Great Expectations: Building Better Communication between Schools and Families
Power of Parental Involvement

- Relationship building
- Parental Stress
- Positive child outcomes
  - Systemic Change
  - Individual change
Positive child outcomes?

- Parent involvement is a core feature of evidence-based approaches to intervention for ASD
  - Determination of instructional targets
  - Delivery of instruction
  - Longitudinal programming
Urgency in Autism

- The complexities of autism make parent involvement imperative
  - Problems with generalization
    - Mismatch between school and home outcomes
  - Early intervention
  - Numbers of instructional trials required
Barriers to Parental Involvement

- Diversity/Culture
- Learning History
- Resources
- Defining of Roles
- School system bureaucracy
- Teacher training
Different Perspectives?

- Parent’s world
  - Limited resources
  - Competing priorities
  - Negative feedback from schools
  - Negative feedback about schools
  - Systems are complex, and reinforcement is thin
Different Perspectives?

- Teacher’s world
  - Limited resources
  - Competing priorities
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Coming together

- Perspectives can serve as major barriers unless there are working channels of communication
Getting the best reception

- Recognizing that clear communication goes both ways
- That communication has to be beneficial to both parties
- That communication has to be ongoing
Creating Clear Channels

- Keep a point of contact to avoid mixed messages
Creating Clear Channels

- Use language that everyone can understand
  - Take it deeper than just “avoiding jargon”
  - Consider underlying theoretical perspectives or belief systems
Creating Clear Channels

- Really listen, avoid just “waiting for your turn to speak”
Creating Clear Channels

- Reinforce attempts at communication
  - Share positives
  - Express gratitude
  - Share goodies
    - Bake goods
    - Resources
    - Photos/Child Products
Creating Clear Channels

- Keep it objective
  - Outline issues
  - Avoid the blame game, it distracts from real issues
  - Share data
Creating Clear Channels

- Go deep!
  - Consider systemic issues that prevent desired outcomes
  - Tackle what is doable now and plan for making long term change
Creating Clear Channels

- Keep it continuous but relevant
  - Communication in itself is not the goal
  - Communication should provide data that are useful for both parties
  - Maintain constant conversation around team goals and effectiveness
Communication Tools

- Daily Communication notebooks
  - Describe daily activities, performance
  - Medical information
  - Behavioral Supports
Daily Communication notebooks

- Formats
  - Established school agendas
  - Spiral notebooks
  - Specialized forms
  - Web-based blogs
Daily Communication notebooks

- Purposes
  - Tracking
  - Promoting generalization
    - Johnny learned this, can you assess…
  - Instructional content
    - Mary went to the movies over the weekend, she saw ……..
    - John mentioned in class he might like to work in a bank, what do you think?
Considerations

- Consider the time it takes to complete the notebooks
- Excuse minor trespasses
- Stay positive and remember inflection cannot always be accurately inferred
- When addressing touchy subjects, get a second read
Email

- Quick way to share information
- Same considerations as daily communication notebooks
- Not everyone is comfortable with email communication, so it cannot be expected
- Consider intermittent emails
Sharing Data

- Permanent product data
- Digital media
  - Pictures and video media
  - Personal YouTube/Vimeo pages
  - Ipod sharing
- Build an electronic portfolio
Sharing Graphed Data

- Graphed data provide one of the most effective means of evaluating student progress.
- Data can be shared:
  - via photo copies
  - Scanned copies
  - Or Google docs
New Twists on Phone Conferences

- Using free video conferencing software
  - Skype/Face-time
  - Less travel time for families
  - Flexibility in scheduling
  - Opportunities to show classroom materials
  - Share data files
  - Meet with multiple participants
    - Dual custody/outside agencies
Other Communication Strategies

- Class newsletters
  - Great way to share
  - Student news, family news, community news
- Student journals
- Blogs
- Classroom listservs
Facilitating Gatherings

- Quarterly teas, potlucks, breakfasts
- Family trainings
- Invited speakers
Avoiding Mucked Meetings

- Consider how levels of ongoing communication can impact episodic, meeting-based communication.
  - Unnecessary urgency to “get it all out there”
Avoid summoning the Hordes

- Sometimes it is difficult to balance inviting the most relevant people and keeping the group to a workable size.
- Consider the purpose of the meeting and only the necessary to meet the proposed objectives.
Avoid a Fast Food Approach

- Meetings should not continue past their efficacy or restricted by squeezing them into 30 minutes intervals.
- Agendas or IEP’s should not be merely delivered, they should be developed within the meeting
Consider Pre planning

- Student objectives are not easy to develop. It may be beneficial for parents and teachers to meet in advance to discuss and draft IEP goals and objectives.
Bring Evidence of Humanity

- Consider starting the meeting by sharing a picture, video of the target child.
- Consider having the child welcome the group and share their own vision
  - PowerPoint
  - Video
Offer your Respect

**Everyone** bring expertise to the room
Stay focused

- Avoid sidebar conversations
- Revisit important points and check for consensus
- Document
- Summarize
Statements to avoid (Cheatham et al., 2012)

- To save some time we went ahead and...
- Because the student has autism, he should be served in.
- I need to check with ..... before I can commit to ..... 
- Nothing works for this child...
- If only someone did this ...then the child would do this.....
- This program does not serve.......
Questions

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