

Helping Staff Engage Families

Read the following scenarios. Then describe what you would say and do to support staff members. The goal of this exercise is to think about how you would engage, honor, and respect families. As you read the scenarios, focus less on the “content” of the scenarios (i.e., toilet training or language development). Focus more on the broad principles of helping staff work through situations in which they or family members have a concern or disagreement.

1. Greg, a staff member in the pre-toddler classroom, comes to you upset about an interaction with a mother. A 13-month-old, Dorrie, has joined the classroom. Her mother insists that Dorrie is already toilet-trained, and she does not want her daughter to wear diapers. Greg does not believe that it is developmentally appropriate to toilet train a child that young, and he does not think that he can manage helping Dorrie use the toilet while diapering all of the other children in his room. Greg and Dorrie’s mom had a heated conversation about toilet training. Dorrie’s mom accused him of laziness and not caring about Dorrie. Greg got emotional and muttered unkind things about Dorrie’s mom’s perfectionism and expectations for Dorrie. Greg feels terrible, but he doesn’t know how to fix the situation.

2. Travis is the father of Acklen, an 11-year-old boy in your school-age program. Travis comes to you upset about how staff members have been responding to Acklen's behavior. You know the staff have had concerns with Acklen's behavior, but you thought everything was going well now. Travis thinks the staff are being too lenient on Acklen. He doesn't think Acklen is learning to take adults seriously or to respect adults. He tells you he thinks Acklen is walking all over the staff members and learning bad habits. When you approach the staff members about it, they tell you Travis is cold and unfeeling with Acklen. He just gives "a look" and Acklen acts like a different child. They want to respect Travis' style, but they don't know what to do to make him happy.

3. Ximena and Juan are twins in your preschool program. Their mother, Rosa, has a great relationship with the teaching team. She and the twins' father speak Spanish at home, but lately they have gotten concerned about the twins' language. The preschool teacher comes to you for help with a problem. Rosa told her that the twins are refusing to speak Spanish at home. Whenever she asks them a question, they say they don't know how to say it in Spanish and ask to speak English. Often they just respond to her in English without even trying to speak Spanish. Rosa is so upset about losing her culture and language connections with her children. The preschool teacher doesn't know what to say or whether this is typical.