

Creating partnerships with families through trust building

Family-centered approach

The role that families play as collaborators in the inclusive process is crucial. Historically families have been relegated to the sidelines when it comes to working on their child's education team, mainly taking on the role of recipient of professional knowledge.

Shifting the role of families from passive recipients of information to active participants in the planning process is critical when we plan for the additional needs of our inclusive students. Families hold a wealth of knowledge and know the student far more intimately than test results, assessments or even professionals.

Research has shown that when families and educators collaborate, it enhances the likelihood that students will have a positive learning experience (Vallejo, Valle, & Epstein, 2015), and this has been demonstrated to improve outcomes for students with additional learning needs.



ISPIE

The Institute of Specialist Practitioners in Inclusive Education

Creating partnerships with families through trust building

Communication

Building a rapport and strong relationships requires different types of communication and a way of communicating that is built over time. Families of students with learning differences appreciate frequent communication. Guidelines:

- ✓ Create a welcoming environment that is hospitable and engaging
- ✓ Be attentive, use active listening skills and show that you value parent input
- ✓ Make comments and repeat what is being said to check for understanding
- ✓ Be clear, succinct and honest with your message
- ✓ Avoid using jargon when sharing information so your message is understood

Listen to parent perspectives with empathy and ask them if they will be willing to brainstorm options that would involve them and you collaborating to promote their child's learning program.



ISPIE

The Institute of Specialist Practitioners in Inclusive Education

Creating partnerships with families through trust building

Respect

Relationships in which each partner regards all others with esteem. Communicate care for the family through actions and words. Indicators include:

- ✓ Honouring the family's background
- ✓ Affirming each other's strengths
- ✓ Treating students and their families with dignity

The way we interact with parents in our communication will strongly influence their involvement in the learning process.

Talk to school leadership about having handbooks translated into languages that represent the diversity of your school population to ensure parents understand what support is available at your school.



ISPIE

The Institute of Specialist Practitioners in Inclusive Education

Creating partnerships with families through trust building

Equality and empowerment

When families are empowered, they become more fully engaged as members of the team seeking to provide the best support for their child. Developing this empowerment takes time and intentionality and is curated by providing opportunities for families to develop creative approaches to support their child. Indicators include:

- ✓ Allowing two-way communication with the school - sharing power so families are consulted on decisions related to their child's goals and learning program
- ✓ Fostering empowerment where families are heard and encouraged to speak up even if the team does not agree
- ✓ Parents bring questions to meetings, have input into their child's goals, are provided with options, and eventually help co-facilitate meetings

See slide on **parent input** to consider the areas where parents can contribute to their child's individual learning plan / individual education plan.



ISPIE

The Institute of Specialist Practitioners in Inclusive Education

Creating partnerships with families through trust building

Commitment

Be sensitive to the emotional needs of the family, they could be experiencing challenges in the home that we are not aware of. Indicators include:

- ✓ Being available to the family for consultation
- ✓ Going above and beyond what is expected
- ✓ Being sensitive to the family's emotional needs – coming to terms with their child's diagnosis can be a process that takes time.

Stay in contact with the family; issue invitations to attend school events, field trips or open house days. Don't leave them on their own to make connections in a new school community; arrange for them to meet with another family or introduce them to other parents in the school.



ISPIE

The Institute of Specialist Practitioners in Inclusive Education

Creating partnerships with families through trust building

Trust

Maintain confidentiality. Parents should have confidence in our words, judgment and actions, and they should believe that we will act in the best interest of their child. Indicators include:

- ✓ Being reliable
- ✓ Establish empathy with families, by listening without judgement
- ✓ Maintaining confidentiality
- ✓ Trusting ourselves

Never discuss details about a student with another parent and be discerning about the information you share with others.



ISPIE

The Institute of Specialist Practitioners in Inclusive Education