

## Collaborate with Families of Children with ADD



SMITA MATHUR AND  
ROBIN M. SMITH

It is widely accepted that home-school partnerships enhance the academic, behavioral, and social performance of students. However, despite a strong commitment toward their child's well-being, many families, especially those who have children with ADD, face competing demands on their time, money, and personal resources, which can impede their participation in home-school partnerships (Anderson, 2001). Educators need to work collaboratively with families to address these challenges. Discussed below are 20 ways you can collaborate with families of children with ADD.

**1. Recognize the diverse needs of families.** All families are embedded in a cultural context and in economic and social

realities that shape their lifestyles, attitudes, and childrearing practices. Educators can acknowledge differences among families by accepting and validating the diversity in beliefs, values, and practices.

**2.**

**Provide information about ADD to families.** Families can be empowered with information related to behavior management techniques, causes of ADD, and legal rights of the child and families. This will help them understand the child and create a more supportive environment for the child and all members of the family (Knight, 1997).

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**3.** Understand that families of children with ADD are vulnerable to stress at several points in their life cycle. It is important to acknowledge that as families cope with stress, they develop certain competencies to manage the stress. Educators can offer support and education to build on the competencies that the families develop in coping with stressful events (Podolski & Nigg, 2001).

**4.** Learn and support the family's decision-making process. For example, even though educators may not agree with the family's decision on medication, they can support the child within the context of the family's decision. Learning about and validating the family's decision-making process can enhance the child's success in school.

**5.** Plan meetings to accommodate family members. Many family members have busy schedules, and one meeting may need to be broken down into two sessions of shorter duration. It may be important to provide convenient transportation to family members at no or low cost to them. It also may be important

to make age and developmentally appropriate childcare available during meetings. Requests for childcare can be solicited from families before the meeting so that there is sufficient time to plan quality care for children with ADD and their siblings.

**6.** Learn about and respect the family's cultural beliefs and validate their sentiments. Dettmer, Thurston, and Dyck (2002) recommended learning about cultures by getting to know members of different groups, identifying a cultural guide, reading literature by and for people of the culture, attending cultural events, and asking questions in sensitive ways. Educators can show their respect for families by adjusting their services to the family's values and customs. This also inspires trust and goodwill between the school and home and opens up opportunities for collaborative work with family members. This does not imply that the teacher must believe in the family's cultural practices; however, the teacher must show respect and genuine interest in knowing about the family's culture.

**7.** Address the language needs of families. Send home correspondence in the family's preferred language. Many families also may need an impartial and competent translator, especially when English is not their first language. At the beginning of the school year or prior to the first meeting with parents, families should be asked if they need a translator. Once translators have been identified, they should make contact with the family before the first meeting. If possible, the translator should not be changed during the school year.

**8.** Avoid jargon when speaking to families about the child's strengths and needs, legal implications, teaching strategies, or principles of learning. This will help families feel you are talking "with them" instead of "at them" or "down to them." Legal and technical jargon should be introduced gradually using examples and language families can understand.

**9.****Reflect upon one's own biases, attitudes, and practices regarding working with students with ADD.**

Smith, Salend, and Ryan (2001) suggested that reflecting on how you think and talk about and to students can reveal inaccurate or deficit-oriented assumptions. These may result in practices that inhibit learning and make it difficult to collaborate with families. These questions can guide self-reflection:

- Do you focus on the person rather than the disability?
- Do you refer to the student by name rather than by disability (e.g., "ADD student")?
- Do you acknowledge the efforts and achievements of all students?
- Do all students have opportunities to show their strengths and assist others?

**10.****Help family members develop their advocacy skills:**

- Involve family members as partners on school policy and curriculum development.
- Encourage parents to organize and build coalitions around issues that affect their

child's education, services, or legal rights (Barbour & Barbour, 1997). Educators can help families articulate and document their concerns, network with other parents who have similar concerns, and tap into resources available within the school and community.

- Help parents become informed and stay abreast of policy changes and their implications for children and families.

**11.****Include all the caregivers and family members who are involved with the child's care and education.**

There are often multiple caregivers within the family. For example, grandparents, stepparents, and other members of the extended family, tutors, neighbors, and friends may perform important roles in the child's life. Including them in a collaborative relationship with the school helps maintain consistency and continuity in the education and care of the child with ADD (McDonnell & Mathews, 2001).

**12.****Provide families with information about different ways to manage the child's behavior.**

This information can help families identify the effectiveness of their



management styles and modify them accordingly. Family members need to understand that their interactions with their children may need to change based on the child's age and the setting.

**13.** **Help families network with other families experiencing ADD-related issues.** For example, families may attend a workshop or lecture about issues such as legal rights, advocacy skills, or the use of medications. Networking also provides opportunities to meet others and exchange ideas. Networking can be a source of useful information and strategies and can minimize a family's feeling of isolation.

**14.** **Use regular conferences to establish a collaborative home-school relationship.** Conferences may inform the family about the school's way of doing things



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and the child's progress. Conferences are a good way to share ideas, information, and insights (Barbour & Barbour, 1997). Jones and Jones (2001) suggested that families who miss initial orientation conferences can be invited for a one-to-one meeting to create a foundation for further family support and collaboration.

**15.** **Use a dialogue notebook that travels between home and school with the student.** The notebook can include positive messages about students or comments regarding how a behavior plan is working. It also can be used to make families aware of problems that arise in school. Similarly caregivers can use the notebook to inform school professionals about home situations, request information, or ask questions.

**16.** **Develop collaborative behavior intervention plans with families.** Behavior intervention plans work best when they address the family's values and resources and when all involved implement it as designed (Albin, Lucyshyn, Horner, & Flannery, 1996). For example, a plan to reward on-task behavior while doing homework will only work if all the adults involved communicate and collaborate in designing and implementing it.

**17.** **Structure instructional activities to involve families.** For example, instructional activities can ask students to create a family tree or to interview family members about their jobs or their experiences and reactions to a particular event. Weinstein and Mignano (1997) listed several other ways for families to become involved in learning activities at home that involve reading, writing, mathematics, and television.

**18.** **Encourage families to teach their children how to develop friendships.** Families also can be encouraged to invite other children to play at their home and to have their child participate in community events.



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## 19. Use the Internet to provide families with access to useful information.

Some useful sites include:

- [www.ld-add.com](http://www.ld-add.com)
- [www.ldonline.org](http://www.ldonline.org)
- [www.wrightslaw.com](http://www.wrightslaw.com)
- [www.ThomasArmstrong.com](http://www.ThomasArmstrong.com)

## 20. Be prepared to mend fences with families. There may be times when you disagree with families or they disagree with you. Remember that it is in everyone's interest to understand and accept these differences and not let them interfere with the ongoing collaborative relationship.

*Persons interested in submitting material for 20 Ways To . . . should contact Robin H. Lock, College of Education, Box 41071, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX 76409-1701.*

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Smita Mathur**, PhD, is an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Studies at the State University of New York at New Paltz. Her research interests relate to parental involvement in schools, education of immigrant children, and issues related to ethnicity and acculturation. **Robin M. Smith**, PhD, is an assistant professor of special education at the State University of New York at New Paltz. Her current interests include self-advocacy and inclusion, disability studies, and competence-oriented teaching. Address: Smita Mathur or Robin M. Smith, SUNY New Paltz, 75 S. Manheim Blvd., OMB 112, New Paltz, NY 12561; e-mail: [mathurs@newpaltz.edu](mailto:mathurs@newpaltz.edu)

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