




## Trauma-Responsive Resilience Building Family Engagement



### Julie Nicholson



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## Goals

- Describe the difference between family involvement and family engagement
- Introduce several trauma-responsive resilience building principles of family engagement
- Learn some concrete strategies that buffer stress and improve communication with parents and families

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## Defining "Parent" and "Family"

- The words "parent" and "family" are inclusive and respect all adult caregivers who make a difference in a child's life.
- Parents refers to biological, adoptive, and step-parents as well as primary caregivers, such as grandparents, other adult family members, and foster parents.
- Families can be biological or nonbiological, chosen or circumstantial. They are connected through culture, language, tradition, shared experiences, emotional commitment, and mutual support.

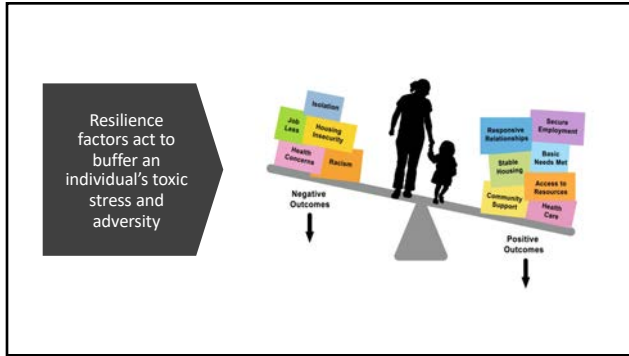
Source: <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/parent-involvement-family-engagement-for-professionals.pdf>

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### Brain-Based Family Engagement Strategies with a Trauma-Responsive Lens

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family Engagement</li> <li>Shared Decision-Making</li> <li>Knowledge of Child Development</li> <li>Two-way, Reciprocal Communication</li> <li>Flexible and Open to Change</li> <li>Promote Wellness and Resilience</li> </ul>		<b>Forebrain</b> "Air Traffic Control System" "CEO or Boss"	<b>EXECUTIVE BRAIN</b> Thinking Reasoning Impulse Control Empathy Perspective-Taking Logical Reasoning Problem Solving
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agency, Control and Voice</li> <li>Inclusion and Belonging</li> <li>Attunement</li> <li>Social Networking</li> <li>Promote Parent Competence</li> <li>Power-sharing Partnerships</li> <li>Acknowledge Strengths</li> </ul>		<b>Limbic BRAIN</b> "Emotional Center" "Attachment"	<b>MAMMAL BRAIN</b> Attachment and Connection Emotions Inclusion and Belonging Emotional Buttons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Safety and Predictability</li> <li>Nurturing and Responsive Relationships</li> <li>Understand Stress and Trauma</li> </ul>		<b>HINDBRAIN</b> "Alarm Center" Brainstem	<b>REPTILE BRAIN</b> Motor Regulation Fight, Flight, Freeze Heart Rate Increases Breathing Rapid Blood Pressure Increases Sensations in the Body

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### Family Involvement versus Family Engagement

Simply put, **parent involvement** is often more of a "doing to," while **engagement** is a "doing with." With involvement, schools tend to **lead with their mouth** -- generally telling parents what they should be doing. Engagement, on the other hand, has schools **leading with their ears**. By listening to parents' and family members' ideas, and by eliciting from them what they have found works best with their children, we can develop a more genuine partnership.

Ferlazzo (2012)

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### PARENT OR FAMILY INVOLVEMENT (Doing for)

- Involve = to enfold or envelop
- Schools identify projects, needs, and goals and then tell parents how they can contribute
- One-way communication
- Parent events are predominantly planned and implemented by the school staff and/or outside experts

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### PARENT OR FAMILY Engagement (Doing with)

- Engage = to come together and interlock
- Focus on listening and learning about what parents/family members think, dream and worry about. Goal is to build partnerships
- Two-way communication
- Focus beyond school to consider neighborhood and community

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### Family Involvement or Family Engagement?

- A teacher calls a family to share information about a child's behavior at school.
- A parent coordinator act as liaisons between the parent communities and the school or program.
- An expert on early literacy shares recommended practices for book reading in the home at a parent meeting
- Home visits and phone calls/emails are not limited to concerns and problems about a child.
- A newsletter offers information on a new discipline policy.
- A family night is planned focused on a topic parents/families are interested in
- An automated phone call welcomes parents to a new school year.
- Parents/Family members are invited to contribute information (and respond to the teacher's documentation) to classroom assessments of a child's skills and knowledge.
- An email is sent with requests for donations or volunteer support for a program food drive.
- Parents and families help to determine the mission, goals and activities of the program/school.

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What do you do that represents:

Family Involvement?

Family engagement?



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### 8 Core Principles of Trauma-Responsive Practice

- Build Mutually Respectful and Trusting Relationships that Lead to Reciprocal Partnerships\*
- Understand Stress and Trauma
- Acknowledge Systems of Privilege and Oppression and Take Actions to Disrupt Inequity
- Reinforce Messages of Safety and Predictability
- Focus on Strengths and Assets\*
- Use Culturally, Linguistically and Individually Responsive Practices
- Intentionally Promote Coping, Resilience and Healing
- Provide Opportunities for Agency and Control\*



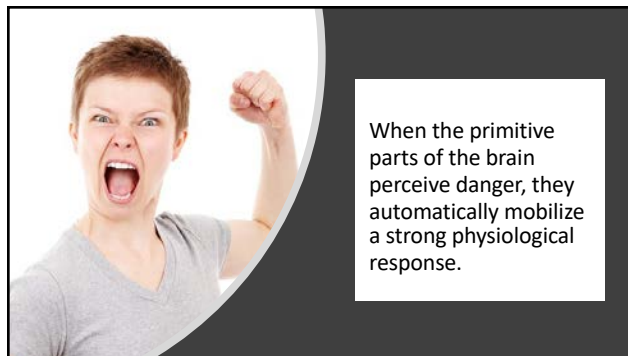
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Build Trusting Relationships that Lead to Reciprocal Partnerships

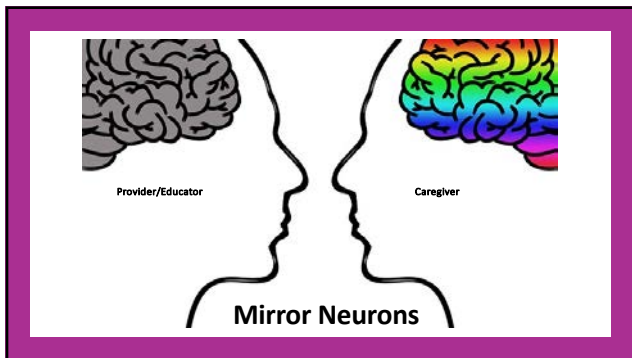
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<p><b>Connect with the right:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Validating emotions</li> <li>Reassuring: tone of voice, listening</li> <li>Nonverbal: touch, facial expressions</li> <li>Attunement: feeling felt</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Redirect with the left:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain</li> <li>Plan</li> <li>Negotiate</li> <li>Reason</li> </ul>	<p><small>*Dr. Daniel Siegel, The Whole Brain Child</small></p>

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**Name It to Tame It**

**Help adults tell their stories to calm big emotions:**

Research shows that merely assigning a name or label to what we feel calms down the activity of the emotional circuitry in the right hemisphere

*Source: Dr. Daniel Siegel, The Whole Brain Child*

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A grandmother came to pick up her grandchild from school and the teacher had never seen her before. The teacher introduced herself and asked if they could help her.

Grandmother stated she was there to pick up her grandson. It was explained to her that the policy of the program is to check the Emergency card to see if her name was on there. Grandmother said, "It better be on there".

Unfortunately, her name was not on the most current emergency card.

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**Discussion**

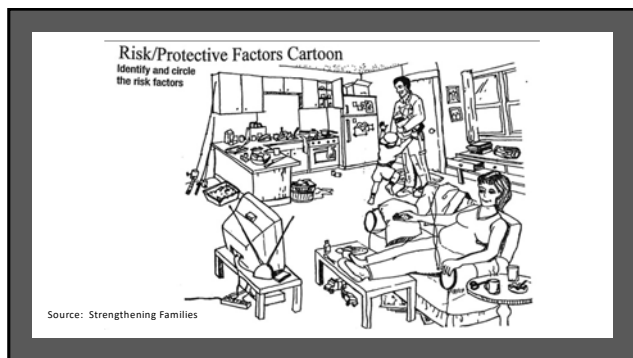
What did you notice/hear in this video?

When you are communicating with a parent or family, what are the small ways (nonverbally or verbally) you show them you are invested in their child, you care about them, they belong and are valued in your program?

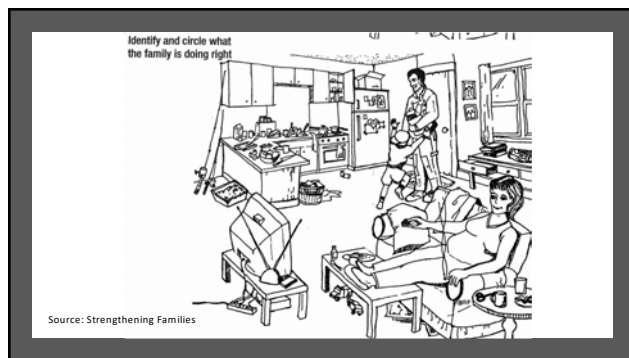
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**Shifting from Deficit to Strength-Based Perspectives**

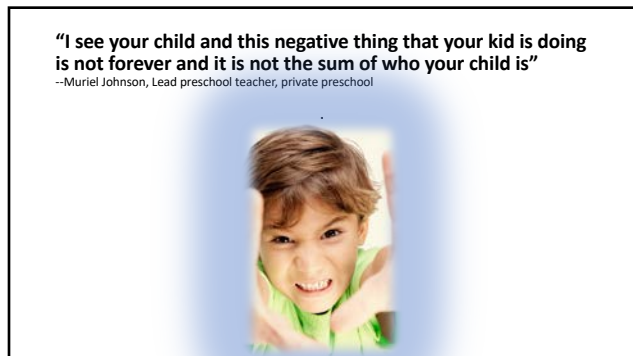
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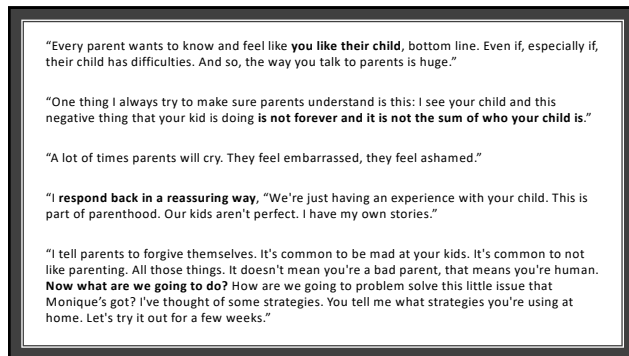
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### Reflection/Discussion

- When you have a child who is having challenges, what ways like Muriel do you approach a parent to help them feel safe to talk about it with you?
- How do you move yourself from your first reaction of “you need to fix your child’s challenging behavior” to “we are going to solve this problem together?”

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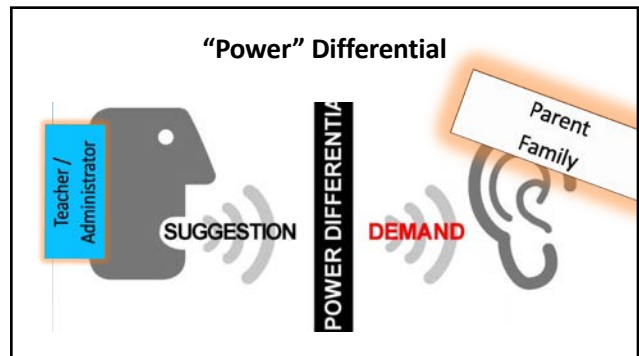


When reactive behavior is understood as a coping strategy, we discover hidden resilience; the new question becomes, **What is your behavior communicating?** or **“What is strong with you?”**  
*(Bereiter & Brave Heart, 2017)*

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## Provide Opportunities for Agency and Control

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### Building Trust by Taking the Stance of an Invited Guest



- Asking permission. Valuing consent.
- Communicating messages to the parents and families that they have choices
- Allowing opportunities for withdrawing
- Using family input to inform decisions and processes

\*The invited guest concept is one of the best ways to build confidence in schools and serves as a reminder that trust is enhanced when people have the ability to leave.\* (Ketterer, 2020)

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### Provide Opportunities for Agency and Control

As a loss of control is one of the conditions of a traumatic experience, gaining a felt sense of agency—that is, **having a voice and feelings of control**, is essential for coping and healing from trauma.

When we provide opportunities for families to make choices, to influence programming, or provide input and feedback and elevate their voice, we are creating the conditions that help them to reduce their stress, cope, build resilience and/or heal from trauma and adversity.

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### Letter to Parent: Take 1

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Dear Mr. Concord,

I hope you and your family are doing well. I am writing to check in about the requirement for Maritza's physical exam. Last week I spoke to your wife and she mentioned that Maritza was not able to attend her previously scheduled appointment.

Please let me know at your earliest convenience when you have scheduled another appointment.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Laura Canelli

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### Letter to Parent: Take 2

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Dear Mr. Concord,

I hope you and your family are doing well. I know you and your family have so much on your plate. I don't want to add to that. However, we have a few urgent program requirements regarding Maritza. I would love to partner with you in meeting these deadlines. What is the most convenient option for you to connect? Would you prefer to speak by email, Zoom, phone or a home visit? Do you have a preferred time for our conversation?

I look forward to speaking with you. Working together, I'm confident we can ensure Maritza's continuing participation in the program. We are very grateful to have all of you enrolled in our program.

Laura Canelli

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### Tips and Take-Aways

- Balance of Family involvement and family engagement
- Understand the impact of stress/ trauma on behavior
- Know the power of relationships. Mirror neurons.
- Look for strengths and points of connection
- Reduce power differentials
- Provide opportunities for agency and control

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