



Handout 8-1: Developing the Relationship

The social worker-client relationship is central to interventions and engagement that promote positive case resolutions. Listed below are some key elements to developing the relationship (Adapted from the Six Principles of Partnership; Appalachian Family Innovations. (2003). *Partners in change: A new perspective on child protective services* (curriculum). Morganton, NC: Author.)

Everyone desires respect

All people have worth and everyone has the right to self-determination, to make their own decisions about their lives.

Partners share power

Power differentials create obstacles to partnership. Since society confers power upon the helper, it is the helper's responsibility to create a partnership with a client, especially one who appears hostile, resistant, etc. Clients do not owe us their cooperation; we must earn it.

Everyone has strengths

All people have many resources, past successes, abilities, talents, dreams, etc., that provide the raw material for solutions and future success. As "helpers," we become involved with people because of their problems; these problems then become a filter that obscures our ability to see strengths. Acceptance of this principle doesn't mean that one ignores or minimizes problems; it means that one works hard to identify strengths as well as problems so that the helper and the client have a more balanced, accurate and hopeful picture.

Everyone needs to be heard

This can be accomplished primarily through empathic listening. While empathic listening looks very much like active or reflective listening, what differentiates it is the listener's motivation. Active and reflective listening are techniques that are often used to manage or manipulate someone's behavior so that the listener can advance his own agenda. Empathic listening is motivated by the listener's desire to truly understand someone's point of view -- to enter someone's frame of reference -- without a personal agenda. When one feels heard and understood, defensiveness and resistance are unnecessary, and solutions can be sought.

Judgments can wait

Once a judgment is made, one's tendency is to stop gathering new information or to make an interpretation in light of the prior judgment. Therefore, since a helper's judgments can have an immense impact on a client's life, it is only fair to delay judgment as long as possible, then to hold it lightly, while remaining open to new information and willing to change one's mind. Acceptance of this principle does not mean that decisions regarding safety cannot be made quickly; it simply requires that ultimate judgments be very well-considered.

Partnership is a process

Each of the six principles is part of a greater whole. While each has merit on its own, all are necessary for partnership. Each principle supports and strengthens the others. In addition, this principle acknowledges that putting the principles into practice consistently is hard. Acceptance of the principles is not enough; it requires intention and attention to practice the principles.