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topic facts

How families and professionals can build winning partnerships

*P*arent and professionals partnership is so important in planning and providing services that truly meet the needs of children and their families.

Effective communication can help families and professionals overcome the barriers to good working relationships.

Families look toward educators, health care providers and other professionals to provide information and support that will help their children to learn, grow and succeed. With strong parent-professional collaboration, parents play a pivotal role in their children's education, health care and overall development. When doctors, school administrators, teachers, therapists, coaches and others are sensitive to families and communicate clearly with them, they help parents to help their children. Here are some ways for families and professionals to overcome some of the most common barriers to successful partnerships.

Developing trust

To develop relationships with families based on trust, professionals could

- link parents with others who have had similar experiences, or with a parent support group
- give families on-going information and opportunities to gain new knowledge and skills

- use the school's guidance counselor or a social worker, who may be associated with the families' health care provider, as a family support person
- begin conversations or meetings with positive statements about the child
- recognize and respect parents as experts on the subject of their child
- call upon parents to provide valuable information and insight on their children
- welcome parents' questions and encourage their participation in all meetings or discussions concerning their children
- recognize and encourage families' interests, strengths and skills
- create an atmosphere in which families' cultural traditions, values and diverse backgrounds are acknowledged and honored.



To order copies of this fact sheet, or to learn more about VPIC's materials and services, contact the Vermont Parent Information Center (VPIC), 600 Blair Park, Suite 301, Williston, VT 05495, (802) 876-5315 (v/tty) or toll free 1 (800) 639-7170. You can also contact us via e-mail at vpic@vtpic.com. And don't forget to visit our website at www.vtpic.com.

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Family participation

Because parent-professional partnership is a two-way street, parents could

- let professionals know that as parents, they expect to take an active part in making decisions regarding their children
- try to attend all meetings having to do with their children
- come up with goals, needs, strengths, and services for their children and family
- be committed to the plan developed for their children
- get to know the people working with their children
- keep in touch with professionals either by phone, in writing, or in person
- tell professionals when they are doing a good job as well as when things aren't going well
- respect the knowledge and skills that professionals can bring to the relationship
- ask for clarification, more information, or help in making difficult decisions or choices

Transportation and child care problems

Because parents may need help getting to and from meetings with professionals and with child care, professionals could

- help parents find transportation
- hold meetings in parents' homes and at times that are convenient for families
- connect parents with support groups or agencies in the community that provide transportation and child care services
- provide families with school-supported transportation and child care

Through good working relationships, based on shared responsibility and mutual commitment to children, families and professionals can and do improve their whole community.