

Engaging and Retaining Families in Services

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Introduction

- Family engagement and retention in services represent a critical practice issue
- Engagement and retention challenges can be particularly salient for low-income families who may face barriers such as:
 - No Shelter
 - No Food
 - No Transportation
 - No Child Care
 - Illiteracy
 - Domestic Violence



Ethnic and racial minority families may confront:

- Additional language and cultural barriers
- Negative experiences with mainstream helping institutions and professionals



Safe Start sites have reported several challenges associated with engagement and retention:

- Stigmatization of mental health interventions;
- Distrust of social service agencies;
- Lack of staff diversity;
- Family perceptions that staff do not respect them;
- Inability to reach families;
- Lack of stability in families; and
- Language barriers between families and service providers.



ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION STRATEGIES

The NET synthesized two bodies of literature:

- Literature generated by mental-health service researchers
- Literature generated by researchers who designed specific parenting programs



ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION STRATEGIES

The literature suggests five categories of engagement and retention strategies:

- Building relationships
- Leveraging existing supportive relations
- Designing and providing responsive and respectful services
- Using strategic and strengths-based marketing
- Addressing and removing participation barriers



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS: SPECIFIC STRATEGIES

- Make contact with the family prior to the first appointment
- Use reminder letters
- Use the Comprehensive Referral Pursuit and Maintenance Approach (CRPMA)
- Use paraprofessionals
- Use a combined engagement intervention
- Engage the whole family system and address family concerns not directly related to parent-child interactions
- Specifically train staff to work in a respectful manner



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS: SAFE START SITE STRATEGIES

- Spokane's Child Outreach Team
- San Francisco's emphasis on relationship-building within the family
- Chatham County's Community Programs
- Coordinator's ties to faith community



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS: PRINCIPLES

- Build relationships with families
- Remember that developing social networks takes time
- Recognize that different cultures vary
- Provide social support
- Engage the police and other “first responders”



LEVERAGING EXISTING SUPPORTIVE RELATIONS: STRATEGIES

- Identify key individuals (leaders, elders, helpers, etc.) known to the population of interest
- Identify key social spaces likely to increase the family's comfort and sense of safety (e.g. churches, and cultural centers)



LEVERAGING EXISTING SUPPORTIVE RELATIONS: PRINCIPLES

- Natural supportive relations differ by community, culture, and type of problem.
- Institutions vary in their role and structure across cultures.
- Members of low-income communities need safe spaces.
- Existing sources of support are as important as new sources.
- Leadership and social hierarchies vary across cultures.
- Interventions need to take place in the natural environments of families.



DESIGNING AND PROVIDING RESPONSIVE AND RESPECTFUL SERVICES: STRATEGIES

- Involve participants
- Ensure congruence with parent expectations and learning styles
- Provide multilingual materials
- Adapt curricula
- Foster a sense of anticipation, progress, and achievement
- Include parents and children together
- Include social opportunities
- Make reminder calls



DESIGNING AND PROVIDING RESPONSIVE AND RESPECTFUL SERVICES: SAFE START SITE STRATEGIES

- Chatham County shortened screening tool in response to family feedback
- Chatham County revised its service coordination protocols and the structure of its case management team meetings



DESIGNING AND PROVIDING RESPONSIVE AND RESPECTFUL SERVICES: PRINCIPLES

- Adapt to gender differences regarding how support is received and given
- Adapt to educational differences regarding how support is received and accessed
- Build the capacity of families and neighborhood residents
- Provide supports and services that are family- centered
- Individualize programs and services
- Build interventions on strengths and resilience
- Involve family members
- Use programs that have shown to effectively address the developmental needs of children



USING STRATEGIC AND STRENGTHS-BASED MARKETING: STRATEGIES

- Design “What’s In It for Me” advertising
- Use strengths-based marketing
- Take advantage of naturally occurring events
- Conduct door-to-door canvassing and one-to-one recruiting
- Use bilingual and bi-cultural individuals for engaging families and helping you plan your strategy
- Advertise frequently, using a variety of methods
- Leave brochures



USING STRATEGIC AND STRENGTHS-BASED MARKETING: PRINCIPLE

Use and partner with ethnic media outlets



ADDRESSING AND REMOVING PARTICIPATION BARRIERS: STRATEGIES

- CRPMA meets families in their homes, uses flexible scheduling, and assists families with locating needed resources
- The combined engagement intervention works with families to overcome concrete barriers to participation such as translation, transportation, and childcare needs
- Schedule services at times convenient for families



ADDRESSING AND REMOVING PARTICIPATION BARRIERS: PRINCIPLES

- Provide ample logistical supports
- Services must be comprehensive



CONCLUSIONS

- The following are key to engaging and retaining families:
 - Thoughtful planning that responds to the perspectives of the population of interest
 - Cultural competency
 - Relationship-building
 - Relationship-leveraging in the form of using familiar, informal social networks
 - Providing practical support in familiar places

