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**SPEAKER:**

Hello everyone. Thank you for being here. We will begin in about 15 minutes.

**SPEAKER:**

Hello again everyone, we welcome you from Utah State University. We will begin our presentation at 11:30 AM Mountain time. We will begin in about 10 minutes.

Hello everyone, we welcome you from Utah State University. It is good to see some more of you joining us early. We will begin our presentation at 11:30 AM Mountain time, so about five minutes.

**SPEAKER:**

Hello everyone, and welcome to today's Hear to Learn webinar, brought to you by the Department of communicative disorders and deaf education at Utah State University. This webinar is being recorded. To access captioning, click on the cc button at the bottom of the screen, and click on show subtitle.

Today's presentation is titled Promoting Parent Connections and Friendships, which we presented by Teena Young, and Nicole Jacobson.

Teena Young is a teacher of the deaf in the preschool classroom at (unknown name). She utilizes the spoken line which approach to help her students reach individualized listening and language goals. She has taught in a preschool setting for seven years, and enjoys helping children learn through play and exploration.

Tina has a Masters degree in communication disorders and deaf education, and a bachelor's degree in audiology.

Nicole Jacobson is a listening and spoken liquid specialist, with a dual professional background as a speech language pathologist and a special educator. She has many years working with children who are deaf and hard of hearing, and their families in the sound beginnings program at Utah State University.

Please hold your questions and comments until the end of Teena and Nicole's presentation. At that time you can use the Q and a function to submit any questions you have four hours-- our presenters. Now I would like to welcome Tina and Nicole to today's webinar.

**TEENA YOUNG:**

Thank you Stephanie, and thank you everyone for joining our webinar. I am Teena Young, and I have Nicole Jacobson here with me. We are so happy to present this information to you. As professionals who provide services for children with hearing loss, we understand that families have a variety of needs and experiences throughout

their journey. Often, parents report that the connections that they make with other parents, provide them with the Bible support that they may not obtain from other sources.

We would like to discuss the benefit of these connections and friendships. Parents need each other. They value their friendships, and they seek to make connections with each other.

? In short, because we care about these families. We want them to find the support they need. Parents of children and death and hard of hearing, can find understanding support and encouragement, when they connect and build friendships with each other. Also, these types of friendships can provide an anchor in times that may seem unsettled. These unsettled times may be experienced upon initial diagnosis, or when a child is transitioning into a new school setting.

Connections and friendships with other parents who have sailed a similar sea, can provide people with knowledge to continue their efforts.

As we support parents, it is important for us to consider why these friendships are so important, and make efforts to promote these types of connections.

Parent connections and friendships can be facilitated in a variety of ways. Here at Sound Beginnings parent connections can look a little bit different. Family dynamics, age of children, and available resources are reasons. Briefly, I will highlight a few of the ways we are facilitating parent connections and friendships. I will provide some information about the toddler parent group, and the virtual parent discussion group.

I will also take a moment to discuss how parent connections are made within the classroom setting. Later in the presentation, Nicole will provide more information about various families connection activities, and the feedback that we have received from parents who have participated.

Toddler parent group is held weekly with a group of parents and their toddler aged children. Parents stay with their children, and interact with each other. They provide learning opportunities within the small group setting.

I have listed a few ways that this group promotes parent connections and friendships. The toddler parent group may provide the first opportunity for parents of children with hearing loss, to interact with each other. The early intervention therapist may answer questions and help parents find commonalities.

Parents of told her aged children may begin to realize the value of these connections and friendships, and are likely to engage in these types of interactions in the future.

Parents may also find commonalities, as their children often have similar interests at this stage of development.

Another way parent connections and friendships have been facilitated is through virtual parent

discussion group. This is held weekly via zoom meeting. The virtual form allows parents to connect with others who may live in different areas or states. Tele-intervention therapist hosts the meeting. They host a facilitating role. Not a leading role. This is intended to be parent lead.

Listed here, are some benefits that parents are experiencing as they participate.

Connections and friendships are made across many different states and time zones. Parents share resources that have helped their children throughout their development. Parents find commonalities, even though some have teenage children, and some have newborns.

Parents with older children encourage the other parents share resources they have discovered. Because the virtual meetings are held weekly, parents find support of our current issues that they are facing, and share successes and concerns relevant to the here and now.

The virtual parent discussion group allows parents to have a voice. It is a safe place for them to share their story and reach out for advice and understanding.

Classrooms is another valuable setting for parents to develop these friendships. These connections may be developed as families participate in classroom activities. Drop-off and pickup times are natural times for parents to check in with each other.

Also, when children develop friendships, it often leads to their parents developing friendships as well. As a classroom teacher, I love to see families connecting with each other through their children's classroom experience.

These connections build a sense of community, even outside the classroom.

Who can facilitate these parent connections? The answer is anyone who has interest in providing these types of supports for parents. Professionals such as doctors, audiologists, speech therapists, educators, early interventionists, and tele-service providers may contribute to efforts in facilitating parent connections. Local or national parent support groups, and school administrators and teachers also can facilitate these interactions.

Many parents make connections through social media groups. Additionally, parents and families are facilitating these types of connections as they are reaching out to each other in a variety of ways, and in a variety of settings.

Helen Keller stated, "Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much." Let's discuss for a moment why parent connections and friendships are so valuable. There are a variety of benefits for children and for parents that I would like to highlight here.

First, parents need each other. They need to feel like they have someone that knows and understands the challenges associated with navigating the needs of a child who is deaf or hard of hearing. Parent friendships provide emotional support in both hard

times and in times of joy and celebration. Often parents seek out resources from. Often, parents seek out resources from other parents, so these are valuable in forming (indiscernible) resources. Parents may feel more comfortable in sharing their story and maybe more likely to seek advice to solve problems. Additionally, parents who have children with a new diagnosis can reach out to other parents to forecast any future needs such as preparing for a new classroom transition, or working with the school district to obtain supports.

In addition to the many benefits for parents, these types of friendships also benefit children. Connections allow for children to interact with other children who have hearing loss. Additionally, information about resources and services can be shared, that benefit the children.

Children can have an increased feeling of belonging within the social groups, as they find support from other families.

Now that we have discussed about wise and whose associated with promoting parent connections and friendships, Nicole will take us further in our discussion on this topic.

NICOLE JACOBSON:

How can we work together to promote parent connections and friendships? Have fun together! When people can go to a fun event, they are more likely to relax and laugh, and start chatting with each other. So, providing experiences for people to share together gives them the opportunity to build relationships.

We are going to share some ways that this program has worked together over the years to build parent connections, that keep in mind as we talk through these, these tips can be used by other programmes, or even by informal groups that are coming together.

It is very helpful one of program hold a regular schedule of events for families to enjoy frequent gatherings. Consider how a program could establish fun annual traditions to give room for these social connections to naturally happen. Seasons and holidays give prime opportunities to hold fun events.

I have listed some of the events we have held in the past that families often look forward to returning for them year after year. Sometimes even as alumni families of the program, long after their children were graduated from our program.

We have held summer camps where parents learned from parent seminars, and the children's and the teams enjoyed group building activities.

We have kicked off our school year with a back-to-school barbecue. As fall roles in we will hold a family party with the Utah family University football athletes. That is definitely a family favourite that brings alumni back every year.

Other parties we have had is Halloween costumes, a Thanksgiving pie party, hot cocoa party in the winter, Valentines dance, pancake breakfast, field trips to fund sites around town such as the bakery,

the fire station, a bank, a restaurant, a park. Even to see the baby animals in the spring.

We have also held a holiday program in December, and an end of your program in May.

As you hold the social types of events, it is good to realize that service providers are often the first people that parents need in their community. Because some people don't like to go somewhere without a good friend, parents may at first come to a program activity only if they have warm report with their provider.

Keep in mind, some parents might be confident extroverts and easily attend an event where they know few people, providers really can help your parents become acquainted with others until they form their own deepening ties and expand their sense of community. Hopefully these program communities can lead parents to branch L as they plan together, such as play dates in their home, meeting at the park, or going to the library together.

Another way to build a parent community is to hold parent seminars and support group meetings.

Keep in mind that other family members such as grandparents or aunts and uncles, or any caregivers may also be appropriate to invite to these meetings. At Sound Beginnings we have found old and regular group meetings have been a rich resource. Parents and families often experience difficulty understanding, adjusting, and coping with the challenges hearing loss can bring. They may not know what circumstances to anticipate, or what outcomes to strive for as their children continue to develop.

Parents may also seek education and guidance that would empower them to make informed decisions for their children's audiological and developmental and educational needs. These meetings can be held in person, or online.

Before the start of a school year, our integral dysentery-- interdisciplinary staff would consider topics according to parent interest and need regarding the child's hearing loss and ability. Presenters were invited to leave the seminar based on their professional background relative to the topic.

For example, a social worker was invited to lead seminar on a topic of achieving family balance while caring for a child's special needs.

An audiologist was invited to explain how to read and audiogram.

Listening and spoken leg specialist were invited to teach parents about using whistle strategies.

It is helpful for parents to see the yearly schedule in advance, so they can save dates on their calendars as the time approaches, and then it is also helpful to give parents reminders in a way that matches their communication styles such as through social media, emails, or text messages.

We started our family education support group meetings with a little time for informal mingle. As people chat with each other, they establish a warm climate of trust and friendship. That is so essential

for them to feel more comfortable later in that meeting, so they can share their meaningful experiences and insights with each other.

After this opener, the host of the meeting leads around of introductions to include all in the room, to help everyone learn names and understand various roles of people that are there.

A professional shares of brief educational presentation with some stimulating discussion prompts, to invite the parents to share their insights and experiences. We have often invited multiple types of professionals to attend these meetings, so families can benefit from an interdisciplinary panel, or a very professional perspectives.

During the discussion, it is important to meet the parents where they are at. What is their emotional state? Are there some sensitivities to watch out for? Are they feeling resilient or vulnerable? Socially, are they feeling confident in meeting others, or would they benefit from and others outreach toward them?

You might be wondering why I listed a physical element, but it makes a big difference if a mother of a young infant or child has had a series of sleep deprived nights--nights.

What content knowledge are parents walking into the meeting already knowing? Do they need any foundational concepts explain before diving into more advanced concepts? It is important not to make any assumptions about what state apparent-- apparent (audio issues) to whatever states we find them in.

As we work to fit our educational methods to meet the parents where we are at, this not only helps professionals to offer more on target family centred care, but also helps parents to understand every support -- how to support each other according to their true needs.

We have often seen how parents would advocate for each other. I have done stuff before by a parent in the middle of a presentation because she was concerned that I was using a term that a new parent might not understand. She wanted to make sure that I was explaining the foundation of concepts first, in ways that her new friend would benefit from. I was absolutely delighted that this parent who had more experience in our program was just as concerned with another's learning, as she was for her own.

The true heart of the family education and support meeting is the open discussion that flows from the seminar topic. Asking thoughtfully prepared questions, inviting parents to share meaningful insights, experiences, questions, or even concerns is authenticity to the discussion.

While parents can learn evidence-based practices from professionals, what they learn from other parents can many times be far more powerful takeaways. Parent who shares successes can't substantiate hope for another parent to work to obtain the same positive outcomes for their child.

A parent who shares concerns can find empathy from another parent who is living through the same or

similar concerns.

A parent who shares a burden can benefit from collective wisdom from other parents, as they brainstorm possible solutions to try out. While we facilitate the sharing portion of the meeting, it is important to help facilitate balance among the parent participants, to encourage all to participate according to their state of readiness.

This isn't a place to force responses. At times, it is enough for a parent to know that they have the opportunity to share, even if they don't feel ready to share that day at that meeting.

Even if a parent doesn't choose to contribute much to the session, but does achieve self awareness of how they are responding and coping in ways that resemble others, they have gained much from listening.

These support group meetings have become home to tender tears and hearty laughs, and knowing nods as parents reveal that their experiences, what a common or singular.

The close of the meeting is a good opportunity to ask parents for written or verbal feedback on the helpfulness of the topic explored, and then to invite them to share suggestions on topics for upcoming meetings.

Parents have given a warm appreciation to us for holding these parents connection meetings. The following slides are real quotes from parents who wanted to share their experiences.

One parent shared how much she appreciated the connection in understanding she felt.

She said-

(Reads)

Another parent shared how practical strategies was a very helpful take away. They said-

(Reads)

Another parent summarized the experience with a powerful conclusion.

(Reads)

TEENA YOUNG:

Thank you Nicole. I love to hear parent feedback about how much they value these experiences.

As we are nearing the end of our presentation, we would like to share some important tips in facilitating parent friendships and connections.



First, meet the parents where they are. Some parents may be overwhelmed and make me more of a one on one connection with another parent. Others may seek larger groups and more frequent connections.

Also, be sensitive to cultural preferences. Friendships and interactions may differ depending on the family's culture. Identify local parent groups and provide contact groups to the parents you serve.

You may also ask a parent to reach out to other parents and to help facilitate an activity that will promote parent connections. Also, hold events regularly. Regularly scheduled events or activities tend to have the best outcomes and interest.

Lastly, ask for feedback from parents. Take a look at ways helpful, in ways not helpful. Make adjustments to meet the needs of the parents.

Here are some additional tips for parents and families. Reach out to local parent groups. Join social media or virtual parent groups. Reach out to medical professionals or therapists for resources, or activities that provide opportunities to connect with other parents. Lastly, share your story. Parents, your story is valuable. You are the expert in your child's journey. By sharing your journey with other parents, you are lifting them and encouraging them to continue to evolve their own story and find their own voice.

NICOLE JACOBSON:

Let's talk about some of the hurdles families may be (indiscernible) when it comes to others. Some parents spend so much time working to meet the several needs of their children, but they might have time to meet their children social events or their seminar or support group meetings. Or perhaps they live in an area where there are not many families who have children that are deaf or hard of hearing.

Perhaps these parents would benefit from a virtual group meeting or from a parent discussion on an app like class dojo or social media like closed group.

Perhaps a parent is experiencing a lower emotional state and is withdrawing from any social connections. We can express an offer to introduce them to another parent who has experienced something similar in case a parent would be open for a one-to-one interaction.

We can continue to invite parents to events and offer to meet them in the entrance of they have someone to walk with to the event. It may be helpless to her for this parent to counselling resources if this parent would benefit from professional guidance to negotiate pervasive emotional difficulties.

TEENA YOUNG:

Here we have a brief list of resources for professionals and families. There are local and national groups that offer valuable information and resources for parents of children who are deaf or hard of hearing. These groups promote parent connections and friendships in a variety of ways.

Thank you for joining our presentation today. As we make efforts to promote parent connections and



friendships, let's all remember the quote from Helen Keller that was shared earlier. "Together we can do so much."

SPEAKER:

Thank you for the informative presentation. We do have a few minutes for questions. You can type your questions into the Q and a window, and you can connect -- you can open it by connecting-- you can open it by clicking the Q and a button in your window, and our presenters will respond.

SPEAKER:

We have an anonymous person asking if we are providing the social events free of charge. How are you getting buy-in from your employer to do this? I fully understand the importance, but getting buy-in from our providing agencies is seeming a challenge in my community, thanks.

That is a great question! For our summer camp, we did have a modest fee that we assessed for that. For all of our other events, we used our program funding to do that.

We relied a lot on the community to make donations and so a lot of times we would solicit that from... for example, we have had certain vendors that would give us some money, also local restaurants would, or local grocery stores sometimes would offer baked goods or stuff like that that helped us.

Another question asked, how does the school get a parent to an ARD meeting even after three attempts?

Maybe check with the parent and find out what the barrier is. That conversation is dependent on the relationship of trust, so hopefully they will be open with you about what might be their barrier. Is it that they can't physically be there? Maybe they need to face time in for a few minutes? Perhaps the timing is different? Getting to the heart of what that parent has issues with, would probably be helpful.

TEENA YOUNG:

Another question with Penny is do you have any (indiscernible) icebreakers in the virtual setting? They can be so awkward sometimes.

Penny, I agree. Sometimes when we start these new things, and meeting someone we have no context of what their background is, my suggestion would be to open with a topic discussion, and ask for any feedback. It may be just introduce yourself, and share three facts about your family, or tell us about your child.

Sometimes when we get talking about our families, it gives us a common thing we can talk about, and we associate better with each other.

NICOLE JACOBSON:

Another question says how can we support parents who speak alike which other than English.

Excellent question. A lot of times if you can find somebody who... for example for Hispanic communities, we have had people who we have asked to attend who can serve as interpreters. Also think about who can help via cultural broker. Help them understand our culture so we might unwillingly do things that might be offensive to their culture, or might help them be more at ease.

We are running out of time, but these are wonderful questions, and we certainly wish you all well.

Communication is the big T

. Understanding people better, I think mostly. When people know you are making an effort, that always goes so far.

Thank you for other questions. If you have other questions, please see our email address here, and we would be happy to continue that dialogue.

**SPEAKER:**

Wonderful, well thank you so much Nicole and Teena for answering those questions. We really appreciate it.

We would like to thank our captioner and IT support and all those who participated online. I want to remind you a video recording of today's presentation will be available on our website. Hear to Learn.org. Our next Hear to Learn webinar will be held on April 15. The presentation is titled Beyond How Are You?

When you leave this session, you'll be pumped into complete a survey to help us improve future webinars. The link to the survey will also be posted in the chat, in the room will be left open for three minutes so you can access it.

You may also choose to receive a certificate of completion for attending today's webinar. We again, want to thank you for your participation in today's webinar, and hope to see you back for the next one. Thank you for joining us.

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