



Promoting Successful
Relationships with
Families

8.1

BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES

Forming Relationships with the Family
**Maintaining a Positive Relationship
with the Family**
Sharing Information with the Family
Building Trust with the Family



BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE FAMILY

As a Direct Support Provider (DSP) you are likely to work with families in some way, shape, or form. In section 8.1 you will learn about:

- ◆ the various kinds of families you may support,
- ◆ the components of a healthy family,
- ◆ ways to build trust with families, and
- ◆ how to work in collaboration with families.

It is important to start by noting that in Canada there are various kinds of families.

- ◆ **Two-Parent Families** - These are families headed by two parents. The parents may be biological parents or they may not.
- ◆ **Single Parent Families** - These are families headed by one parent. The parent may be a mother or a father.
- ◆ **Foster Parent Families** – These are families who provide short or long term care to children placed in their home.
- ◆ **Approved Family Homes** – These are families who provide residential support to adults with an intellectual disability.

It is important to note that none of these families are "better" than the other. All of these family structures have the potential to create healthy environments for children to grow and develop. All family structures have the potential to develop the characteristics of a healthy family.

Healthy families are likely to include:

- ◆ **Affection** - Love for each other, encouragement, and commitment to each other
- ◆ **Respect** - Positive communications and interactions with each other
- ◆ **Emotional Strength** - Ability to deal with stress and resolve conflict
- ◆ **Shared Experience** - Enjoying each others company

The old expression "You can't judge a book by its cover" is something to remember when you work with families. The structure of the family is the "cover". The real story is how the family loves, respects, encourages, and enjoys each other.



FORMING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE FAMILY



“Partnering is joint or mutual action between people. It is marked by collaborative action to achieve a common goal.”

(Ann Turnbull)

If you work with families in your role as a DSP, you will need to develop relationships with parents. There is no one way to do this. Every family and every DSP is unique. Each relationship will have its own dynamics, roles, and rules. Relationships will be created over time through collaborative effort on the part of both the DSP and the family.

As a DSP, you will in very practical ways interact with families. This means working together to achieve a common goal.

The things you can do are:

- ◆ Be personable and friendly with the family
- ◆ Seek and share information in a respectful manner



There are three things you can do to help create positive relationships:

Focus
On

- ➡ *Creating a Positive Relationship with the Family*
- ➡ *Sharing Information with the Family*
- ➡ *Building Trust with the Family*

MAINTAINING A POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FAMILY

In the past, parents were expected to be passive recipients of the advice and direction of professionals. The relationship between parent and professional was marked by what was called social distance. The relationship was impersonal and in many instances cold.

An impersonal relationship may be appropriate for some professional roles but it is no longer seen as suitable for most direct support work. While establishing appropriate boundaries remains essential in human services, the treatment of families as inferior is a thing of the past. The parent of today expects and wants to share power, responsibility, and information with the people supporting a family member.

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Here are two stories to help you think about the role and value of creating positive relationships:

1 *Bill and Angela Johnson have an eleven year old daughter, Jennifer. Jennifer has an intellectual disability and is supported on a casual basis by a support provider. The support provider is Agnes Firenza. Agnes has been supporting Jennifer for six months. The parents report that their relationship with the provider is awkward. They describe Agnes as unfriendly and very businesslike. They say Agnes limits her conversation to “hello” and “goodbye”. If asked she will give answers to questions but volunteers little information herself.*

Bill and Angela recognize that on the one hand supporting Jennifer is “just a job” and that they can not expect the provider to be as involved as they are. On the other hand they would like the relationship to be more personal and would like a sense that Agnes shared their hopes and goals for Jennifer.

**What Do
You
Think?**

Here, Agnes takes a negative approach to her support role.

How does the approach Agnes takes to her work in the story impact things like planning, information sharing, and working as partners? What is the impact on the parents emotionally?

What are the potential affects on their daughter, Jennifer, in terms of the quality of support she receives?

2 *Bill and Angela Johnson have an eleven year old daughter, Jennifer. Jennifer has an intellectual disability and is supported on a casual basis by a support provider. The support provider is Agnes Firenza. Agnes has been supporting Jennifer for six months.*

The parents report that their relationship with Agnes is excellent. They describe Agnes as friendly and caring. They say Agnes is open to discuss any aspects of supporting Jennifer. In terms of two-way communication Agnes not only answers questions but also asks questions about Jennifer. While it is "just a job" Agnes does her job in a way that inspires confidence, comfort, and effective communication.

**What Do
You
Think?**

Here Agnes takes a positive approach.

How does the positive approach Agnes takes to her work in the story impact things like planning, information sharing, and working as partners? What is the impact on the parents emotionally?

What are the potential impacts on Jennifer in terms of the quality of support she receives?



As a DSP you may have to lead the process of creating a positive relationship with the family. In most cases the family will respond and cooperate with you in this process. In some cases the family may be the party that is cold and distant. As a DSP your job is to work to create a positive relationship whatever the situation.

You can promote positive relationships by:

- ➔ Being Friendly
- ➔ Showing Interest
- ➔ Asking Questions
- ➔ Sharing Information

SHARING INFORMATION WITH THE FAMILY

For the relationship between the DSP and the parents to work, you will have to share information. You will need information about the person you support and the family will need information about what you are experiencing. You will need to share information in a clear, respectful, and helpful way. Most parents want to know how things are going for their child. They will look to you for this information.



Here are two stories to help you think about the role and value of sharing information in a constructive manner.

1 *Eugeni and Ronaldo Silvera are the foster parents of a four year old boy named Adam. Adam has FAS and is supported on a casual basis by a support provider. The support provider is Don Cascade. The foster parents report that when they ask Don about how it is going with Adam he usually responds with phrases like, "Not so hot," or "Alright, I guess." If they ask how Adam was while he was out Don often says, "He was in a bad mood," or "He acted pretty bad."*

*The parents feel that they do not get enough information about **what** actually happened, **where** it happened, **who** was involved, and **why** might it have happened? They feel that in order to support Adam in partnership with Don, they need Don to share more information.*

What Do
You
Think?

Here Don takes a negative approach to sharing information? How does it impact on the quality of support Adam receives?



2 *Eugeni and Ronoldo Silvera are foster parents of a four year old boy named Adam. Adam has FAS and is supported on a casual basis by a support provider. The support provider is Don Cascade. The foster parents report that one of the things they appreciate the most about Don is his willingness and ability to share information about Adam. If he has been out with Adam and there was any kind of problem Don always makes a point of telling the foster parents about it.*

He describes what occurred and how Adam was involved. He is not vague or overly subjective. When asked, he is open to sharing his own opinion about things relating to Adam. The parents feel that Don is a partner in supporting Adam's development. They feel they can count on him to let them know how Adam is doing when not in their presence.

**What Do
You
Think?**

Here Don takes a positive approach to sharing information?
What does Don do differently?
What benefits to both the foster parents and Adam can you see from Don's approach?

As a DSP it is part of your job to share information. You should be willing and able to do this effectively. Willingness relates to having a positive attitude about sharing information. Ability relates to having some basic

skills about how to share information. As a DSP you can communicate willingness and ability to share information by doing the following:

- ◆ Be open to the idea of information sharing
- ◆ Pay attention to what is going on when you are working
- ◆ Start with an objective description of an event (tell what happened) so both parties know the situation
- ◆ When you are being subjective (tell why you think it happened), be clear that you are sharing your opinion and not fact

BUILDING TRUST WITH THE FAMILY

Trust is a key component of any partnership between the family and the DSP. Families have to trust you to take care of their child. Remember you are at some point a stranger to the family. The challenge for you is to move from stranger to trusted ally. How can you get the family to believe in you? How can you get them to see that you are a caring and talented person who is worthy of their trust?



The following two stories will hopefully help you with this challenge.

1 *Mary Finch is a single parent and has a 27 year daughter named Brenda. Brenda has both a mental health issue in her life and has been diagnosed as having an intellectual disability. The Finch's have a support provider named Lisa O'Leary. Lisa has been the family's support provider for three months.*

Mary Finch reports that she does not have complete trust in Lisa. On a number of occasions Lisa has arrived late, without phoning. A couple of times Lisa has called at the last minute to say she was ill and could not make it. Mary is also concerned about some of the places Lisa has taken Brenda. Mary feels that in some instances they have visited places Lisa wanted to go rather than places Brenda would enjoy. Another concern is that Lisa has talked about other families she has worked with in negative and inappropriate ways.

**What Do
You
Think?**

Here Lisa has created a negative climate for trust.

Do you think that Mary and Brenda Finch should trust Lisa?

Do you think Mary sees Lisa as a suitable "partner" in supporting Brenda?

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2 *Mary Finch is a single parent and has a 27 year old daughter named Brenda. Brenda has both a mental health issue in her life and has been diagnosed as having an intellectual disability. The Finch's have a support provider named Lisa O'Leary. Lisa has been the family's support provider for three months.*

Mary Finch reports that she has complete trust in Lisa. From her first day on the job Lisa has been both dependable and reliable. Lisa has never been late or called at the last minute to cancel. The one time she had a personal matter that required her to miss work she phoned a day before to inform Mary. Lisa also shows respect, empathy, and good judgment in her planning suggestions for activities with Brenda. Mary appreciates that while Lisa has been a support provider for many years she never talks about any of the individuals or families she has worked with.

**What Do
You
Think?**

Here Lisa has created a trusting relationships.

Why do Mary and Brenda trust Lisa?

Why does Mary sees Lisa as a suitable helper in supporting Brenda?

Building trust depends on demonstrating positive character traits and responsible behavior. If, as a DSP, you want to be trusted you will have to demonstrate that you are a person who is dependable, accountable, and focused on the person you support.

So . . .

Individuals who require support need their families and DSPs to work in collaboration. Successful relationships are characterized by a mutual and positive communication, openness to sharing information, and trust. As a DSP you have the opportunity to collaborate with families.

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Resources

The Circle of Life - A Book of Activities For Life Planning

This resource was published by Continuity Care, 120 Maryland Street, Winnipeg , Manitoba. It contains useful information on families, the person-centred approach, and planning activities. The website is www.continuitycare.ca.

Life Landscapes - Parents talk about raising children with disabilities

This resource was developed by the Saskatchewan Family Resilience Project and published by the Saskatchewan Association for Community Living . The website is www.sacl.org.

Quality Mall Website

This website contains information about supporting individuals with disabling conditions. The address is www.qualitymall.org.

And Then Came John

This is the story of a young man with Down syndrome and his inclusion in the community. The story provides many positive examples of community integration. Available at Red River College, 2055 Notre Dame Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba R3H 0J9.

Friends of Clubs

This video is very useful for learning about planning as a 'partner" with parents. It also shows positive examples of involving friends and family in the support process. Available at Red River College, 2055 Notre Dame Ave. Winnipeg, Manitoba.