

Family Support NEWS BRIEF

A publication of

 CENTER FOR SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES



Capturing and Implementing Parent Voice and Leadership

John, a former owner of a civil engineering company in Cuba, is now living in the United States working as a construction worker to support his wife and two young children. Janet, a teenage mother of a 1-year-old, is working part-time at an auto parts store while finishing her last year at the vocational high school with a focus on automotive technology. Betty Sue, the eldest of seven children, a retired paralegal, grew up on a farm and is now a kinship caregiver of 8-month-old twins.

These parents and caregivers, like others, use complex leadership skills and abilities as they manage their households every day. How can family support professionals effectively partner with parents and caregivers like John, Janet, and Betty Sue to incorporate parent voice and leadership in their family support programs?

It is important for family support professionals to first establish a trustworthy, equitable, ongoing partnership with parents and caregivers. In many partnerships between parents and caregivers and family support professionals, there is a power imbalance, where the family support professional is seen as the expert and the parent is the student.

There are differences in levels of education, social class, and race and ethnicity between family support professionals and parent and caregivers. These differences often hinder or mislead the family support professionals, and family support professionals may overlook the skills, knowledge, and experience of the parents.

To change this dynamic, family support professionals can:

- Allow for a power dynamic shift and re-center the parent and caregiver as the expert.
- Use two-way communication without interruption and allow each person to ask questions and make points.
- Co-create next steps for follow-up meetings.

When parents' voices are expressed and acknowledged, remember that one or two voices do not effectively represent the opinions of all parents and caregivers. Some strategies to get more inclusive feedback from parents and caregivers and help build a culture of respect, trust, and common ground include:

- Using unique and multiple communication methods to better ensure that family support professionals are able to listen and acknowledge the concerns, ideas, and opinions of all parents.
- Compensating parents and caregivers for their time and services.

Conducting regular assessments can also help build leadership among parents and caregivers.

- Take time to talk to parents and caregivers and find out their skills, abilities, experience, and interests, which may be of value to the program.
- Assess the current progress of family leadership in the family support program, and how parents and caregivers' voices are heard.
- Get input from the parents on developing assessments and surveys.
- Provide multiple ways to assess and gather information to accommodate the unique needs of parents and caregivers.
- Conduct a staff survey to provide detailed information about if and how parents and caregivers voices are currently heard and their level of engagement as leaders in the program. The information and data gathered help family support professionals plan, modify, or create strategies to incorporate parental voice and leadership.

When parents are left out of decisions on systems, policies, and curricula, it can be frustrating and result in programs that do not reflect their needs, interests, or priorities. Instead, family support professionals can listen to parent voices and identify and leverage the strengths and talents of parents. Programs can support the leadership roles of parents at all levels.

For example, family support professionals and caregivers can:

- Conduct focus groups to gain an in-depth look at how parents participate in leadership opportunities and how parent voices are heard in family support programs.
- Review the benefits and challenges of the project together.
- Co-create a policy that addresses and supports parent leadership roles. The policy should include measurable outcomes and evaluation methods.
- Partner to identify, address, and co-create solutions to dismantle the systemic, institutional barriers that perpetuate inequities in society.

Parents and caregivers know their communities the best. In addition to improving programs, family support professionals can help parents use their expertise and experience to build the strength of their community. For example, parents can help plan a community outreach project such as a toy drive; actively serve on a parent committee or an advisory board; and help lead a Parent Café.

When parents' voices are heard and valued, and parents take on leadership roles in family support programs, it improves outcomes and has positive impacts on the family's well-being and the community at large.

Sources

1. Creamer, B. (2021, August 31). Eight Principles for Engaging and Centering Parent Voices. Ascend Aspen Institute/Ascent Network. <https://ascend.aspeninstitute.org/8-principles-for-engaging-and-centering-parent-voices/>
2. Maternal Infant, & Early Childhood Home Visiting. A Study Design Exploring Family Voice and Leadership in Home Visiting. Maternal Infant, & Early Childhood Home Visiting Technical Assistance Resource Center. <https://mchb.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/mchb/programs-impact/EDCElevatingParentVoice.pdf>
3. Taylor, Falyn. (2023 December 11). The Impact of Culture on Home Visiting Relationships [Webinar]. Center for Schools and Communities.

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To stay up to date, join us online at the [Pennsylvania Parents as Teachers Facebook page](#) or at the [Pennsylvania Strengthening Families Facebook page](#).



Family Involvement During the School Age Years

Parents play a vital role in their child's educational journey from their early learning years into their transition to formal schooling. Parents have many opportunities to support their children by getting involved in community parent groups and with their local school district. There are several ways parents can play an active role in supporting their children through their educational journey.

Parents can work with their child's teacher by becoming a classroom volunteer, attending parent-teacher conferences, joining a parent leadership group, and becoming a part of the parent teacher organization. A school's parent teacher organization, or PTO, offers parents the opportunity to work with teachers to organize school activities, raise funds, and enhance the educational experience.

Parents as Teachers Online Courses

Foundational and Model Implementation

For new parent educators and new supervisors of affiliate programs.

[Register for the February 5-16 Foundational and Model Implementation Course](#)

[Register for the February 26-March 8 Foundational and Model Implementation Course](#)

[Register for the February 20-23 Virtual PAT \(Parents as Teachers\) Foundational 2](#)

If you have any questions regarding registration for **Pennsylvania PAT** courses, please [contact Drewanne Kline](#).

Register for other courses offered by **National Parents as Teachers** at their [website](#).

Upcoming Events

Save the Date for the 2024 Pennsylvania Strengthening Families Conference
May 7-9 | State College

Save the Date for February's Family Support Webinar
February 7 | 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM ET

The Diversity Community of Practice
Wednesdays | February 7 - March 13
12:00 PM - 1:30 PM Central Time

The Diversity Community of Practice is designed to provide opportunities for leadership staff to take a deep dive into exploring ways to develop intentional strategies for hiring and retaining a diverse staff that reflects the communities that a home visiting program serves.

Topics and discussions will include defining diversity, the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility, how to actively reflect on the community that you serve, and how to recruit, hire, and grow staff to serve families in intentional and culturally sensitive ways.

Anyone with an active curriculum subscriber subscription or model certification can participate.

[Register for Diversity Community of Practice](#)

Please note our new email address FamilySupport@csc.csiu.org

Effective January 2024, all communications from and to our Family Support Team will exclusively use the email address familysupport@csc.csiu.org.

We kindly request that you take a moment to update your contact lists and inform your IT department or relevant parties within your organization to ensure that emails from familysupport@csc.csiu.org are permitted and not filtered as spam.

If you have any questions or require further assistance regarding this change, please do not hesitate to reach our Family Support Team at the new email address familysupport@csc.csiu.org.

We appreciate your understanding and cooperation in this matter. Thank you for your continued trust in Center for Schools and Communities.



Family Support Team

Family Support at Center for Schools and Communities provides training and technical assistance to Parents as Teachers providers, Children's Trust Fund grantees, and the Strengthening Families Leadership Team.

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Safe Kids Corner: TV and Furniture Tip-overs

You wouldn't think about bringing a baby home from the hospital without a car seat or having your child ride a bike without a helmet. Protecting your children from the potential risk of TV and furniture tip-overs is another important part of keeping them safe.

Hard Facts about TV and Furniture Tip-Overs

- Every three weeks a child dies from a television tipping over.
- Each day, 10 kids go to the ER because of a TV tip-over.

Top Tips for TV Safety

- **Secure TVs.** Mount flat-panel TVs to the wall. Place older, box-style TVs (CRTs) on low, stable furniture that can hold the weight.
- **Attach furniture to the wall.** Use anti-tip brackets, braces, or wall straps to secure furniture to the wall. Install stops on dresser drawers to keep them from being pulled all the way out.
- **Rearrange household items.** Store heavy objects on lower shelves or in lower drawers. Avoid placing remote controls, toys, or other items in places where kids might be tempted to climb up or reach for them.
- **Recycle old TVs.** To find a location that safely and easily recycles unwanted TVs, go to GreenerGadgets.org.

Learn More

These tips will help get you started, but if you're interested in learning more about how to keep your family safe from TV and furniture tip-overs, [read a full list of TV and furniture tip-over prevention tips](#).

Read article on [Safe Kids Worldwide's website](#).

Share Your Story

Please send your success stories or program news to share in future News Briefs to [Drewanne Kline](#).