

**How to Help Parents  
Be Leaders**

*"The journey of parent involvement and leadership begins with the heart"*

From Parent Involvement  
To  
Meaningful Partnerships

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**Goals**

- See parents as a viable source to informing their practice
- Begin to have better expectations of parents, and what is possible
- Think about how they might engage parents in their agency
- Walk away with tools of parent engagement that have been tried and proven effective
- Be a catalyst helping parents realize their voice through peer to peer support opportunities
- Maximize the opportunities to partner with families for the benefit of all children, families, and service providers.

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**Parent Involvement  
vs.  
Parent Engagement**

<p><b>Involvement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Courtship</li> <li>• Short term relationship</li> <li>• Look out for the interest of what is need at that time</li> <li>• Responds to the call</li> <li>• Waits for opportunities to present themselves</li> <li>• Does not always recognize their own worth, and needs guidance</li> </ul>	<p><b>Engagement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marriage</li> <li>• Lifelong Commitment</li> <li>• Pledge to look out for the best interest of</li> <li>• Responds and goes beyond the call of duty</li> <li>• Creates opportunities to do more</li> </ul>
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## Key Findings about Impact

- "Engaging parents in providing direction and guidance is critical to making health and human service systems more responsive, coordinated, culturally sensitive and cost-effective". Jennings, Joyce C. (2002). Parent Leadership: Successful Strategies. [www.friendsnrc.org](http://www.friendsnrc.org)
- "Parents as decision makers and in leadership roles strengthens families, service systems, and communities that support children's readiness for school" Hepburn, Kathy S. (2004). Families as Primary Partners in their Children's Development and School Readiness. Annie E Casey Foundation Report. [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org)
- When parents talk to their children about school, expect them to do well, help them plan for college, and make sure that out-of-school activities are constructive; their children do better in school.
- When systems engage families in ways that are linked to improving learning, students make greater gains.

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## Principles of Parent Leadership

- Parents have a voice
- Parents have strengths
- Parents are their children's first teacher
- Parents are responsible to do what they can
- Parents know a lot, and want to know how to do better
- Parents do a lot already, and need other supports
- Parents are an untapped resource, and don't realize it
- Parents do the best they can with what they have
- Parents can become leaders when they are given the opportunity and additional tools

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## Every One as a story...What's yours?

What has helped you make your journey of Parent Leadership?

Panelist Discussion

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## Systems and Programs

- How can systems and programs set the tone and offer environments for real parent leadership to occur?
- What kind of barriers do they face as providers and systems people?
- How do you help parents to become Leaders?
- Why it is important to help parents become leaders?
- What are the benefits of parents becoming leaders?

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## Interviews from Systems

*"It is often a 'one way' approach to parent partnerships... that doesn't last or have meaning for parents. And misses the opportunity to utilize the knowledge, wisdom and contributions that parents bring to partnerships."*

Lina Cramer, Director  
Illinois Family Partnership Network

*"When provided the space, support and tools to lead, all parents can become strong and vocal leaders standing up for their children in schools, communities and around public Policies affecting families. Our experience bears this out. We have to start where parents are at and value them as a key resource for Strengthening systems affecting families."*

Ellen Schurmer, Director  
Community Organizing & Family Issues

*"Systems don't always recognize parents as a viable source, but parents can be a valuable resource to informing our practices."*

Amy Slavin, Associate Deputy Clinical Director  
Division of Mental Health  
Child & Adolescent Services

*"Parents love their children...there are not adequate enough resources in the community to help them. We can help!"*

Thu A. Vo, Special Assistant to the Director  
IL Dept. of Children & Family Services

*"Social emotional competencies enable people to be in healthy relationships with each other, which maximizes the opportunity for great mental health. SEL is a continual way to meet parents where they are."*

Caryn Curry, SEL Project Coordinator  
IL Children's Mental Health Partnership

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## Practitioner Roles

- Mentor
- Coach
- Leading from "the side" (with the explicit permission from the parent) and supporting parents as they develop confidence in their leadership abilities
- Providing appropriate articles and other resources to build the skills and knowledge of parents
- Arranging for Parents to attend formal and informal training sessions
- Looking for opportunities to involve parents in traditional and non-traditional ways in agency initiatives

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## Practitioner Roles Continued

- Providing positive feedback and constructive criticism to parents that will encourage further participation and will provide concrete ideas for increasing their leadership expertise
- Helping others in your agency understand and embrace the principles and benefits to implementing parent engagement initiatives

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## Tips for Sustaining Parent Leaders

- Respect parental expertise
- Creates a culture that values parents as partners / resources
- Give parents compelling reasons for getting involved
- Demonstrate that their involvement will be effective and personally rewarding
- Be clear and honest in your commitments to parents.
- Make those commitments in writing, and uphold those commitments over time
- Ask parents for straight feedback about your agency
- Listen to the feedback and use it to improve performance together

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## Tips for Sustaining Parent Leaders

- Secure appropriate resources and funding levels. Parent engagement requires staff time and financial support for important activities and services for parents, including: on-site childcare, meals, transportation, skill development opportunities, and provisions for reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses of participating parents.

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## Strategies available in Illinois

Video Clips of Café Process

### For parents:

- Cafes
  - From Passion To Action
  - Parents and Arts Integration
  - Parents as Partners
  - Saturday Scholars
  - Love is Not Enough
- Parent Leadership Training
  - COFI (Community organizing and Family issues)
  - Raising...The Next Generation of Leaders
- Parents Care and Share (national org.)
  - Support Groups – IL State-wide
- Social Emotional Learning
  - Parents Engagement Workgroup
  - SEL Parent Empowerment

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## Trainings that are available

You have handouts that lists the Strength-based Practices in Illinois

- Social Emotional Learning – CASEL
- Community Organizing and Family Issues
- Family Development Credentialing
- Family and Community Development
- Healthy Steps
- Strengthening Families Illinois

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## For more information contact

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