Module 5 Family Collaboration Activity

[Collaborating with Families, IRIS Center Module](http://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/fam/)

You have completed the IRIS Center module on collaborating with families. Take some time to answer the following questions. If you have trouble answering any of the questions, go back and review the Perspectives & Resources pages in the module.

1. Describe the range of emotions associated with being the parent of a child with special needs. Select two emotional states and describe how you as a teacher would you work with a parent experiencing these emotions.

Parents can experience a lot of different emotions living with a child with special needs. This can include denial, guilt, anger, fear, but also include positive emotions like joy, compassion, and empathy, especially for those with disabilities. These emotions don’t necessarily happen one at a time or in any particular order, but may occur throughout the life of the family. Many parents feel the emotion of grief when they are faced with the loss of their hopes and dreams for their child. I think I would help a parent experiencing grief by being compassionate and listening to their concerns. I would want them to feel heard and I would want them to feel ok expressing these emotions. If the parent were up for it, I may also help them recognize and plan for the things their child may be able to do some day. If a parent were feeling joy, I would celebrate that with them and continue to encourage them in whatever success their family and their child are experiencing.

1. Identify and describe three roles that a parent of a child who has a disability might undertake that are unlike the roles typically associated with parenting.

One of the biggest roles a parent can have for their child is the role of case manager. This means they are in charge of all aspects of the child’s life including educational, health, and other services. They must coordinate the care for their child and communicate those services to all the different stakeholders. Another role they can take on is as an advocate for their child, especially for a child who may lack the ability to do so for himself or herself. This means they speak on the best interest of their child. A third role is as the personal futures planner. They are responsible for planning for the child’s future beyond their high school education. They need to know their child’s interests, strengths, and needs in order to plan for a successful future for their child.

1. Reese is a young girl with cerebral palsy. Her primary means of mobility is a manual wheelchair, though she is also able to take a few independent steps. Reese’s parents have recently separated and are in the process of divorcing. Reese, her mom, and two older siblings have temporarily relocated and are now living in the upstairs of her grandparents’ house. As a result of the move, Reese has transitioned to a new school. Although her mom is generally very involved with her child’s education, there are currently many stressors in her life. Describe at least two of the stressors, besides divorce, that Reese’s mom might be experiencing and explain how you think they might affect her time and involvement with the school.

One possible stressor may be a lack of help. With three children, one with special needs, Reese’s mother has a lot on her plate. She may feel that she is not receiving support from others whether it is emotional support, respite care, or other child care. Reese’s grandparents may not understand her needs and may not be able to contribute. Reese’s mother may feel overwhelmed with all the things she needs to do and may not make involvement at school a priority for her use of limited time. The school should be understanding of that and could even offer possible community resources for Reese’s mother. Another stressor that Reese’s mother could be facing is accessibility issues Since Reese has mobility issues it may be hard to find places that accommodate her needs. Since they live upstairs at the house, it may even just be a daily difficulty of transporting Reese within the house. Reese’s mother may also not have a vehicle that is safe for Reese to ride in, making it difficult to take her places like doctor’s appointments. Reese’s mother may face physical pain from helping Reese move about or increased fatigue. All of these factors could contribute to a lack of involvement from Reese’s mother. If she feels like she can’t transport Reese places or is tired from caring for her it may be difficult to also be involved at the school.

1. Imagine you are a teacher in Reese’s new school. Describe three ideas you have for building a relationship with Reese’s family and how you would go about making the family feel welcome in your school.

One way that I would build a relationship with Reese’s family is to encourage the family’s involvement. I would make sure that they can express their wants and needs to us and that we want them to be actively involved in Reese’s education. I would also show respect for the family by communicating with them frequently and using methods of communication that are most efficient for them. Since involvement may be difficult, we want to respect the family’s situation and get them involved in the easiest way possible. Finally, I would communicate the family’s strengths. I would always communicate Reese’s successes in school and I would always be sure to thank the family for the effort that they put in whether it is coming to the school or just being thankful for input on an issue.

1. Imagine that you, as Reese’s new teacher, have just returned from a visit to Reese’s grandparents. During your home visit, Reese’s mother vented about her failed relationship with her husband and the reasons for their divorce. Now the teachers in the teachers’ lounge are pushing you for the juicy details. What is your responsibility in this situation and why?

My responsibility is to keep what she shared with me to myself. Sharing that information would break the trust of the parent and is incredibly disrespectful. If I want to maintain a positive relationship with Reese’s mother then I need to maintain the trust and not share that information with the other teachers.