

99 - The Early Educator's Partnership with Families

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Purpose: The purpose of the transcripts is to provide readers and listeners with a written version of each episode of the UAGC Center for Early Childhood Education's Early Childhood Chatter Podcast so they can follow along with the audio content. www.uagc.edu/ece-center/chatter-podcast

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: This podcast is your go-to source for inspiration and practical tips to unlock the full potential of every little learner.

Don't forget to subscribe to the podcast for notifications about future episodes. Today we are thrilled to have Cindy Terebush with us back again for some more great sharing. Welcome Cindy.

Cindy Terebush: Hi, I'm glad to be back.

Host Dr. Heald: Cindy Terebush is an associate faculty member at the University of Arizona Global Campus and is a sought-after professional development provider, speaker, and author of Teach the Whole Preschooler, Strategies for Nurturing Developing Minds, and podcast co-host of How Preschool Teachers Do It, isn't that something? Cindy has spent more than 20 years working in the field of early education. She provides subject matter expertise to the learning and development team at the Rutgers Institute for Families at the School of Social Work.

Host Dr. Shipley: Cindy, I'm super excited you're here with us. We were just chatting on the phone, and I love when you come and you're such an important faculty member that we have here at UAGC, so thank you for everything that you do. Today we're going to talk about the Early Educators Partnership with Families, which we know is a really important topic and a great reminder for all of us and our listeners.

So if you can think of one thing that's the most important thing about parenting with families, in your opinion, what would it be?

Cindy Terebush: All right, I'm going to ask you to humor me and allow me to say two things because I can't pick one.

Host Dr. Shipley: Okay, I know. I agree.

Cindy Terebush: Right? Mm-hmm. I feel like these two things are at the crux of our partnerships with families. So here are my two.

The first one is that it's our job to support families when they are ready for that support, which can take time. People are not necessarily ready to be supported on our timeline. It has to be when they're ready.

And the second thing is that families are likely actually telling us the truth when they report different actions and behaviors at home because home and early childhood settings are two very different places.

Host Dr. Shipley: I could agree with both of those 100%. And I always like to say that mine is building relationships from day one, but I also think you're right about the support because we have to wait for them to need us or want us.

We can give our opinions and ideas, but without that relationship, it probably isn't going to happen. Right?

Cindy Terebush: You're absolutely right. And I think saying to people, I have resources when you're ready is relationship building.

Host Dr. Shipley: Oh yeah. A hundred percent. I agree with you.

Host Dr. Heald: Yeah. And I think a large part of this show is just understanding the why. So let's even dial it back.

We know the importance, but let's break it down to actually be what the whys are for partnering with families to help children.

Cindy Terebush: Okay. You know, we have to remember, it doesn't matter how many hours in a day we spend with young children, their families still know them best.

I have so many professionals say things to me when I ask, why do we need to partner with families? And they say, families are the expert in their children. And that is very true, but we don't always act as if they are. And you know, it's such a simple reason why they are the experts.

When you think about it. We see their children in one setting, basically with one group of people with like 15 same age peers and two adults who they're learning to get to know the family, see them everywhere else in every other social setting. And they know the context of what they've taught their children, their culture, their values, their priorities. So regardless, if the children are spending many hours with us during the day, we still only know them in the one place.

So we need to get the family's perceptions and ideas about their children in order to fully know their children.

Host Dr. Shipley: So we know, go ahead, go ahead. I don't want to, I don't want to interrupt.

Cindy Terebush: I was just going to add that we also know that human beings thrive when the most important people in their lives work in harmony.

Host Dr. Shipley: That is so fun. That is exactly what I was going to talk about the next relationship, because I've heard children say, I don't really like my teacher.

I don't really like school. But then you've heard the parents talk about the teacher, right? Those children hear everything that their parent says. So that relationship is vital for that reason, because if they see you meshing and they know you get along, they're going to enjoy school more.

They're going to learn more. They're going to want to come to school. So that is, that's so funny that you said that.

Cindy Terebush: And similarly, if we build that relationship, the families are probably more likely to do activities we might send home, to send things in that we ask for, to follow up on whatever requests we make.

Host Dr. Shipley: I agree with that. So I have a quick question, Steph, I'm sorry that I keep butting in for your part. I have students all the time say, I'm getting ready to do a parent teacher conference. I'm getting ready to call this parent. And I try to give them tips and tricks on, you know, how to start that conversation.

But when you're new, or you have a parent that maybe you're a little intimidated by, it can be hard to have that conversation. So what are some tips that you would give our listeners to start building those relationships? How do you do it? How do you have those hard conversations?

Cindy Terebush: Every relationship starts with what people have in common. So right, I'm always seeking to figure out what, what do we have in common.

And I have to tell you, I've had some difficult relationships and conversations with families over the many years of my career. I always have to remember, find the place we agree. And I'll give you one example.

We had a parent one time who said to me, you know, "I don't know why you, you aren't allowed to do some of these punishments that worked for me when I was a child. You know, I would be okay with you punishing my child in this way". And frankly, there were ways that aren't allowed by licensing even.

So I said to the parent, you know, I have to find the thing we have in common. So I said to the parent, "we all want your child to learn about how to function in a group setting like this. Let me help you understand how we do it within our licensing requirements and what we know about what how children learn about social emotional development".

But I have to start with we all want this, right? We all want your child to know this. So in the beginning of the school year, in addition to your programs questionnaire, it's a good idea to reach out to families with some sort of form they can fill out telling you things like what places have you traveled to with your child? What are some of the hobbies your child gets to see at home? What are some of your most enjoyable activities and find something you have in common.

Host Dr. Heald: You know, one of my favorite quotes, one of my favorite quotes of all time is from Theodore Roosevelt. And it's just people don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care.

And that's our kiddos, our youngest learners are, you know, adult learners, our families, and the partnership we you create with families and what you just spoke about is so crucial in supporting development. And to be honest with you, families only send us their very best, right? So, we want that relationship, we want that partnering, we want that comfort level with our families to benefit everyone, children's teachers, families really in in cohesion with each other. So, we've got these really great relationships, and I'm just going to put it out there to your point, there might be some that are a little bit more tricky or difficult.

How can educators proceed with those that might be intimidating, or just different belief systems?

Cindy Terebush: We have to remember a couple things. First, a person's culture and family background determines a lot about their priorities. Our job as early childhood professionals is to learn about that, not expect people to be doing things the way we think they should be done.

And I think some of it is just admitting when I don't know things, being willing to ask questions and to find things out, and to make yourself a little vulnerable. You know, in some of the most difficult relationships I had with families, I needed to figure out how to form that connection. And some of it was being open and willing to learn and saying to them, I would like to learn more from you about your perspective.

Host Dr. Shipley: I love that. And so a second ago, I asked you about the teacher feeling intimidated building those relationships and having conversations. But the next one is, why might families feel intimidated? So, I'm always talking to my students and new teachers about this, but families are intimidated also to come and talk to us.

Cindy Terebush: They are. Families see us as the experts and they see themselves as not expert, which is not true. They are the experts on their children.

We all bring different things to the table. When I meet with a family, I bring my experience of working with children. I bring my knowledge of child development.

But when they come to the table, they bring everything about their child. It is important when we set up times when we're going to meet families to continually acknowledge that they are the experts on their children and they have information that we should know. And to say to them that we are curious educators, the only way that we're going to really find out what your child needs is to learn from you about your child because you are the experts.

I think we also have to think about some nuts and bolts thing. I learned from someone, I thought this was such a great hint. I learned from someone that when you're sitting in a room with parents, like let's say you're having a conference.

First of all, I never met with families in my office when I was a program director because that's intimidating, and they feel like they're being sent to the principal's office. So, I always sat, if I could, next to them or sort of catty corner. And then I learned this from somebody.

If you have a choice of chairs, put them in a slightly higher chair. Isn't that interesting?

Host Dr. Shipley: All of those things are interesting and something to think about and at least try, right? Right. Right.

Cindy Terebush: They have to understand that we are equal in their children's early childhood experience.

Host Dr. Shipley: Right. Okay.

Host Dr. Heald: Yeah. I absolutely love that. I think that again, the more we can create those partnerships and a level of equity, ultimately respecting the fact to your point, they know their children best.

I mean, we are here as a resource, but they ultimately know their children best. Cindy, can you leave us with three takeaways for our listeners?

Cindy Terebush: I would love to. First, when we partner with families, everybody benefits.

The children benefit because they reap that partnership and they see us getting along with their families and working in tandem with them. The teachers benefit because we get to learn more about the child and the family, and that enables us to teach them in a more individualized way. The families benefit because they partner with us and are equal in their child's education.

They learn to be advocates for their children. They learn the value that they have in educational systems, and they're more willing to share things with us that may be happening at home, perhaps.

We also have to remember that for a second item, families are likely telling us the truth about different behavior at home and at school because they are different places and children, just like every human being, adjust their behavior based on who they're with and where they are.

And I think a third takeaway is that our job is to support the families, and we cannot force them to do anything. I can't force them to do activities I send home. I can't force them to get evaluations by specialists if we feel the child would benefit.

I'm there to support when they're ready.

Host Dr. Shipley: Right. Those are all, those are great.

Really, I mean, I think it's things that we know that we need to rethink about all the time. So as we leave, Cindy, you're always amazing when you come on. But what is one challenge that you have for our listeners?

Cindy Terebush: Well, I think one challenge is to think about why we react the way we do to our interactions with families.

If a family is saying something to you and you are reacting, you feel your body reacting, your emotions reacting, maybe you're feeling a little defensive or a little unsure of what they're saying to you. Think about your own feelings and reflect on what could be causing that and how do we put that aside so that we can reach out and have a productive partnership with the families.

Host Dr. Shipley: That's very true.

Cindy, I know you'll be on again because you're one of our favorites. We love having you on. Thank you so much for everything that you do for the early childhood community and have a great day.

Thank you, listeners.

Cindy Terebush: Thank you. You too.