

TATS eUpdate  
Family Involvement

Working with Families in the Context of Home and Community  
Environments  
November 2007

In order to form partnerships with families of the children served in early childhood programs, it is important to understand how each family system functions. According to the literature, *family systems theory* refers to an examination of family functioning from the viewpoint that all members of the family impact on each other and affect how the family functions. The “family system approach” requires that professionals understand the important effect all family members have on each other and the child. Having a child with a disability is an additional factor that will alter the family system. By understanding the characteristics of the family and the family’s support system, there is an opportunity to establish positive, trusting relationships and partnerships between families and professionals. The result will increase the participation of the family in the child’s education.

**Best Practice:**

It is important to realize that the child in the classroom also functions in a home with a family and in the surrounding community. The child affects these entities and, in turn, is affected by them. The child brings school issues home and home issues may be brought to school. Both home and school issues are also brought into the community.

The type, degree and age of the child at the time of diagnosis of a disability also impact family functioning. Some children are diagnosed at birth, others when they are two, three or four years old. Still others may not be diagnosed until they are in the second or third grade and experience school failure. Some disabilities require intense medical interventions and support, others require adaptive equipment and accommodations, while still others need intensive remediation once a child enters school. Whatever the disability, the impact on the family occurs on a daily basis with differing degrees of intensity. It is important for the teachers to be aware of the implications, not only on how the disability affects the child’s learning, but also the potential limitations in life style and options for the families.

Another consideration is the impact of the culture and ethnicity of the family which influences the degree and type of participation in which they will engage with professionals and schools. It is important to respect the families and their cultures and respond to their needs and values in light of those cultures. In order to work effectively with families of diverse backgrounds, it is also important to know how their specific

culture views disabilities. Some cultures place great value on cooperation, cohesiveness, and interdependence which differs from the school culture's emphasis on individual achievement and a competitive spirit. For these and other reasons, racially/culturally diverse families are sometimes only marginally involved in the education of their children with disabilities

**Reflection:**

1. Why is it important that professionals understand family and cultural perspectives?
2. Do you think your perspectives on what is best for a child match what a parent's perspective might be? How would you come to an agreement if they were different?
3. Are familial or cultural differences taken into consideration when planning school/program activities or events?

*Every single person has capabilities, abilities and gifts. Living a good life depends on whether those capabilities can be used, abilities expressed and gifts given. If they are, the person will be valued, feel powerful and well-connected to the people around them. And the community around the person will be more powerful because of the contribution the person is making.* - John Kretzmann and John McKnight

**References and Resources:**

Al-Hassan, S., & Gardner, R., III. (2002). Involving Immigrant Parents of Students with Disabilities in the Educational Process. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 34(5), 52-58.

Berger, E. H. (2003). *Parents as partners in education: Families and schools working together* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Brewster, C., & Railsback, J. (2003). *Building trust with schools and diverse families: A foundation for lasting partnerships*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. [Available at [www.nwrel.org/request/2003dec/trust.pdf](http://www.nwrel.org/request/2003dec/trust.pdf)]

Christenson, S. L., & Sheridan, S. M. (2001). *Schools and families: Creating essential connections for learning*. New York: Guildford Press.

*Cross-cultural considerations in early childhood special education*. (Technical Report #14) [Electronic version]. August 18, 2003. Champaign-Urbana, IL: Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services for Early Childhood Research (CLAS) Institute. <http://clas.uiuc.edu/techreport/tech12.html>

Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., & Clark, L. A. (2000). *Connecting home, school, and community: New directions for social research*. In Hallinan, M. T. (Ed.), *Handbook of the sociology of education*. New York, NY: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers

Turnbull, A., Turnbull, R., Erwin, E. Soodak, L. (2006). *Families, Professionals, and Exceptionalities: Positive Outcomes Through Partnership and Trust 5<sup>th</sup> Edition*. Merrill Prentice Hall, Saddle River, NJ.

Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) – Early Childhood Research Institute

Identifies, evaluates, and promotes effective and appropriate early intervention and preschool practices for children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Resource bank for effective materials and strategies.

<http://clas.uiuc.edu/aboutclas.html>

Family Involvement Network of Educators (FINE)

Part of the Harvard Family Research Project. The work of the Network includes increasing teacher and administrator preparation in family involvement and community partnerships; dissemination of assessment methods in family involvement programs and training models; and highlighting opportunities for families and schools to participate in design and implementation of teacher preparation programs. Much current information on school/teacher/family partnerships is available through their resource link.

[www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine.html](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/fine.html)

PACER Center

Created by parents of children and youth with disabilities to assist other families and is staffed primarily with parents of children with disabilities. It has extensive links and information to family involvement in school and the education system for children and youth with disabilities. [www.pacer.org](http://www.pacer.org)

Partnership for Family Involvement in Education

One component of its mission is to ‘increase opportunities for families to be more involved in their children’s learning at school and at home.’ Partner organizations work with postsecondary institutions and local schools to develop teacher preparation and professional development opportunities in family involvement. [www.pfie.ed.gov](http://www.pfie.ed.gov)

Technical Assistance and Training System (TATS)

Statewide project providing technical assistance and training to programs in Florida serving prekindergarten children with disabilities. Website provides information and resources on curriculum and instruction, evaluation and assessment, family involvement, inclusion, program effectiveness/quality, and transition, as well as, linking early childhood partners. [www.tats.ucf.edu](http://www.tats.ucf.edu)



*TATS eUpdates are a service of the Technical Assistance & Training System Communities of Practice. The TATS eUpdates are intended to provide current information related to best practices or trends in the education of young children with special needs in the areas of Transition, Program Effectiveness, Inclusion, Curriculum & Instruction, Evaluation & Assessment, and Family Involvement. For more information about the TATS Communities of Practices and the TATS eUpdates, please log on to [www.tats.ucf.edu](http://www.tats.ucf.edu).*