



Principle #6 Provide Opportunities for Agency and Control

As traumatic experiences involve a loss of power and control resulting in feelings of helplessness, terror and often, hopelessness, trauma responsive practices support parents and families to have opportunities for agency and control. This is often described as ‘voice and choice’. Trauma-responsive environments supports parents and families to have opportunities to provide input to inform the decisions that impact them (e.g., policies, processes and procedures), to make choices and participate in creating mutually agreed upon goals, and to feel a sense of control in communication, interactions and within early learning environments.

Asking for Consent: Parents and Families as “Invited Guests”

- Communicating messages to the parents and families that they have choices
- Reducing the power differential between educators and families
- Allowing opportunities for withdrawing
- Using family input to inform decisions and processes

What does ‘asking for consent’ look like? Requesting to be an invited guest in the life of a parent/family might sound like:

- “Your child said something in class today that I’d like to share with you. Is this a good time to discuss this with you?”
- “Would you be willing to meet with us/me about your child’s preferences for different foods?”
- “I want to share some things about your child in our classroom. May I share some of my observations with you?”
- “How much time do you have for our meeting?”
- “Where is best location for you to meet?”
- “Where would you like me to sit?”
- “Should I take my shoes off (when entering a home)?”

An example of using the concept of the “Invited Guest” in an ECE program:

Javier Diaz is a home visitor for a Head Start Program in Texas. He visits families weekly and provides parenting education and support services. He shares with us how uses this concept of the “invited guest”:

Two days before my appointment with a family, I send a friendly text asking if they are still free for our appointment and if the time still works for them. I also invite them to feel free to share any topics, concerns or questions they may have. I make sure they have a choice to send this information in advance in writing or, if they prefer, to wait for the meeting so they are able to choose which way to communicate based on what they are most comfortable with. I have found some families do better by sending their thoughts in writing in advance but are not as comfortable when I am with them in person. The day of the meeting, I send off one more text as a friendly reminder telling them that I am on my way. When I arrive at the family’s home for a visit, I knock in case a child is sleeping. When they open the door, I ask if they prefer that I take off my shoes. In the beginning, I always ask where they prefer for me to sit. We start off every meeting with me asking them, “Tell me what is on your mind this week.



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How are you doing?" This open-ended question allows them to lead the conversation with topics that are important to them.

Javier uses this strategy of the “invited guest” to illustrate the trauma-responsive principle of **Providing Opportunities for Agency and Control**. This principle is often described as giving people “voice and choice” which can provide a sense of control in an environment. The more stress and chaos we feel in our lives, the more we can feel out of control and this can be expounded when it triggers past feelings of trauma. When Javier asks the family for consent or offers them with choices, he provides them with opportunities to have a sense of power and control in the interaction which can significantly help adults to calm their stress response systems and return to a state of regulation.

Reflection/Discussion Question

- Have you ever had someone come into your familiar environment/home and they acted as if they were an “invited guest”? How did that feel for you?
- Have you ever entered the home or the environment of someone else and you acted as if you were the “invited guest” using the concept above? What did you notice?