Nicole

Welcome back to the podcast guys! We're going to be talking about building relationships with families today. And I brought two BCBAs on to talk. You guys know Cassie, she's been on a couple of episodes, but in case you don't know who she is, I'll have her reintroduce herself.

Cassie

Hi guys. This is Cassie from Adventures in Behavior, I am currently a special education teacher and part-time in home BCBA. I'm transitioning soon to full time clinic BCBQ.

Nicole

and our other co-hosts is Carla.

Carla

Hi, I'm Carla. I'm actually in my coursework to be, become a BCBA. So, uh, whenever I saw Nicole was seeking out people, I thought it would be great to come on. I was a special ed teacher for 13 years, between autistic support and emotional support classrooms, um, here in Pennsylvania. And I transitioned last year before the pandemic hit to an educational consulting position. Um, so I work for organization that works for around 27 districts within our area. So we support teachers. Um, we do FBAs and help teachers to write positive behavior support plans and, um, just kind of a little bit of everything around behavior. So I'm enjoying that role, although I do miss the classroom in some ways

Nicole

Absolutely. And I can relate to that for sure. And so if you're tuning into this episode and you're not a BCBA, you don't want to be a BCBA don't click out because working with parents, similar tips, no matter what field you're in. And I know when I was a teacher, this is something that I struggled with my first couple of years, I just had terrible parent communication. And I honestly didn't value the importance of it. And I was that teacher that like only called home when there was a problem. So naturally the parents, you know, felt really anxious when I called them because they knew if I was calling something was wrong. Because I just didn't even think to call about the positives. And so that's something as a teacher I really worked on and I know as a BCBA, I will have to do the same. And so I wanted to bring some other people on where we could talk about that. So I'll have both of you just kind of share what your communication style is in terms of, do you reach out to families via phone calls? Do you do emails? Do you touch base once a week, once a month, once a quarter? Uh, I'll let Carla go first and then we'll go to Cassie.

Carla

Well, I can relate, um, Nicole, I think early in my teaching career, I, uh, didn't have the greatest communication with parents. Um, it took a lot of learning and, and then being able to relate to them and understanding, uh, just kind of taking my perspective out of it and thinking, how would I feel as a parent? Um, you know, if somebody just always called me, um, when something bad was happening, you know, and like you said, then it almost, you're kind of creating yourself to be that adversive in that condition. So I learned over time that you really have to communicate in the best way that it works for the parents. So asking them, you know, some parents didn't have time for phone calls at night, so they preferred to email. Um, I had some parents that would rather have a phone conversation with me and talk. So I learned, uh, quickly that at the beginning of the year, just to ask parents, what do you want for me? Um, as far as communication, what works best for you? And now in the role that I'm in, we communicate with parents mostly when we're kind of coming in on an FBA or something that can already be a condition where they might be a little anxious about what's happening in the school environment. So I usually do make those contacts by phone so that I can get to know them and they can kind of learn a little bit more. There's less of, sometimes you can't necessarily read the whole situation whenever you're just communicating via email. So I like to communicate via phone in those situations

Cassie

So I have, my style has kind of evolved depending on what role that I have, um, at the time. So, uh, I'll just quickly touch on that in home clinic role. Um, one of my favorite parts about being in homes doing ABA therapy is that the parents have to be there too. Um, and so I see them every session we, I can catch up with them at the beginning of the session, what we know what's happened today. Um, what made your behaviors have happened at the end of the session? I can quickly give him a rundown of what happened. Um, and so we have really great relationships, um, because I see them as much as I see the kids, um, uh, on the flip side, um, my middle school classroom, cause I am currently a middle school teacher. I don't talk with the parents as much because we're starting to, um, you know, work a lot more on independence. Parents are pulling back. It's not, they're not as involved even though their students are. Um, do you have intellectual disabilities and autism they've been around for a while. They're not wanting to know as much detail. So generally unless it's like a kid that, um, parents pick them up after school. And then of course I still talk to them every single day. I usually try to talk to them once a week. It doesn't always happen because I do support. Um, I've had up to 33 kids, um, which is a lot to be calling every single week. Um, and so it kinda just depends on, you know, also with the parents are wanting, I have some parents that they're like, they, they don't want a phone call unless it is something bad. Um, and so I try to, um, sometimes like send home a little positive notes, but it just, it really depends on what the parents are wanting as well.

Nicole

And that's such a great point because when I finally figured out that some of my parents, if we just had a monthly phone call, they did so much better than just waiting for the IEP. And I had other parents who were like, you're asking me to talk to you once a month. Why can't I just talk to you at that yearly IEP and taking time to figure out this communication styles helped build positive relationships with each of those families and their needs.

Do either one of you have any like hard dues are hard don'ts when it comes to communicating with families.

Cassie

Yes. Uh, so a hard no is, like you said, only calling on the negatives. Um, that's a great way to ruin any relationship. And my like hard and fast do is to make at least one positive contact before anything else. So if I haven't contacted them, let's say before the school year for teachers, um, then like the first day of school, I have to make a contact, um, and share something positive about their day. So that way we're starting to build that relationship. We have to pair with parents just like we have to pair with our kids.

Carla

Yeah. I agree. A hundred percent. That is something that I have always thought about the more and more I learn. Um, it's kind of stuff that I always did in my classroom, but I couldn't, I didn't necessarily know the science behind it. And now the further I get into the coursework pairing always comes to mind. Um, like Cassie said is just like when you're working with students, um, for many of our parents, they especially, um, you know, for a student that may be older and new to a district and we're coming into work on an FBA because of some, uh, problem behaviors. And so teachers in the past, they may just have had negative experiences where every person they've talked to in a school environment has just been telling them kind of the negative things that are going on. So sometimes they already have those experiences. So it does take a lot of, kind of pairing ourself to build that relationship with them. And then as you both mentioned, really know what they want from it, but definitely sharing those positive things that their child is doing is so important.

Nicole

Absolutely. And we kind of already touched on this, but did either one of you have any other tips on how you kind of build that relationship with a brand new family? Like what does that look like when you first meeting a family and kind of navigating what they need from that teacher parent relationship?

Carla

So I always like to hear about their history, give them a chance to kind of explain, you know, what's going on, what they've done up to this point. Um, you know, any past experiences that they want to share with me. And then that really kind of helps me to gauge where they're at as far as their experiences. Um, you know, especially when I was in the classroom, it helped me to see, okay, did they have a poor experience in the past, in a, another setting or another classroom that their child was in and how can I start to repair that in a way? Um, so I always kind of give them the opportunity to explain the history, as well, as where, what are their big outcomes for their child? You know, ultimately what, where do they, what kind of goals do they see and, and what kind of outcomes are they looking for their child and how can I work to support that and what am I going to put in place to support that? So I just think making them feel like their opinion is so valuable because they knew their child best is really important, especially in that pairing process.

Cassie

Yeah. All of those things. And then I also like to just ask questions that have nothing to do with school, their kids, like, what are you like, where'd you go this summer? Like, do you have anything fun planned for the next holiday break? Just like random questions that have helped them feel like I care about them and their kids as more than just the school environment. Um, and so I find that that is really helpful as well.

Nicole

So one thing I would love to get your opinion on, and this is something that I struggled with as a teacher and I can already see that it will be a struggle for me as a BCBQ is what does that look like when we have a family that maybe wants to use a practice that is not evidence-based. And we know that it's not supported by the same evidence that we use, our research that we use, how do we stay true to our science and true to our passion for evidence-based practices without destroying that family relationship? Because the last thing you want to do is go to the table and say like, you're following a quack policy and it's ridiculous because that's going to, I've seen it be done and that naturally burns a bridge. So how do we negotiate that conversation?

Cassie

I think for me, um, I fortunately have never had to deal with this. Um, I think in this school system, parents, for the most part, generally defer to the teachers and whatnot. But I think for me, if that were to ever happen, um, I would want to explain about evidence based practices and why they're important and then offer that if the parents still want to go forward with it, um, that we can collect data and make sure that, you know, we make up our base or phase change Mark. So like on their graph, you know, saying like this is when that evidence or that practice that isn't evidence-based started, this is, and then like monitor it, um, over time. And so that way, you know, we're not necessarily implementing it, but, um, we are helping the family by providing that data for them. That's a great example.

Carla

I agree. And I also, with parents, sometimes I like to figure out the why, um, you know, kind of just like we are with kids, the function, why do you want this? What is your end outcome you're looking for with this intervention that you're coming to us with. And then from there, perhaps we can look up and look at some evidence-based practices that we can then share the research behind those to kind of compare and say, this is going to get us the same outcome, but here's some research that we can share that, um, is that showing that the implementation of this, uh, the research backs it up so we can perhaps try that. But in Cassie's case too, if they are very adamant about trying something, you know, you can show them that data and be very honest about it, just like with every intervention. I think that you implement just being honest with your data and saying, even with an evidence-based practice, if it's not working for their child, then you show that to them and say, Hey, we're going to try something different now because the data is showing us that. And I think that in itself helps to build relationships too, when you're just honest, even when something's not going.

Nicole

Right. Exactly. I love that that honesty is key. And another thing that comes to mind for me that I, I see a lot of people forget is we all have chosen this as our career in our professions and our parents haven't. So they haven't gone to school the way we have, you know, they, you know, and I get it. They're probably not caring about research when they're just trying to survive every day with their families. So I find it important to help kind of be that bridge. And again, like using those lay terms and helping them understand that research is, you know, it's not effective just to hand them a research article that I, as a graduate student, struggled to read and be like, Hey, good luck. That's going to show you why I think this way. We're having those like really open conversations, I think can go a long way in figuring out the why, and kind of figuring out how we can work with them. Those are all the questions I had for you guys. But did you have anything else you wanted to share in terms of building relationships with families?

Cassie

I think, um, like I was terrified of my first year teaching. I like, I was so fearful because I had heard all of the horror stories and even my most challenging parent that I ever had teaching. Um, we had the most positive relationship that that parent has ever had with any school professional. And it was because I was honest and open and I showed her from the very beginning that I cared about her kids' success. And, um, I, it was when I was teaching in a behavior unit. And so that can be very intense for parents, for the kids, for the staff. And so we had daily behavior charts that I would send home, um, so that like they knew exactly what was happening and it wasn't just, um, that the target behaviors, we had the replacement behaviors on there as well, so that they could see all of the good things that happened that day, not just the bad. And I think that's the key to focus on is making sure that we have that open, honest and positive relationship.

Carla

Definitely I was the same way early in teaching is, you know, you hear these nightmare stories about a bad parent teacher relationships and the things that go wrong. And once you kind of figure out how to establish those relationships and you work with parents to show them that you're going to be the advocate for, for their child when they can't be there. And that's, that was the biggest thing is just proving to them that I want to advocate, just advocate just as much as they are. And I want their insight on what they feel is most important for their child, as well as their child's insight into that. And, and I still have parents from my classroom that I'm very connected with, um, that, like Cassie said, didn't necessarily have a relationship with an educator in the past and saw that I, that I wanted to do what was best with their child because of the interventions that we were putting in place. And we were very open about why we were doing it, how it was going and when we were going to make changes and that built the relationship. Because a lot of times, I think just in the past, they had some people that weren't necessarily being as open and honest about what was happening in that setting until a crisis emerged. And then they hear about it. And that can be a very frustrating situation.

Nicole

Absolutely. And the last thing I wanted to do, because I certainly don't like to sugar coat anything. There will be times where you have parents that maybe just don't like you that's a reality of the job and it stinks. But for me, it's always important to make sure do they not like me because I'm not doing a good job. Do they not like me because I have made myself aversive, am I doing everything I can to foster a positive and just remember if you're in that situation, you probably have nothing to do with it. They probably, don't actually not like you, it's a circumstance. And like we talked about, it's a history of having bad relationship after bad relationship with teachers and admins and therapists I've built up to now, you're the person that you feel like it's all on you. And it's important that you still treat the parents with respect and dignity. Even if, maybe you feel like they don't like you. Cause I know I would get a chip on my shoulder and I'd walk into an IEP meeting and I'd be angry cause you don't like me. And like, obviously that did not end well because it's not gonna end well. And so just like with our kids from maybe we end on a bad note, it's a new day as you do the same thing with parents. Even if we have a bad IEP meeting, it's a new IEP meeting. I'm going to still come in and still want to work with you, but don't take it personally. We've all been there and you will get through it. You guys have anything else you want to throw out there?

Carla

It's just a really great point. So.

Nicole Perfect. Well, thanks. Oh, go ahead, Cassie!

Cassie I was just gonna say, I think that's a really great note to end on!

Nicole- Thanks for coming on the episode, I hope you guys enjoyed it and I'll catch you all in the next one.