**Cooperative Efforts with Families in Educating Children with Visual Impairments**

**A Position Paper of the Division on Visual Impairments**

**Council of Exceptional Children**

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Recent research findings have substantiated what teachers of children with disabilities have known for years based on clinical experiences -- direct involvement of families in the education of their children results in significantly greater gains for the child with or at risk for disabilities.  The Division on Visual Impairment (DVI) of the Council for Exceptional Children affirms the need for the cooperative efforts of parents, children, extended family members, and teachers.  To establish such partnerships, teachers must be committed to working with families in arrangements where each party has distinct roles and responsibilities, and in which both are willing to exert every effort to bring about an environment conducive to optimal functioning of children with visual impairments.

**Recommendations**

In order to facilitate this partnership, teachers and families of children with visual impairments should approach the relationship with the:

* Recognition that parents are the most powerful influence in their children’s lives;
* Assumption that parents know their children better than anyone else;
* Recognition of the permanence of parenthood, its expectations, and its ongoing responsibilities;
* Respect for the right of parents to participate or not to participate in a child’s program to varying degrees at different points in time;
* Recognition that parents’ nonparticipation in the child’s program does not imply noninvolvement with or disinterest in the child;
* Recognition of the various roles parents play, including those of nurturer, teacher, advocate, and case manager, and a realization that these roles cannot be assumed easily or without preparation due to the structure and complexity of today's educational laws;
* Empathy for and outreach to all family members of children with visual impairments, including organized efforts to bring all family members together to share experiences and to learn from each other;
* Recognition that the values and priorities of the family are primary in planning the child’s program;
* Recognition and appreciation of the needs of immediate and extended family members of the child with visual impairments so that efforts can be made to balance the energy and commitment of services to meet the needs of all family members;
* Recognition that part of the teacher’s role is to facilitate parents in their role as decision-makers;
* The need for acceptance of the child as an individual and the right to dislike the disability and/or its manifestations;
* Realization that teachers and parents are not in competition for the love or attention of children;
* Realization that parents and teachers have the need to interact according to their own personal styles, idiosyncrasies, and desires;
* Mutual trust and cooperative effort;
* Mutual recognition of each person’s individuality and expertise;
* Understanding of the necessity for an open and honest relationship;
* Willingness to communicate and honestly discuss situations, particularly when there is a disagreement or a lack of understanding;
* Realization that if differences of opinion occur, those differences should be directly addressed first by the persons involved rather than with anyone else, and that both parents and teachers have the option of pursuing their procedural rights;
* Reciprocity in sharing information;
* Openness to suggestions;
* Knowledge about and utilization of all available services and resources;
* Ability to make decisions based on the best information and advice currently available, and reluctance to place blame for mistakes on any one party;
* Willingness to reinforce each other’s instructional efforts for the sake of the child’s learning continuity and achievement;
* Insight into the needs of children with visual impairments without unrealistic expectations or concerns;
* Awareness that the best interests of the child always override all other considerations;
* Recognition that a positive approach is important when working with children;
* Reciprocity of family/child/teacher efforts to understand behavior and to implement a consistent approach to promote behavior change;
* Awareness of children’s strengths, and enjoyment of their progress;
* Ability to help children with visual impairments develop and maintain self-esteem;
* Consideration when making decisions that children with visual impairments will grow into adults with visual impairments;
* Commitment to educate the public about the characteristics and needs of children with visual impairments so that similarities as well as differences in relation to peers without disabilities may be understood;
* Concern for child abuse and neglect (emotional, physical, and sexual) imposed at home or in school, and an agreement to seek help from appropriate sources if needed;
* Commitment to legislative action for advocacy of educational rights of children with visual impairments.

**Position**

For an educational program to be most effective, DVI believes the family/educator partnership is mutually cooperative and supportive and has impact beyond an individual’s work with any one child.  This partnership stimulates and nurtures the growth and development of the child with a visual impairment and facilitates the child’s unique contribution to family and society at large.