, age, sexual orientation, geographic location, ethnicity, personality, ability, status, marital status and job position.

Achieving culturally relevant practice is a process that begins with each individual and includes every aspect of an organization's activities. Both practitioners and parents bring their personal perspective to the work, informed by our personal and cultural experiences. 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.

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Elements of Cultural Responsiveness

Cultural Responsiveness has three key elements, which are Culture, Cultural Competence and Cultural Humility.

Culture

Is a constantly changing, learning pattern of customs, beliefs, values, and behaviors, which are socially acquired and transmitted through symbols, rituals, and events and which convey widely shared meanings among its members. Culture includes elements such as gender, age, sexual orientation, geographic location, ethnicity, personality, ability status, marital status and job position.

Source: Child Welfare League of America (2013)

Cultural Humility:

- Promotes self-awareness,
- Is the acknowledgement that the experiences of others are different than ours and requires that we be open and respectful of their perspectives,
- and that out of acceptance we develop understanding and the recognition that others have a positive worth – they matter.

Source: Ortega, R. M. & Coulborn-Faller, K. (2011)

Cultural Competence

Is the ability of individuals and systems to respectfully and effectively interact with people of all cultures, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, ability statuses, and faiths or religions, in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth of individuals, families, tribes and communities, while protecting and preserving the dignity of each.

Source: Child Welfare League of America (2013)

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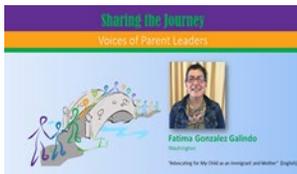
Click here to learn more about advocating for your child.
http://vimeo.com/277676130

For a Spanish version, click here.
https://vimeo.com/277676751

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 that addresses 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.
- 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.

For additional information on cultural responsiveness visit:
https://www.friendsnrc.org/activities-that-support-collaboration/cultural-responsiveness

A culturally responsive approach includes continuously gaining knowledge and an understanding of the varied needs of diverse families and communities. Parents and practitioners must work to bridge the gap between differing perspectives and embrace the complexity of diversity.

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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. FRIENDS offers resources to help community stakeholders have meaningful community conversations – Community Conversation Guide – Preventing Child Neglect: A Conversation Guide for Community Stakeholders.
- https://www.friendsnrc.org/neglect-toolkit/public-awareness-and-engagement

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- Hold meetings at a time and location convenient for parents. This may require meeting at times other than typical office hours.

- Ask parents if they have e-mail access either on a computer or cell phone where they can receive communication related to their involvement or role with your program/organization.

- Ask how often they check their e-mail. Some parents may not check e-mail daily. You may need to call or send text messages 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. This is also an opportunity to outline what parents can expect (e.g., what will be discussed, appropriate attire, who will be participating, etc.)

- Follow-up calls provides an opportunity to build and strengthen 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 share more information about the background and decision-making related to the policy and to reflect on your program's 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.

- Ask the parent about and 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.

- Ask parents for honest feedback about your agency's performance in parent engagement, listen to the feedback, and use it to improve performance together.

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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.

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

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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. Careful consideration of new and fresh ideas creates a positive flow of energy and may lead to changes in an original idea that satisfies everyone.

- 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 an array of leadership opportunities that include a variety of roles for parents. This could include 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 parent's 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.[6] 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.

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[6]https://www.friendsnrc.org/prevention/sharing-the-journey-voices-from-the-field

- Plan events that provide a more formal opportunity to recognize the contributions of parent leaders.
- Celebrate the contributions of parents through awards that highlight 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 when acknowledging contributions. 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. For more information about recognizing the contributions of parents, go to https://www.friendsnrc.org/parent-leadership-month-resources.

Conclusion

Parent leadership is fostered on a meaningful level when parents are given the opportunity for personal growth, to gain the knowledge and skills to function in leadership roles and represent a "parent voice" to help shape the direction of their families, programs and communities.

Parent leadership is successfully achieved when parents and practitioners build effective partnerships based upon mutual respect and shared responsibility, expertise and leadership in the decisions being made that affect their own families, other families and their communities.

Parent education and support programs are good first steps in fostering leadership in parents. They provide parents with the tools they need to become more confident parents and to bond with other parents. This confidence and connection to other families, can then be supported and encouraged, to move parents towards more meaningful roles in programs by giving them opportunities to become a part of the team developing the programs rather than simply the persons benefiting from the services provided.

Successful State Models of Parent Leadership

There are several successful state models of parent leadership that can be found in the CBCAP State Report Summary on the Parent Leadership page.

https://www.friendsnrc.org/2017-cbcap-state-reports-summary

https://www.friendsnrc.org/2016-cbcap-state-reports-summary

https://www.friendsnrc.org/2015-cbcap-state-reports-summary

Resources

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Appendices

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
- 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

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 parents 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
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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

	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? • *What are they?*				
1B	Are your policy manuals reflective of the responsibilities and benefits for parent leaders? • *Is input encouraged from parent leaders as well as staff?*				
1C	Is there a meaningful career ladder within the network for board members? Staff? Parent leaders? • *Do you see evidence of movement and longevity within the network?*				
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 is a respectful way? • *Do you see that there is increased parent participation because of it?*				
1E	How successful are your internal and external resources to help parent leaders develop and maintain their skills, and assistance in accessing them? • *How are they kept timely and relevant?*				

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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? • *Is this a formal or informal process?*				
1G	How effective is your structure to support and supervise parent leaders and give them regular feedback on their performance? • *How do you get feedback regarding this?*				
1H	How frequently are parent leaders given the opportunity to participate in staff enrichment workshops or in-services offered by the network? • *How are parent leaders made welcome by staff when they do participate?*				
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? • *How is this followed up?*				
1J	To what extent are parent leaders regularly and publicly recognized for their contributions? • *How is this information captured and shared within your network?*				
	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? • *How is participation supported and encouraged?*				
2B	Is information shared and decisions made together? • *What is the forum for this?*				
2C	Are problems solved collaboratively? • *Can you cite an example?*				

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		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? • *How does this evidence itself?*				
2E	Do you see evidence that leaders try to gain many points of view before solving important problems? • *By what means is this accomplished?*				
2F	Is it customary that decision-making is consensual and inclusive as opposed to top-down and non-participatory? • *How does that impact working with or within hierarchical organizations?*				
2G	Do leaders provide formal and informal means for all members of the network to raise and solve problems? • *How is this done?*				
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? • *By what means have you ascertained this?*				
	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? • *How do you know this?*				
3B	Do parents have equal input to professionals and other volunteers in all levels of your network? • *How is that assured?*				
3C	To what extent is this shared vision seen and recognized in your state? • *How do you know this?*				

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		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? • *By what means?*				
3E	Do your board, staff, planning committee, network members, funded programs and parent leaders take collective responsibility for the principles under which you operate? • *How is this practiced?*				
3F	To what extent is your agency one that empowers rather than uses power to coordinate the activities of the network? • *How is this carried out?*				
3G	Does the organization chart show hierarchy and power rather than lines of communication? • *Why?*				
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? • *What are they?*				
3I	Does your network maintain a culture that supports risk-taking and encourages innovation? • *How is that accomplished?*				
3J	Rate how your network empowers parent leaders and other stakeholders to help shape the direction of your CBCAP activities. • *How is this accomplished?*				

Some ideas used in the creation of this document were taken from http://www.ncrel.org/cscd/pubs/lead21/2-1l.htm
This material was developed and shared by Circle of Parents® for the FRIENDS National Resource Center on CBCAP

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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: – Participating as trainers in staff orientation and in-service programs – Reviewing written and audiovisual materials developed by the program				

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Parent Involvement and Leadership Roles
Checklist for Involving Families as Advisors and Consultants (Continued)

PRACTICES	Not doing well	Doing okay	Doing very well	EXAMPLES
– 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				
• We support families serving in advisory roles by: – 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				
• We provide training to staff on working collaboratively with families at the policy and program level.				
• We have a paid Parent Consultant(s) on staff.				
• We support the Parent Consultant by: – Creating flexible work schedules – Developing clear job descriptions – Ensuring access to a supportive supervisory relationship				
• We have a Family Advisory Council or committee.				
• Membership on the Advisory Council reflects the diversity of families served by the program.				
• 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.

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