

# Forming and Maintaining Relationships

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## Concepts to consider

- ▶ Why relationships matter
- ▶ Building parent skills through positive relationships
- ▶ Boundaries and role clarity
- ▶ Being therapeutic without doing therapy (aka, “Staying in your lane”)

# Relationship and child development



- ▶ We understand this concept well in early childhood!
- ▶ Attachment relationships
- ▶ Parents as first teachers
- ▶ Other important primary relationships

# Relationship: Not just for kids!

- ▶ Relationships are the vehicle through which most important learning occurs throughout our lives!
- ▶ A supportive relationship can lead to learning and growth at any age
- ▶ Research shows that parents who feel trust and support from a provider are more likely to be engaged and do things that are needed by their children (Daro & Harding, 1999)

# Relationships

are the medium through which  
intervention is delivered -  
change occurs through the  
quality of interaction

Kadija Johnston

# Role of Relationship in EC Fields

*The success of all interventions will rest on the quality of provider-family relationships, even when the relationship itself is not the focus of the intervention.*

Kalmanson & Seligman, 1992, p. 48

# Working Alliance: A Collaborative Partnership

When providers show:

- Empathy and Understanding
- Warmth
- Responsiveness

Parents are more likely to

- Stick with a program
- Share when things are hard, mistakes are made
- Try the ideas that are suggested

# Parenting and SUD

Substance use compromises parts of the brain critical to relationships and performing caregiving



Parents with SUD struggle with the stress of childrearing



Child social and emotional development is hindered



# Opportunities for Growth in Parents with SUD

- ▶ Improve parent emotional regulation
- ▶ Reduce stress/improve stress tolerance
- ▶ Learn to find pleasure in the caregiving role

[https://www.srcd.org/sites/default/files/resources/%E2%80%A2Child%20Evidence%20Brief\\_No2\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.srcd.org/sites/default/files/resources/%E2%80%A2Child%20Evidence%20Brief_No2_FINAL.pdf)

## Parent Growth Benefits Parent and Children

Improvements in these three areas are associated with:

- ▶ Reduction in severity of substance use
- ▶ Improved parent well-being
- ▶ Improved child well-being

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# Strategies for Building Positive Relationships



Clear two-way communication; includes active listening and observation, soliciting feedback

Perspective taking; noticing and wondering

Demonstrating curiosity and genuine interest about another

Recognize and make use of emotions (one's own and others)

Showing respect; individuals and cultures

# May require shifts from

Focus on the child or parent....

to shared focus on the child and parent

Expert stance.....

to collaborative or partnership stance

Conducting assessments on a child/family ....

.... “sitting beside and getting to know” a child/family

Providing education/information....

providing space for a parent to participate in identify solutions

# Barriers to Forming Positive Relationships

## Parent

- Difficult past experiences (loss in early childhood, bad experiences with systems)
- Difficult current situations (domestic violence, poverty)
- Personal challenges (mental illness, addiction, incarceration)
- Personality styles that affect relationship

## Provider

- Attitudes, beliefs
- Counter-transference issues
- Burn-out
- Blurring boundaries



Boundaries—what comes to mind?



Norman-Murch, 2005

## Boundaries and Decision-Making

- ▶ What are the costs/benefits (self, agency, family/client)
- ▶ What is my motivation?
  - ▶ What is this all about?
- ▶ What is my role in the situation (Staying in your lane)
  - ▶ Scope of practice
  - ▶ Feeling the “press” to do more or less
- ▶ What may I be committing myself to in the future?

# Staying in your lane when the lines are blurred



Access ongoing training and supervision



Know what you don't know



Clearly understand and be able to communicate your role/ "piece of the work"



Identify, access, and partner with other services/ systems



# Reflection & Self Awareness Supports Engagement

Our work requires taking multiple perspectives ~

- ▶ Thinking about and “holding” each family member’s experiences and feelings
- ▶ Considering contexts, cultures, communities, individual differences
- ▶ AND maintaining a level of self-awareness
- ▶ Lets us be present and ready to engage with the family as a whole

# Thank you!

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