

Principles of Partnership

Adapted from Appalachian Family Innovations. (2003). Partners in Change: A New Perspective on Child Protective Services. Morganton, North Carolina.

1. Everyone Desires Respect

This principle suggests that all people have value and a right to have some control over their own lives. Accepting this principle leads us to treat others with respect and to honor their opinions and worldview. True partnership is impossible without mutual respect.

2. Everyone Needs to be Heard

This principle seems simple but it is actually hard to put into practice regularly. It goes beyond the simple act of listening. This principle asks us to put aside our needs and agenda and to listen with a sincere desire to truly understand the other's perspective before communicating our point of view. When we really are able to do this, resistance and defensiveness often melt away.

3. Everyone has Strengths

This principle means that all people have resources. Beyond the obvious ones, these strengths may include past successes, abilities, dreams, and resiliencies. Implementing this principle requires us to use these strengths to help create solutions to concerns and needs.

4. Judgements Can Wait

This principle asks us to become aware of the assumptions we make about others and their situations. We naturally make judgements in all situations, and it is inherent in the work we do. The danger is that once a judgement is made, we tend to stop gathering new information or we interpret new information in light of our previous assumptions. Acceptance of this principle means being willing to hold our judgements lightly, staying open to new information, and being willing to change our minds if new information warrants it.

5. Partners Share Power

This principle recognizes that power differentials create obstacles to true partnership. Whoever has more perceived power in a relationship has the responsibility to find ways to balance the difference in power so that partnership can happen. One outcome of truly sharing power is that mutual responsibility and follow-through often increase.

6. Partnership is a Process

This principle recognizes that each of the six principles is a part of a whole. Each principle supports and strengthens the others. This last principle also acknowledges that while we all know how to relate to each other in this way, doing so consistently is a challenge. We must have the intention to put them into practice, and pay attention to our behavior to keep ourselves on track.