

Exploring and Developing Communication Strategies with Parents

Key Themes, Insights, and Recommendations

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Summary and recommendations regarding effective communication strategies with parents

Trust, two-way communication, and technology are the three keys to effective communication strategies with parents. Both the content and the method to deliver messages about child development and early education opportunities must be customized and segmented to achieve equitable access to information that parents with young children in Minnesota need to raise healthy children.

Effective strategies also require time to overcome or prevent linguistic, racial, cultural, and geographic barriers and inequities many parents experience accessing needed information.

The goal should be to empower parents, not just to hand out a bunch of paper. [Interview 27]

There is no best way – It’s all about meeting parents where they are. [Interview 13]

Trust

Effective communication with parents begins with trust and respectful relationships. Gaining mutual trust is more important than translating the information into multiple languages.

Communication efforts must have sufficient time to develop trust, an understanding of different cultures, and both organizational and communal relationships. While “one size does not fit all” is a cliché, effective communication strategies must move beyond printed and translated materials and websites to focus on relationships and to demonstrate respect for all types of families.

Communication efforts, moreover, should be aware that they, like this study, will likely be met with skepticism and mistrust. Early childhood community leaders, professionals, and parents expressed exasperation with the lack of apparent system improvements despite previously providing feedback, the focus more on rules and confusing eligibility requirements rather than on child and family well-being, and the child care shortages across Minnesota.

Scrutinize the information to be communicated to ensure it is not, and cannot be construed as, biased or judgmental. For example:

- Information should be geared to fathers as well as mothers.
- Language about “quality” can be off-putting and can taint the whole message as culturally biased information. That is because informal home-based care, which may be preferred, is by implication low quality. This miscommunication is also likely to arise when parents are being pushed toward quality care, yet licensed infant care is scarce, or quality rated care is not available.

- Language to promote connecting to services may backfire when receiving services may be viewed as a stigma or as connoting “failure” as a parent.

For parents connected with organizations and programs and relying on staff as their source of information, communication efforts should connect with parents in their community contexts by building relationships with trusted intermediaries such as child care providers, teachers, physicians, and social workers. Communication efforts could also reach parents through monthly newsletters of early childhood development centers and through specialty radio and television stations for Hmong, Latino, and Somali families.

Finally, equitable access means more than all families being able to receive or obtain needed information. It also means the information is worth getting because it will lead to affordable and culturally appropriate early opportunities and education.

We need to look at the whole family and their living situation. Especially for parents who are low income and struggling to just survive. I think we should also provide information about how to improve their stability through a better paying job or more stable housing. It is hard to tell parents to spend more time with their children when they are not in a position to do so. A stable environment can make a real difference in parents' ability to focus more on their children. [Interview 18]

Two-way communication

Two-way communication involves delivering and discussing information as well as answering questions. It is best done through in-person communication, which also serves to build relationships and trust. Texting and social media can then be effective ways to communicate after the relationships are established.

Based on discussions with parents and interviews with professionals who serve parents, some parents, even when the information is translated, do not understand the words, concepts, or value the information imparts. These parents include low-income parents, immigrants, parents whose children have special needs, parents who lack access to technology, and parents with lower levels of education.

Accordingly, the best way to communicate with these parents is to deliver information in person. That approach allows interaction and the opportunity to talk through the information and answers parents' questions, leading to better understanding among parents.

Outreach is outmoded as an effective communication strategy for diverse parents. Emanating from outside communities, outreach can be perceived as deficit-based and judgmental. Alternatively, in-reach – relationship-building and community organizing from the inside, with and by community members – is more welcomed. For example, African American fathers, who feel either invisible or disrespected when dealing with schools, recommend hiring an African American father to go where

other fathers congregate to connect with them and share useful parenting information geared to fathers.

Technology

Cell phone use is nearly universal. Electronic methods of communication must be mobile-friendly. Be mindful, however, that internet service is less available in rural areas and on reservations.

Some younger parents are best reached via social media, where they share information with their friends.

Information sent via emails, texting, or social media must be short, clear, and to the point.

The internet is bloated with helpful advice and misinformation for parents. A curated list of internet sites could help guide and link parents to accurate information on the internet.

Study purposes, methods, and sources of data

As part of the state’s Pre-K Planning Grant, the purpose of this study is to learn about the experiences of parents of young children in order to shape/tailor effective ways to communicate with them about child development and early education opportunities.

The goals of the study are to make sure all types of parents with young children in Minnesota have the information they need to raise healthy children and that services for children and families are accessible for all types of families.

We collected data using two methods. We conducted 14 group discussions in community settings that involved 89 participants. Parents were provided snacks or meals and \$25 gift cards for their participation. These groups included mothers and fathers in rural, suburban, and urban settings. The participants included African and Latino immigrants, American Indians, African Americans, Hmong, and white parents. The participants also included vulnerable and underserved parents. A list of participating organizations is in the Acknowledgments.¹

We also completed 52 phone interviews with persons knowledgeable about the experiences of parents and communicating with them.

Description of interview respondents' community connections	Count
Geographically specific	
Greater Minnesota (generally)	16
Rural (specifically)	7
Twin Cities	15
Families of color	
Somali	15
Latino	15
Hmong	6
Native families (on reservation)	5
East African	3
African American	4

¹ The group responses throughout the report follow these identification numbers: (1) Grand Rapids, Northland Foundation; (2) urban, Children’s Defense Fund; (3) suburban, Child and Teen Check Up; (4) African American fathers, Northside Achievement Zone; (5) tribal, Indigenous Visioning (3 groups); (6) immigrants, Osseo ECFE; (7) Latino, St. Alphonsus Church; (8) rural Latino, Morris Early Childhood Initiative; (9) pan-African, Minnesota African Women’s Association; (10) vulnerable/underserved, Lifetrack; (11) vulnerable/underserved, Simpson Housing; (12) urban, Wilder Child Development Center.

Description of interview respondents' community connections (continued)	Count
Other high-risk families	
Low-income	18
Younger or teen parents	8
Parents in crisis	5
Children with or at risk for developmental delay (mental or physical)	5
School district representative	8
Works with child care providers	6

Initial reactions to the study

Initial conversations with community leaders and activists to build the list of potential discussion groups and interview respondents included a mixture of frank hostility, skepticism, and mistrust.

Just stop it! We have collected enough information numerous times before. Why will this time turn out any different? We need action now, not another process to gather ideas.

We don't need any more extractive conversations. We need nurturing ones. Take time to build relationships and listen.

It doesn't matter how many culture-specific groups you talk with. You're going through the process to gather inclusive information, but the information will still go to the same place with the same outcome. There's no one to ensure it gets used as intended.

When you are asking about the best way to communicate with parents, you are assuming that they do not know what to do and you want to be able to tell them what to do. Even if you deliver your message through a trusted intermediary, the parents will assume the messenger has been coopted or being used to push the state's information.

On the other hand, virtually all of the organizations and community groups that were asked to invite their parents to a group discussion were very helpful. Organizations and community groups and their parents were glad to have the chance to participate, especially those not often asked to contribute their ideas to policy decisions, such as parents in supportive housing, Spanish-speaking parents in Morris, and African American fathers. A couple organizations added extra summer sessions to give parents the chance to participate and provide their input.

Parents' sources of information about early development and education

Internet and social media

Social media, Google, and the internet are the most mentioned sources of information for all types of parents.

Interview respondents also indicated that digital sources, such as the internet and social media, are highly used, especially among younger parents.

It is important to keep in mind that there are many ways to get the information to parents. The younger parents like social media and the internet because it can be quick and easy to get to when they need it. Websites are good for many things but caution needs to be used because not everything on the internet is good. Parents need to know that too. [Interview 33]

If they have trusted family members, my young parents would go to them first. However, many do not have trusted family members so they may seek out other people that they trust, friends, members of the community that they have trusted relationships with, maybe their doctors or health care workers, counselors, or clergy. Of course, they would reach out through their social media and the internet. [Interview 39]

Family members and friends

Family members are a primary source of information, mentioned in more than half of the group discussions with parents. Family includes mothers and grandmothers, fathers, sisters, nieces, and ex-in-laws. They are often perceived to have useful experience. Other parents, friends, neighbors, and co-workers are also trusted sources of information. Parents share information with other parents in their cultural and geographic communities and pass along information through word of mouth. Houses of worship are another source of information mentioned by two groups of immigrant parents.

Interview respondents commonly concurred that parents get information, mostly by word-of-mouth, from people they trust and with whom they have a good relationship, including family, friends, co-workers, and church and mosque members. One respondent called these friends and family “kinship support networks.”

Most of the families I see tend to rely on those closest to them for advice. That could be family members, friends, people they trust in the community like church members, doctors or health care workers, and teachers or day care providers. [Interview 18]

The parents that we work with trust us and other Head Start teachers and service managers. We also do parent-teacher conferences three times a year. If parents have family members in the area, they will probably trust them for advice. Sometimes there is a lot of distance between our families and their family, neighbors, or even a town or city. [Interview 24]

In particular, immigrants and families whose home language is not English stick within their communities for information and may not use or trust social media or the internet.

Within [the Somali] community, parents seek advice from family, neighbors, other parents, co-workers, mostly by word-of-mouth. Outside the community they get a lot of information from the county when they apply for assistance, especially child care assistance. Our parents do not use social media or the internet often, mostly due to the language barrier and lack of knowledge of what information is there or how to use the internet. I am not sure they would trust information in that format. [Interview 1]

They trust people with whom they have a good relationship – starting with the family members, friends, and neighbors. They trust me because they have come to know me because I meet and greet them on Sunday in church. From my experience, the Latino population that I work with need to build trust before they would listen to advice. Since many do not speak English, it is hard for them to trust people that they do not understand. If they have a relationship, they may trust doctors or health professionals. Some people have smartphones and use apps, but they have to be simple. Most Latino parents that I work with do not know how to use a computer or laptop, but can use the phone. [Interview 22]

Professionals

Parents in the group discussions also frequently said they sought information from their doctors and health clinics. Some parents also call 211 (First Call for Help).

For parents connected with service organizations or programs, trusted staff members are usual sources of information. The programs include WIC, community resource centers, and family literacy programs. The staff include social workers, teachers, Guardians ad Litem, family support staff, and interpreters.

Parents and professionals alike noted that those who are well connected with schools, child care providers, and health clinics rely on their children’s teachers and doctors for help on a wide variety of child rearing topics. Pediatricians, in particular, can be a first call for help, as they are the first person a parent will connect with after a child is born. However, isolated parents and parents in rural areas are less likely to be connected to these resources.

Isolated populations

While many parents rely on family and friends for early childhood information, an emphasis on communicating to parents through those channels would leave out the most isolated families. In addition, vulnerable populations may be somewhat skeptical about information from family. Some parents don't have family members in the area, and some have negative relationships with their family members.

I have absolutely no family...I don't trust nobody in my family...You can only trust family so far. Family are quick to help but quick to hurt you at the same time. Family isn't what it used to be. [Group 10]

Some elder advice wasn't the best. [Group 5]

Some parents lack a helpful social network. They may not have any family or trusting family relationships. They may also be isolated socially and, in rural and reservation areas, geographically, without neighbors nearby.

One respondent acknowledged that some parents get information “accidentally.” They “just come across it” either by overhearing it or through a chance meeting with an acquaintance. Isolated families are unlikely to get this information via word-of-mouth through chance meetings.

Best methods for communicating with parents

Use multiple methods

The key takeaway is that no single method or approach suffices. All the groups mentioned multiple preferred methods, with a common theme that the communication, regardless of method, should come directly from a trusted source.

This [the best method] is a broad question depending on the demographic of parents and depending on the district. It is not a simple answer for everyone. Some parents prefer face to face, some prefer emails. Some parents don't read or write. So it is hard to find a one blanket answer that will fit every parent's needs. [Group 9]

Interview respondents agreed that parents need multiple methods for obtaining information.

Digital methods

Email is considered a useful method by nearly all the groups, with the advice that it have a distinct identity in order to stand out or “not get lost or jumbled up with other emails” (9). About half of the groups say phone and text are also okay. Parents in a few of the groups also mentioned using social media, or dedicated online forums or websites.

Interview respondents acknowledge that almost everyone relies on their cell phones now, so digital sources are more effective than printed materials. Interviewees concurred that younger parents, especially, are best reached via social media or the internet. The Think Small weekly text messages and Help Me Grow videos were noted as good digital materials. However, they expressed concern about the accuracy of this information. One person suggested having website navigators to guide people to appropriate websites; another suggested that having one website with links to curated websites that could be trusted could help resolve the problem of misinformation. Text messages from trusted sources, like child care providers and pediatricians, are successful, after trust is built.

Social media can be a “double-edged sword.” It can provide fantastic information, but it can also provide false information and filled with opinions. [Interview 13]

There is a lot of junk information available on the internet and social media. [Interview 17]

[Early childhood] teachers that do texts and the reminder apps have the most success. [Interview 45]

In-person communication

Half of the discussion groups said face-to-face communication in community forums or settings is important, and it was a key point made by leaders and activists at the outset of this study. This method is favored because it has the potential of being relationship-based and allows for two-way communication.

Face-to-face or email, but face-to-face is more productive...Speak to parents directly for those who don't read or write English...Connect parents with community advocates who understand how the system works and who the parents are comfortable with. [Group 9]

Communication must be dynamic and two-way. Ask parents what they know and what they need and want to know more about... Don't assume you know best or better. [Group 2]

We need authentic feedback loops, two-way communication. Not just telling parents what you think they need to know. Have a conversation and learn from each other (community leader).

People to people, someone who has shared experiences. That way it is a relationship...Go where men are already there – barbershops, parks, church, schools, and child care centers – fathers talking to fathers... If there were ways where men [fathers] were employed to connect with fathers and support them; meet with fathers over coffee or just kick-it with our kids – not like a social worker or counselor meeting. [Group 4]

Interviewees also said that many parents (teen parents, low-income parents, immigrant parents, parents whose children have special needs, parents who lack access to technology, parents with lower levels of education), prefer personal contact, someone they can interact with and discuss things to be able to better understand the information and to get their questions answered. Having culturally responsive outreach staff can help organizations communicate with culturally specific communities.

If their questions or information they are seeking is more complicated, then I feel that some kind of in-person interaction is often the best. Sometimes parents are not even sure what to ask and by talking face-to-face, a professional can help them define what they need. This is especially true in the Hmong, Somali, and Spanish-speaking communities. [Interview 46]

In the migrant communities, establishing a good relationship with key people who are trusted and respected. That is the only way to build a way to open communications that will be received. Good relationships will also allow the communities to ask questions and sort through the cultural differences that can be a barrier. That has to be done in person, with a lot of one-on-one conversations and a lot of listening to their concerns. It is a slow process, but necessary to build trust. [Interview 26]

The information needed by the parents I work with is often more specialized and targeted to the individual. [Interview 7]

At events

A few parents and interview respondents also noted that being present at community events is an effective way to connect with parents. Some examples include: community baby showers, county fairs, or setting up tables at preschools so parents can chat before or after drop-off (“pop-ups”). Events offer parents not only a way to get information, but also to socialize and connect with other parents, and build trust with organizations.

We did a project a few years ago where we held in-person meetings, provided a meal, and covered different topics at each meeting. The community loved this and really soaked up the information. There is something special about relationship building when there is food involved! Of course, now DHS will not allow us to buy food with our money so that type of meeting cannot happen. That is too bad because the only way to work well in the Somali and Hispanic communities is to build trust and a good relationship. That was a great way to do that. [Interview 17]

We have trainings in Spanish where we come together and bring food and eat together. We socialize and build the trust by getting to know each other. [Interview 44]

Printed materials

Despite dependence on smartphones, some parents in the group discussions said it was helpful to get printed materials via the mail or people they trust. A few groups specifically mentioned that it was very helpful to get information about the stages of development and what to look for at each stage.

Several professional respondents also acknowledged helpful materials, specifically Think Small materials, the Follow Along Developmental checklists, and CDC immunization booklets. Printed materials are more effective when they use simple language, are brightly colored, and are handed out in conjunction with a face-to-face meeting, such as a parent-teacher conference or well-child check-up. Printed materials can help parents follow-up with the information after the meeting.

Even though social media has become very important in people’s lives and people like their phones, they still like to have some written information – not a bunch of flyers in the backpack, but things like the Community Education newsletters that go to all residents regularly. [Interview 46]

We will post flyers and, if it is really important, we may send letters, like for screenings for school. It is helpful for our participants to actually “see” something in addition to just words on a paper, like a picture that gets at whatever the subject is about. I like the idea of short messages that do not take a lot of time to read. The message could contain a link for those who want more information. [Interview 36]

However, not everyone can read and understand the meaning of what is written, especially if it is translated into other languages. One respondent gave the example of the word “emergency.” Dominate culture responds quickly when that word is used, however, in other cultures, even when translated, people may not understand the urgency. The messages need to be tailored to a specific group and provide context.

Barriers parents have to accessing needed information

Questions about barriers to accessing needed information about child development and education produced deep, wide, and complex discussions and responses.

Language

Both parents in the group discussions and interview respondents agree that language is a major barrier, meaning not being fluent in English. However, language barriers are more complex than can be solved by translations alone.

Some parents are not literate in any language, particularly traditionally oral populations such as Karen and Hmong. [Interview 52]

The actual issue for some parents is cognitive limitations, being able to only understand language that is simple and straightforward. [Interview 52]

Mental illness and substance use turn into language barriers too, leaving parents unable to function or communicate. [Interview 52]

Sometimes language is a barrier, but so is also not understanding the words or the translated language. People lack basic knowledge about child development and the system. [Group 9]

Language is a barrier. Many families do not read in the native language, so, even when things are translated, it is hard for them to understand the information. Some parents need interpreters in order to not only understand the words, but also the content. Many parents do not know that information is available or even what information they need or would be helpful for them and their children. [Interview 5]

Cultural bias

Parents in several groups had a lot to say about biased and judgmental attitudes and indifference of professionals they have approached for child development information or who are responsible for providing information. Parents experienced these attitudes as hurtful and as major barriers to accessing needed information.

For example, African American fathers described how schools do not acknowledge their role as caregivers and how information is geared towards mothers, not fathers. African American and Native parents described being intimidated or judged by physicians and county staff. African and Latino immigrants described dealing with covert and overt racism and cultural biases from teachers and child care providers. Working parents described being judged for not participating in events that conflict with work.

We are high-achievement families, yet teachers have low expectations for our children, telling them they are doing great [when it] is not true... White parents don't want their kids with "those people." ...A Facebook post compared black children to monkeys. [Group 9]

Staff behavior and attitudes – some families have felt those things. Even with our family events and that families want to participate in but can't. Some are at times that are not feasible for a working parent... Staff are saying, "Well, they don't ever come." I've felt it as a working parent." ...Those are the kind of biases. Some of the moms are saying they are not putting their child first. [Group 1]

[Teachers] don't put too much attention for the Latino kids, but if something happened for American kids, oh ya, they take care of it... I notice like if some little kid wants to play with the Latin kids, the parents pull him or they don't let him play with the little kid. I think that's where the problem starts. Not paying attention to social/emotional needs...not understanding bilingual developmental stages and misdiagnosing or over-reacting to pace of early learning. [Group 8]

A barrier could be the attitude of a person. If I come all full of enthusiasm thinking you are going to be help but because [of] your appearance you are ignored. Also, the language and lack of cultural knowledge; people don't use their best customer service skills. [Group 7]

Most schools and early childhood programs, at least in the Twin Cities, haven't fully acclimated to the fact that more fathers are involved. We are still met with some hostility when we show up at the facilities or if we have questions, have to do paper work. We have to validate ourselves in those spaces. When you think about that dynamic between fathers and those institutions and finding ways to funnel information about our child's development, needs, and educational processes, it's negligent...So there will be complications using facilities like that to funnel information to us. [Group 4]

These days we are debunking that myth that black men aren't taking care of their children... We need help with other aspects of fatherhood, but don't treat us like we are not there for our children...A lot of institutional practices which still have not caught up with the reality that black fathers are way more involved than they ever were in the last generation. They hold on [to] that bias...If I were running an institution, why would I want to create programs for black fathers when I don't think that they exist? It would be a waste of my money and time... Everything is geared towards women. [Group 4]

Parents also describe being hurt by health care providers' biased and judgmental attitudes.

I got the brush-off from the nurse...They labeled me as part of the "cycle" that makes it sound [like my problems] are inevitable. [Group 10]

I am treated as unacknowledged by the doctor, who may overlook or dismiss my concerns... They don't do anything, and then it becomes a serious issue when it could have been fixed when I first went in. [Group 11]

People in the medical office are judgmental and treat you negatively...Rude attitude on the phone. They don't help with solutions. They would rather tell you what you did wrong...As a Native, I get treated differently, getting judged because I am Native . . . "Prejudice" is still here...I never experienced racism until I got here, not the Minnesota nice – especially if you are not educated. [Group 5]

While less directly, interview respondents also acknowledge discrimination and bias within the system that prevents parents from getting the information they need. Some report bias within organizations, and others see community members treating some parents differently. Discrimination and “hate crimes” were noted as being more common in greater Minnesota. One respondent, in particular, believes white privilege is subconsciously embedded within existing materials.

Policymakers design programs and regulations without understanding the reality of what disadvantaged families are really dealing with. There is little thought given to cultural differences and the trauma many of these families had been through. This also creates bias at many levels, even if it is not always on the conscious level. Often organizations only see things from their point of view. [Interview 37]

The only bias we have is community bias. That is the gossip and the unnecessary and inaccurate hearsay information. Not on any particular subject, often more aimed at judging what someone else is dealing with, especially when it comes to children with special needs or behaviors. This causes division in communities from time to time. [Interview 40]

We also struggle with bias, and we continue to work on that. For example, we have had at least one incident where a child came through screening where the bias of the teacher influenced the screening results, and how the information was shared with the parents in regard to the needs of the child. [Interview 43]

Complex early childhood system

Both parents and interview respondents report that the complex early childhood system and differing qualifications and eligibility criteria are barriers to accessing information. Given that many parents access information via program staff, including child care providers, social workers, or public health nurses, those that do not access services are further isolated from accessing information.

The hardest thing we have to deal with is eligibility guidelines. We both work, and they say we are over-income for everything... We have five kids. I make barely over minimum wage, and my hubby makes under \$20 per hour. [Group 5]

One barrier I see with many providers is that they are “system focused,” and if someone does not meet the criteria exactly, they are tossed to the side. Our organization, not being part of the government, is “family focused,” so we take the time to try and find ways around the barrier. They are “if it doesn’t fit the criteria – goodbye,” and we are “how do we make this work”... We just need to make things work for what is best for the children. [Interview 25]

The only thing I can think of is that many parents do not know what 185% of poverty means and I wonder if some parents don’t apply for scholarships because of feeling they don’t qualify. [Interview 4]

One thing that is hard for parents is getting a sense of where to look for good information in their local area. For new parents, especially, finding your way through the maze of options can be overwhelming. Once they find programs, like ours, there are many steps that they have to follow and the amount of paperwork that is involved. This is even more complicated if English isn’t your first language or you need a translator. [Interview 38]

Embedded within the complex early childhood system is the challenge that parents simply cannot access affordable child care. Some parents are able to access information about child care and are aware of providers, but there is no space, or they cannot afford it. When messages are shared about child development and child care, it is important the resources being promoted are actually available. For example, it's hard for parents to receive messages about the importance of quality care, when no quality care is available to them.

County subsidies will not reimburse the full cost, which leaves families either paying co-pays that they cannot afford or choosing another day care. If the family does not get child care subsidies, the cost is almost prohibitive. What good is it to have "high class" day care if only the rich can afford to use it? I find it interesting that the goal is to raise the standard for all children, but the way the system is set up, it excludes many of the families who need it the most because the cost of day care is too expensive. The focus needs to look at what parents can afford as well, even regular day care is very expensive. I realize day care is a business, but does anyone realize what it takes for a single parent (or even two-parent families) to pay for day care that costs more than their housing. Something is wrong with this picture! [Interview 33]

Cost of day care programs can be a barrier for some families. The day care programs that provide the higher level of services cost more than what the child care subsidy will cover. Therefore, families are left with either going to a less expensive day care or spending money that is needed elsewhere. For families that do not qualify for day care subsidies, the cost can be overwhelming. [Interview 30]

Lack of understanding about the importance of child development

Some interview respondents feel that parents aren't always aware that they play a role in early childhood development. Particularly in immigrant families, interview respondents say there is an assumption that children will "just grow." Because of that, they may not take time to seek information or read the information provided to them.

The biggest barrier is that many parents are not even aware that they need to be active in helping their children learn. The lack of knowledge is seen in all the parents regardless of their cultural background. I see a lot of parents who have the impression that children "just learn," so we work at helping them understand how interaction can improve their child's progress. [Interview 32]

Many parents do not even know that they need information and support to help raise healthy children. Many think the child will just grow up and learn what they need to know. [Interview 1]

Also the parents may not be educated either and are not aware of the need to help their children. We need to work with the parents as well. We need to start thinking about how agencies can work together to help the whole family. Agencies working together could be a powerful game changer in helping families. [Interview 41]

Fear and discrimination

Parents also expressed concern about asking for help, fear of being judged, and lack of trust in government programs.

It never hurts to ask. A lot of parents think, “I can do it.” ...Can’t be scared to ask for help. [Group 1]

Sometimes I don’t trust that [government publication] because I don’t know how they are giving it or who is in charge...What I found here is a lot of chaos. I don’t understand...Things are disorganized. The information is not easy to get. [Group 9]

Interview respondents acknowledge parents’ concerns, fear, and lack of trust of government agencies and people outside their cultural community. In particular, they fear being judged, having children taken away, or being deported. Parents do not want to be told what to do or what they need to know or be judged as a bad parent doing everything wrong.

There is a strong bias against the very poor and homeless parents. They are looked down upon and treated with a lack of respect. [Interview 31]

We need to find materials that work for families of different social-economic levels, races, and cultures. Unfortunately, white privilege is so hidden in our subconscious that it is hard to recognize...We seem to be stuck on what is wrong with children. The emphasis, especially for poor or disadvantaged children, is on what we need to do to fix them so they fit into the white privilege model that we have decided is the best model. Parents become marginalized when they lack the resources to give their children the same opportunities as other children. Disadvantaged children are often behind and their parents get blamed. We tend to want to “fix” those parents and their children. [Interview 37]

Teen parents are sometimes afraid to ask questions or seek help because they do not want to be judged. [Interview 14]

Some families do not apply for scholarships for fear that we will ask about their legal status. We do not ask about or require citizenship. [Interview 4]

Misinformation

An abundance of misinformation communicated via social media and word-of-mouth confuses parents. Interview respondents noted misinformation about:

- Immunizations
- Age of Head Start eligibility
- Dual language learning as a developmental delay
- Preschool screening
- What ages of children providers serve
- Having a baby will prevent future pregnancies or gaining citizenship

- Which organizations and programs provide financial assistance
- Proper use of a car seat

Isolation

Though resources abound in some places, parents lack transportation to get the information they need. Parents prefer face-to-face communication, but often that means they have to transport themselves and their children to another place to have those in-person conversations.

If they have to go to somewhere to meet with someone, there is the challenge of transportation and/or day care for their children. This is especially true if the family has a lot of young children. [Interview 5]

The lack of transportation options to and from day care providers, employment, or other services that could help the families are barriers. For our families, who need help in translating and understanding much of the information that they receive, the lack of transportation options makes being able to understand information more difficult or the information may get ignored. [Interview 6]

In addition, transportation is a problem for parents to get to a library or someplace where they can talk to someone in person, go to a meeting with a provider, or to school to talk to their child's teacher. Some parents do not even have a telephone. Regular mail is very slow. When we have community events, we have to let people know well in advance so that they try to arrange transportation. Some parents are isolated and do not even have close neighbors to talk to. We do some outreach through our office to some parents. [Interview 8]

Another barrier I see is that we expect parents to come to us when they have issues with the lack of transportation and/or child care for other children. A better system would be for us to do home visits. [Interview 41]

Parents also face digital isolation, in that they lack internet access. This is true in rural areas, on reservations, and in urban areas among low-income families who cannot afford high internet costs.

For many parents on the reservation, there is no internet service. Therefore, it is a challenge for them to get information in a quick manner, like through email, or to be able to look up information. [Interview 8]

Families often cannot afford to pay for the internet, so things like email or websites would not work for them unless they have a smartphone. [Interview 24]

Some of the younger parents may use social media, but not everyone has those connections up here on the reservation. The Center has a website on the White Earth Nation website. [Interview 10]

Poverty

While not mentioned by parents themselves, interview respondents perceive poverty as a barrier to parents getting child development information. They expressed their concern that many low-income and immigrant families are focused on “just surviving,” and not on issues like child development or early education.

We need to look at the whole family and their living situation. Especially for parents who are low income and struggling to just survive... There is a lot of very good information out there but it doesn't help parents who are working two jobs to survive and have no time. It is hard to tell parents to spend more time with their children when they are not in a position to do so. [Interview 18]

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