



**Parents as Teachers Technical Assistance Brief**

**Family Engagement & Exit Guidance**

*This is part of a series of Technical Assistance Briefs published by the Parents as Teachers national office designed to address emerging issues around the Parents as Teachers evidence-based model. These briefs are informed by research and evaluation findings, technical assistance efforts, feedback from stakeholders, and discussion within Parents as Teachers learning communities.*

**What information will I find in this brief?**

This TA Brief is intended to assist PAT Affiliates with developing family engagement and exit policies and procedures to ensure that every family receives high quality Parents as Teachers services. For further information on creating policies and procedures for your Parents as Teachers affiliate, please see the TA Brief: Policies and Procedures.

**Which Parents as Teachers Essential Requirement and Quality Standards are connected to family engagement and exit?**

Parents as Teachers Essential Requirement #1 states that affiliates provide at least two (2) years of services to families with children between prenatal and kindergarten entry. It is a Quality Standard (Infrastructure & Leadership #1) that affiliates offer at least three (3) years of service to families with children between prenatal and kindergarten entry. Another Quality Standard that touches on family engagement and exit is Infrastructure & Leadership #6 that the affiliate has written policies and procedures that address: intake and enrollment; services provided to families, including timelines and frequency; and transition planning and exit. Additionally, all 11 Quality Standards in Service Initiation and Participation connect to family engagement and exit.

**Please note:** Essential Requirements represent the minimum requirement for all affiliates – it is mandatory to adhere to the Essential Requirements. The Quality Standards build on the Essential Requirements and are best practices that are ideally in place. Model affiliates are not required to meet all Quality Standards.

**Why should an affiliate develop family engagement and exit policies and procedures?**

*Family engagement is an intentional, ongoing partnership to which all parties contribute. The Parents as Teachers Model Implementation Guide offers specific suggestions and strategies for effectively engaging families in Parents as Teachers services. Despite these efforts, however, sometimes parent educators may lose contact with an enrolled family.*

Affiliates are strongly encouraged to develop a family engagement and exit policy and outline procedures to provide guidance to parent educators for engaging families by detailing the steps parent educators should take if they lose contact with an enrolled family. The family engagement and exit policy and procedures should support parent educators and supervisors in promoting families' consistent participation in services and ensuring consistent, high quality Parents as Teachers services across the affiliate.

**What should be included in a family engagement and exit policy and procedures?**

A family engagement **policy** should include the following elements:

- Affiliate/agency philosophy around engaging families in Parents as Teachers services
- Community, cultural & situational factors that may influence family engagement
- Role of parent educator & supervisor in supporting family engagement



- Philosophy around re-engaging families that have been exited from services due to loss of contact
- Role of the affiliate organization in planning to ensure consistent support for families in the event of organizational changes, i.e.: staff leave, staff turnover, or funding changes, .

Family Engagement **procedures** should include the elements listed below. Each element should include an accompanying time frame, i.e.: on the first visit, 3 times in the course of 3 weeks, within 90 days, etc.

- Review and completion of a participation agreement/consent for services at enrollment with family to outline program services that are offered, expectations for family participation in services, and steps that will be taken if visits are missed or the parent educator loses contact with the family
  - Gathering of additional contact information for family members or friends in case the parent educator is unable to contact family, and information about what circumstances may prompt the parent educator to contact these individuals
  - Method for gathering family input around the family's reasons for participation, and what the family hopes to gain from participating in services
  - Steps that a family might take if the family believes the services provided are not meeting their needs
  - Steps that should be taken to confirm visits with the family in order to prevent a missed visit
  - Steps that should be taken when scheduled visits are missed (i.e. text, phone call, note left on door, etc.)
  - Number, type and timing of contact efforts to be made by parent educator and/or program when there is no response from family
  - Affiliate steps that should be taken when a parent educator leaves the affiliate to ensure that families continue to receive high quality Parents as Teachers services including:
    - How and when the family is contacted and by whom
    - How the family will receive services in the interim (i.e. temporarily assign families to other parent educators or supervisors who are model certified)
  - Steps for exiting a family from services, including notifications to the family that services will be or have been discontinued. Steps should include separate guidance for at least the following scenarios: loss of contact with family, loss of program funding, transition to another program, moving out of the service area, aging out/graduating
- Please note:** Families should never be automatically exited from the program in the event of staff turnover or funding loss.
- Record-keeping around attempts to re-engage family in services, and at what point families are exited from services
  - Completion of an Exit Record

**Please note:** The recorded family exit date should reflect the date on which the affiliate made the last attempt to contact the family and/or notified the family of the discontinuation of services, in alignment with the procedure & timeline developed. Parents as Teachers strongly encourages affiliates to notify families in writing of discontinuation of services.



### **What should we consider when creating our family engagement and exit policy and procedures?**

Parents as Teachers affiliates should consider the community and the families they serve, the organizational context of their host organization, and requirements of their funders when writing and implementing policies and procedures. The family engagement policy and procedures of a Parents as Teachers affiliate should reflect the shared values that the needs of families and children served are paramount in the affiliate's services, and that families themselves are the best experts at identifying those needs.

Family engagement is complex and can be challenging to address as each affiliate, parent educator, family, child, and community brings their own lens and context. Creating a written policy that clearly states the affiliate's philosophy around family engagement provides consistent guidance and direction that parent educators and supervisors can refer back to in the event of questions or difficult situations.

Parents as Teachers recommends regularly revisiting affiliate policies and procedures and making changes or adjustments based on the needs of families and communities served. Affiliates are encouraged to use a continuous quality improvement approach and adjust their policies and procedures in accordance with the effectiveness of the strategies employed to support family engagement.

For example, if an affiliate's community is rapidly changing preferred/primary languages spoken and that change is not yet reflected in the parent educators employed, that affiliate may want to pay special attention to the need for interpretation services and translated materials (e.g. for standard notes to be left in the event of a missed visit). Other examples include: considerations for staff turnover (e.g. what happens to families on a caseload if a parent educator leaves?), and considerations for transient families (e.g. if a family moves in and out of the service area for your affiliate, how do you help transition them in and out of services in a seamless and empowering fashion?).

Each affiliate will have unique circumstances and challenges related to family engagement, but strong policies and procedures that address the needs of your community can serve as a guiding light to ensure that every family and every child receives high quality Parents as Teachers services so that they can learn, grow, and develop to realize their full potential.