

Creating Hope and Opportunities: One Family at a Time

*Promising Practices for Working with
Families Living in Poverty*

1. **Self-Reflect** - Check-in with yourself about your own beliefs, attitudes and values about poverty. Poverty is a systemic issue; families are not living in poverty by choice. Developing this understanding will help safeguard against blaming the families who are living in poverty for their circumstances. Empower yourself with knowledge on the facts on poverty, and ignore the myths. Educate others and aid in breaking the commonly believed myths about people living in poverty. Extend the concept of “cultural competence” to include sensitivity to the lived experiences of people in poverty. Failure to develop cultural competence when working with families in poverty “may contribute to forms of practice that add to the problems of disadvantaged families, rather than helping to challenge them.”
2. **Build a Solid Relationship** - Before any meaningful work can start you need to build a relationship with the families by:
 - Spending time with them.
 - Actively listening and building trust.
 - Following through with what you say you are going to do.
 - Arriving on time.
 - Not overpromising what can be accomplished.
3. **Seek Understanding** - Be responsive to parents’ strengths and needs as defined by them. Seek to understand and not jump to conclusions. Respect, acknowledge, and understand parents’ expertise, strengths, and resilience. Push and challenge yourself to “walk in their shoes” to gain a richer and deeper understanding of their lives and the complex interplay of the challenges they face. Don’t assume that you know what they need; let them define that for themselves.
4. **Build Partnerships** - Create opportunities that the parents can choose to use or not, in the way that works for their family or particular situation. Families are better served when they are seen as active partners in their relationship with service providers. Understand that the family is in the driver’s seat and never impose your suggestions on the family. The individuals and families you are working with know their situation the best, as they are living with it day and night. It is important that families maintain their independence and their ability to help themselves. The best way to decrease dependency is by encouraging a partnership between the family and any or all of the involved service providers.
5. **Instill Hope** - Families living in poverty may have lost faith and hope in themselves. Ignite that light and believe in their strength so they can believe in themselves. Respect their views and their belief that they have the ability to change their life.
6. **Increase Inclusion Through Making Connections** - Poverty can increase people’s experience of exclusion and isolation. Families living in poverty are influenced by the community and neighbourhoods that they live in. It is important to understand the context of their lives and to establish their community as a resource. The journey

VISION

*Supporting, mentoring
and empowering fami-
lies living in poverty
by providing resources
and opportunities for
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lives and become more
self-sufficient.*

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towards increasing self-sufficiency starts with making connections to a network of essential agencies that provide a breadth of resources and services. This approach can help you—and those you work with—connect with the cultural community to ensure that the needs of diverse populations of children and families are met. Create opportunities for families to engage in informal connections as there is power in peer support and mentoring.

7. **Be Informed and Knowledgeable About Services and Resources** - Parents need up-to-date, accurate and timely information about their rights and the resources and services available to them. Learn about the range of services available in your community, and how to navigate the system. Then, you can help educate families so as to increase their own self-advocacy skills.
8. **Increase Understanding** - Look for opportunities to educate colleagues and community members about the broader context of poverty to reduce the shame and the self-blame that some families experience when living in poverty. These steps will promote and facilitate effective advocacy and will also make it easier for families to advocate for themselves.

Remember:

- ◆ There is no single cause for poverty; it is complex.
- ◆ Poverty has an impact on many aspects of families' lives.
- ◆ Living in poverty is not easy; working with families living in poverty is not easy.
- ◆ Limited economic resources may cause financial strain and difficulty acquiring basic family necessities.
- ◆ Just because someone is living in poverty does not mean they are bad parents. There is no causal role of income on parenting ability.
- ◆ Accessing services and resources is complex and time-consuming and further impacted by where families live.



This publication was developed through the work of the Community Poverty Reduction Initiative. If you are interested in finding out more information about the Community Poverty Reduction Initiative or if your community is interested in being involved, contact:

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