Parent Leadership 101

Presented by Diana Autin, Executive Co-Director
Statewide Parent Advocacy Network
September 26, 2011
Why do parents get involved?

• We believe the issue is important to us and our family
• We believe we have something to contribute
• We believe that we will be listened to and our contributions respected
• We believe that our participation will make a difference
How do parents stay involved?

- Multiple opportunities for participation, from a small contribution of time to progressively larger contributions of time and effort.

- The level of our participation can vary depending on our life circumstances.
How do parents stay involved?

• We receive sufficient advance notice
• Our participation is facilitated:
  - Child care
  - Transportation
  - Dinner
  - Compensation for time
  - Education & information in understandable language & formats
  - Mentoring/pairing with experienced family member
How do parents stay involved?

- We are listened to; our ideas are supported & respected
- We do not experience retribution as a result of our participation
- Our participation has an impact
- Our participation is consciously & visibly appreciated
Shared leadership is important because:

- Multiple perspectives & diverse strengths and talents are combined to achieve goals
- Families know how systems really work “on the ground”
Who is a parent leader?

- Committed to making positive changes in his/her family, community, &/or system
- Represents a parent voice, not a staff role
What is leadership?

- Leadership is an attitude and a behavior, not a position
- Leadership can be shared
- Leadership can be collaborative
- Leadership can be learned
We learn leadership in many ways

- Learn from others who serve as role models
- Learn from formal training
- "Just do it"
Important leadership skills

• Active listening
• Empathy
• Sincere caring
• Recognition & appreciation of other leaders’ knowledge & skills
• Focus on strengthening knowledge & skills
• Shared decision-making
Pathways to Parent Leadership

- Critical supports:
  - Contact with other parents in leadership roles
  - Opportunities to take on leadership roles, however small, & safe settings to practice them
  - Relationship with respected & trusted person who provides feedback & support
  - Sense of belonging
Many types of Leadership

I. Challenging the process
II. Inspiring a shared vision
III. Enabling others to act
IV. Modeling the Way
V. Encouraging the heart
Roles for parent leaders

- Role model for other parents
- Co-trainers
- Contributor to materials
- Participant at conferences, meeting
- Paid consultant
- Grant reviewer
- Participant in evaluation & quality improvement activities
Roles for parent leaders

- Participant in needs/strengths assessment processes
- Advocate for individuals, families, programs, system change
- Participant in focus groups
- Advisory Board or Board member
- Witness at public hearings
- Public speaker
- Media interviewee/spokesperson
Experiences as a parent leader

- Think about your experiences as a parent leader
- Have you experienced conflict?
- How have you handled conflict?
What is Conflict

- Expressed struggle
- Two or more people
- Interdependent
- Strong emotion
- Perceived blockage
Spheres of Conflict

- Structural Conflicts
- Data Conflicts
- Value Conflicts
- Relationship Conflicts
- Interest Conflicts
Positions & Interests

- Positions vs. interests
- Types of interests
- Finding the interests
Positions & Interests

• **Position:**
  - Specific solution proposed to resolve problem - the “What”

• **Interest:**
  - Underlying real need/desire that gives position its life (beliefs, values, expectations, fears, priorities, hopes, concerns) - the “Why”

• **Getting to interest:**
  - Why is that solution so important to you?
Positions & Interests

Be in by 10:00

Possible Interests
- Concern about safety
- Wanting to be a good parent
- Wanting to exercise control
- Wanting to protect against bad influences
- Wanting to be able to sleep at night
- Concerned about what neighbors think
Finding the Interests

- What need is the person taking this position attempting to satisfy?
- What is motivating the person?
- What is the person trying to accomplish?
- What is the person afraid will happen if a demand is not fulfilled?
“Seek first to understand, then to be understood.”

Stephen Covey, “Habit 5”
Seven Habits of Highly Effective People
Listening is a leadership skill

- Listening is a skill in which a person voluntarily and consciously gives his/her attention to another so s/he can hear what is being said. It is not a natural art, but something that is learned and can be improved upon. Besides being able to hear what *is* being said, it is equally important to hear what *is not* being said.
Listening → Problem-solving

- Sometimes parents just need to be heard.
- Sometimes listening clears up confusion.
- Sometimes listening identifies a need for problem-solving.
Art of Empathetic Listening

- Think of a time when someone listened to you.
- What did he/she do that made you feel s/he was listening?
- What was his/her attitude toward you?
Not listening

• Think back to an experience of someone not listening to you.
Listening

- You can’t do two things at once if one of them is listening.

- You can’t listen if you are trying to figure out what to say.

- You can’t listen if you are assuming.
The Chinese characters that make up the verb “to listen” tell us something about this skill.
Cultural Reciprocity

- Following the thoughts and feelings of others to understand what they are saying from their perspective, frame of reference, or point of view...and why it’s important to them
- Sharing one’s own thoughts and feelings
- Developing relationships based on DIGNITY + RESPECT
To See (or Hear) Clearly

- It is only with the heart that one can see clearly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.
  - The Little Prince
  Antoine de Saint Exupery
Cultural Reciprocity

- Cultures have different ways of responding to relationships, parenting, conflict, etc.
- Culture shapes status, relationships and social behaviors with regard to conflict resolution
- Recognize that many people communicate and process information differently
Leadership “To-Do’s”

• Check-in, monitor and behave responsibly
• Allow time for reflection, don’t always fill silent spaces
• Keep in mind that our actions and words don’t always have the impact we intend
• How others perceive us is their reality even if it is not our reality
Listening

- Listen carefully, not just with your ears but with your heart
- Listen to discover not just the facts and the "issues," but the underlying emotions
- Listen to identify power imbalances and cultural impacts
Moving from Cultural Competence to Cultural Reciprocity

- Do unto others as they would have you do unto them.
- You can only practice cultural reciprocity if you listen with the heart...for the heart...and share your heart.
You are a parent leader!

• What are your strengths? What is the one thing you can most contribute?

- Think about your communication skills, your ability to develop team spirit, to bring people together, your ability to problem solve, to see new solutions, your capacity to inspire others.

• What will you do next week?