

58 - Family Relationship Bridge

Original Air Date: 10/18/22

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Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Host Dr. Shipley: Hello everyone and welcome to Early Childhood Chatter with Dr. Shipley and Dr. Heald. We will upload a new episode every other week on Wednesdays.

Host Dr. Heald: Twice a month, we will come to you with a 10-minute professional development that you can quickly listen to for new ideas to try.

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Today we have with us Katie Wirz, and Katie is a professional that has worked in so many facets of education. She's worked in primary education and has taught at the college level for over five years.

She loves education and is passionate about early childhood specifically because it truly sets the tone for children's educational path. Katie, welcome, and thank you so much for being here.

Katie Wirz Speaker: Thank you so much for having me.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Hi Katie, so excited to be talking to you today. So, we know that family relationships are a vital part of what we do as educators, and today we're here to talk to you about why strong family partnerships and relationships are important. So why do you want to convey this, and what are you going to share with our listeners?

Katie Wirz Speaker: So, I think like you said, with early childhood education, we're really setting the tone, whether that be preschool, daycare.

You're starting the passion or the lack of passion of education from the beginning, and in one of my great classes that I had before, you really find out that parents are the ones that are setting the tone and truly are the first teacher that a child is interacting with. Now, a parent family can be a single family. It could be grandparents raising kids, brothers and sisters raising kids, whatever it is, the primary adult that they have in their house is really the first line of education.

So, if that person is passionate, I think it comes through to the children.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: I 100% agree with that, and we know that the dynamic of families is changing over time, and it's even different from when we were young, from when I was teaching in the classroom, and we know that broken families are something we all have to deal with. Deaths, children being raised by younger siblings, grandparents, aunts, divorce, all of those things.

So, what are we doing today to bridge those gaps, or what are some tips and tricks that you can do to bridge those gaps and help our listeners understand? So, if they're going through this problem, they have some little nuggets of information.

Katie Wirz Speaker: The first thing I want them to know is they're not alone. Regardless of what your family looks like, there is another family out there somewhat similar, and I think letting them know that they have connection groups, I think something that was probably different from when we grew up to what we have now.

You have meetup groups. You have family support groups. You have more things that are hands-on with the invention of the internet.

So, there's a lot of things you can click and find families that look just like yours, or that culturally are just like yours, or structurally are just like yours, regardless of what it is. My friend Anna and I talked about this recently, and she said she grew up with a single parent family, or what you would consider a broken home, and it doesn't matter what that family looks like as long as you have an attentive adult that is there to support you.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: I can agree with that 100%.

My mom was a single mom, and I feel like I had the best childhood ever. I do think that that's important, and the teachers that you have, they're just as important, so we have to make sure we know what those families look like when you enroll your child, right? Build that relationship.

Katie Wirz Speaker: And I think it's really important, too, to tour the schools.

Don't just put your kids somewhere because it's the cheapest option. Of course, you've got to do what you have to do, but there's a lot of early childhood education centers that have passionate teachers, and I know for myself specifically, I can tell you my strong teachers, even in adulthood. I contacted my first grade teacher, Mrs. Phillips, and she was older when I was in first grade, so by the time I found her, she was quite a bit older, and I let her know that she made such a huge impact that I knew even in first grade I wanted to be a teacher.

That's how much a strong teacher holds a place in your life, and even in college. Dr. Acquisto-Pache, I give her a shout out because I had the hardest time even earning a B in her class. I took her three times, but I learned more in that class than I did in any of my other classes, and she was so passionate that it came through in the class.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Katie, that's such a great point. I think as you were saying, strong teachers and educators that make a difference, we all had a face or a name or something that popped into our head, and I think our listeners ultimately are here because they are trying to become more high-quality educators.

So, any advice for a new teacher on how to, from day one, just begin to build these relationships to be a strong teacher?

Katie Wirz Speaker: So bridging gaps is super important.

Know who your kids are, and I know that's easier said than done. We are all kind of trying to navigate through new territory, and I think compassion right now is what we need to hear as teachers. Education has looked very different in the last couple years depending on what state the listener is in.

I myself, am in California, and I know it's in-person, online, hybrid, and we just need to be understanding. We need to have compassion for them, and we are in uncharted territory, so we're all trying to navigate through. Even if a parent is home right now, with their kids at home learning, they're still trying to work.

So, I would say bridging gaps with icebreakers, interaction, like some type of learning about the students, and even if it's something as simple as, I asked Dr. Shipley what her favorite hobby is.

For myself, I love dinosaurs, and if a teacher would stop and ask me that as a kid, I could have talked to you for a long time about my passion. So maybe just stopping, if we're noticing a child is struggling, and just communicate with them, and talk to them about what they like, and really try to foster that love and passion.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: I love that. I love talking about family relationships, so it's just so important to me because, I think that when I first started, I was just trying to keep my head above water, and we have a lot of new teachers on here, and teachers who are still struggling with this. So is there a way to show, and I'll tell you what I did.

I used Family Forums in my classroom, and I had a monthly meetup.

So, is there a way that you or someone you know has amazing family relationships to teach them how important they are, just so that we can give our listeners several ideas when they leave?

Katie Wirz Speaker: So, when you leave the meetup groups and things like that, start with your community. Start with the teachers.

Start with the families that are there. Look for the parents that are basically there raising their hands and helping out. Find the parents that are setting a good example, and maybe kind of meet up with them.

Start your own group. As a teacher, it's great for us to foster whether that's an online forum, that's some kind of meetup activity. Maybe we have every couple months or every other month, we set up something for the parents to get together.

Now, it doesn't always work for back-to-school night, but maybe we can help foster that community build by building one ourselves. And I know for myself, when I was teaching, I always tried to find parents that could kind of work together and team up so they could help each other, even if it was something as simple as carpool, or helping watch the kids, or helping with homework stuff. It was just a way for them to partner up and find somebody else that has kind of the same schedule as them that might need help.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Right.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: I think that's really important because I think, you know, it was brought up earlier, we are in such a funny, unknown state right now. And I think, you know, whether you're in California or Florida or wherever you are, it's changing.

And I think fear of the unknown is tough. And I think we're educators are dealing with, and our children are dealing with it. So, you brought up passion.

And I feel like that's something I really kind of want to hone in on. You're spot on. We know those teachers with passion.

How do you model ways to let them know that despite the unknowns and everything that is going on, we truly have passion for what we do, and want to be there to make a difference for their child?

Katie Wirz Speaker: So, setting the tone for me, I want to be the example and not something as small as teaching elementary school or preschool or daycare, all the way up to teaching college. If my students see me out somewhere, they know that I'm going to be setting a good example. Now we're human.

Sometimes we lose steam. Sometimes we're not on our best behavior. But we should always be portraying ourselves in a manner in which we want others to see.

And I have this saying, I'm very close to my family. And my behavior is something that if my dad and mom saw me act a certain way, would they be proud of me? And that's how I try to act in the classroom as well.

So, I know that we need to have an open line of communication because, again, the burnout is real.

And I think that we need to have dialogue. It's not just, hey, here's homework. Send it home with your kids.

But maybe have yourself on a Zoom, there to help show how to do the homework, especially when it comes to the new math or whatever the activity is. Be open. I mean, when you clock out at 3 o'clock, we all know you don't actually clock out.

It's you're constantly there. So maybe have an open line of communication where you're there showing support to the family on how to do activities or just to be there, just to listen, just to communicate, but have compassion and flexibility for these parents as well.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Right.

And Katie, you touched on it just a little bit earlier when you said the internet is out there. So, I know that I'm in support groups of teachers right now, the COVID support group, a support group of how to build relationships. Go out and find those because those support groups are there, and they give ideas, and they give resources.

And they're amazing because they're out there in the field and they're doing it. And also make a team with the people that you work with, those colleagues. They have great information of what they're doing too.

And, you know, we have Facebook live now and you can make it private to where you can show things to your families, and you can come on and you can do Instagram live. There's so many things that you can do and try that. I love this topic because you're right.

Things have changed.

So, as we leave, what are three takeaways that you want to give our listeners today?

Katie Wirz Speaker: Number one, no matter what your family looks like, don't give up hope. You are your amazing, unique, perfect family.

And even if it's not exactly how we as an adult want it to be, we have to make sure the kids see the passion. That's what my biggest thing. As a parent, show the example.

Again, you're going to lose steam. You're going to have some bad days, but take time, even if it's as simple as watching, you know, Mr. Rogers or a Bob Ross art lesson, or maybe Jack Hartman on YouTube. He's great with music and movement.

So just take some time and be creative at home. And just the biggest takeaway is you're doing a great job. Give yourself kudos.

And when you're having a hard day, find something positive in that day as a parent that you can share with your child to communicate, because really opening those gaps and letting your kids know that you're human, but you're passionate about their education. It goes such a long way for their future.

Dr. Stephanie Heald Speaker: Katie, that's so crucial.

Last year, my word, my intention word for the year was grace. And I think that's key to remember. As a mom, as a professional, as an individual, as a wife, that was really a word I needed to remember.

And we are our toughest critics. We are hardest on ourselves. So, do you have one challenge that you can leave our listeners with?

Katie Wirz Speaker: Yeah, absolutely.

So, I know it's hard when families are divided. Kind of, just find any time for anything, but especially to devote to your education. So, I would want one of my challenges to be for them to think outside the box as a family and show a lesson that they can do together at home.

And that could even be something checking out their local library, going to a zoo if you're nearby a zoo. I know I am in San Diego. Or even just going to a museum.

So, my one challenge is think outside the box. There are so many just examples you have in your everyday life, where you can show your students or your children some passion for education and share that with them.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Katie, this has been so enlightening because I think it's important.

You know, we all know that we need to build relationships, but it's the reminder and it's the new ideas of how. So, thank you so much for being here today. We appreciate you very much.

Katie Wirz Speaker: Thank you so much for having me, you guys. This was a huge blessing. And again, I try to stay humble.

We can all learn. But find somebody that you can learn from, even if you don't have a Mrs. Phillips or Dr. Acquisto-Pache or amazing parents like me. Find somebody in your community.

There's somebody out there that wants to help.

Dr. Tisha Shipley Speaker: Agree with you. Thank you, Katie.

Katie Wirz Speaker: Thank you both.