

Parent Consultant Directory Q & A

“The most important part of teaching—to teach what it is to know” --Simone Weil

WHAT IS THE PARENT CONSULTANT DIRECTORY?

We know that families of children with special needs can provide unique and valuable insight into caring for and supporting their children. These families live special lives. We are creating this directory as a means to educate emerging professionals, early childhood practitioners and community members with first hand knowledge of what families experience and what they need from service providers. The directory will include a brief introduction to each family, the region in which they live and contact information. Faculty members and other educators will have access to the directory and would then contact a family to come in and share their family story.

WHAT IS A PARENT CONSULTANT?

A parent consultant is a parent with a child with special needs who is willing to share his/her experiences, expertise and perspective with students, early childhood practitioners and/or community members. No special training is required but a video is available at the Waisman Center entitled “Telling Your Family Story: Parents as Presenters”, if parent consultants are interested. Parents can also call personnel at the Waisman Center and receive support and resources for their presentations.

WHAT DOES A PARENT CONSULTANT DO?

Educators will contact parents to share their family story—their unique perspective of living and loving a child with special needs—with a class, practitioner training, or conference. This might be in a lecture format, a panel discussion, or a small group question and answer session. There might also be the opportunity for mentoring a student—typically meeting one-on-one with the student to share insights over the course of a semester or two. Parent consultants would have the option to sign up for the formats in which they are most comfortable and would be free to decline invitations.

IS THERE COMPENSATION?

We understand that your insights and your time are valuable so we offer modest honorariums for pre-professional trainings. Professional development is not funded through the State Improvement Grant so we cannot offer honorariums for this although oftentimes the event coordinator can find honorariums from other sources.

HOW WILL I KNOW WHAT TO SAY AT THE EVENT?

Preferably the educator will contact the parent with ample notice (we suggest families are asked at least two weeks prior to the event) and will be able to provide clear directions about content. Parents should feel free to ask questions and clarify expectations. It is usually a good idea for the educator to touch base with the parent a couple of times before the presentation so you feel comfortable and prepared.

I'M NERVOUS ABOUT PUBLIC SPEAKING!

This is a common issue for all of us but be reminded that you will be talking about something you are an expert on—your family. You also have the option to choose which

formats you want to participate on so if large groups are overwhelming, you can opt for panel discussions or smaller groups.

WHAT IF I HAVE PROBLEMS?

You should always feel free to contact the Waisman Center if you need help developing your story, connecting with the educator, etc.

HOW WILL MY FAMILY'S PRIVACY BE PROTECTED?

Families are asked to sign a release form giving permission for information about their family to be included in the directory. A cover statement will be included in the directory indicating that information about families is not to be copied or distributed without the written permission of the families involved.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PRE-PROFESSIONAL TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

Pre-professional training takes place during the formal education of a student—in a classroom setting. Professional development opportunities happen once the practitioner has graduated and is serving children and families and is designed to enhance their level of knowledge.

FORMATS

PANELS: A panel brings together several presenters who each have a given amount of time to discuss his/her perspective on the topic.

- You might want to ask about the order of presenters—will you speak first, last or somewhere in between?
- You might ask whether there will be time for questions and answers.

LECTURE: The physical setting of this kind of presentation is one where the presenter is placed in front of an “audience” and given a length of time in which to share information.

- Make sure you have a clear idea of your topic and what points to cover. Bring in notes as aids.
- Ask about the lecture logistics: number of participants? will there be a microphone? do you stand/sit? Is it casual dress? etc.
- Consider bringing in visual aids to add to your presentation (slides, powerpoint, etc)

MENTORING: This is typically an on-going relationship over a given period of time in which one individual spends individual time with another sharing perspectives and insights.

- Make sure you understand the parameters of the mentoring: how many months does it last? How many visits per month? Where do the visits occur?
- Develop goals between the mentor and the mentee so it is clear what each wants out of the relationship.

PREPARING YOUR PRESENTATION

KNOW THE PURPOSE OF YOUR PRESENTATION: If you don't fully understand your topic, feel free to contact the faculty/event coordinator to get more defined parameters. It is their responsibility to guide you through what they want you to share.

ORGANIZE YOUR IDEAS: Spend some time thinking about what you will say and feel free to use an outline, detailed notes, index cards, etc. Most people feel more comfortable when they have written information in front of them.

In general, presentations should have three parts—

1. Introduction: introduce yourself, thank audience for the opportunity to share your information and explain what you are going to say.
2. Middle: in the body of the presentation you should focus on giving information, illustrating your points with personal stories and conveying your views to the audience. Some people organize presentations in chronological order or start with the most important point.
3. End: summarize your points, thank the audience and open up for questions and answers if time permits.

USE YOUR OWN STYLE: Some people feel comfortable ad-libbing and spontaneously sharing jokes/anecdotes and others like to stick to a prepared script. Adopt whatever will make you feel most comfortable but do remember to engage your audience with a clear, audible voice and regular eye contact. It might help to practice in front of an audience of family or friends before your actual presentation.

ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR EMOTIONS: Especially in cases when we discuss personal issues, like our children and families, emotions can surface. Feel free to tell the audience that your topic is difficult, that you might need a break to gather yourself or that some topics are outside of what you are comfortable sharing. You have control.

RESPONDING TO YOUR AUDIENCE: Because your audience will be either pre-professionals (college/university students) or early intervention professionals, it is highly likely that they will already have an investment in your topic and will be active audience members. Remember to leave an opportunity for them to ask you questions while also being clear with yourself on what topics you're willing to answer and what topics you'd rather discuss after the presentation in a one-on-one conversation. Don't feel bad if you don't know an answer--just be honest.

If you would like to talk with someone at the Waisman Center about your presentation, feel free to contact us at (608) 263-5947.