

# Partners for A Greater Voice, Inc.

*Making the world a bigger place for a child with hearing loss*

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## Considerations for Fostering Parent to Parent Support and Parent Groups

- Identify a parent(s) that is or has the potential to be a leader.
- Be sensitive to the emotions of parents, and encourage continued learning experiences.
- Let the parents run the meeting and give parents their privacy when meeting as a group.
- Involve parents in the work you do and find opportunities to expand the learning process through your actions, not just words.
- Involve the parent at every level – don't ever underestimate their potential. They are your access to better outcomes!
- Parents know their child best! They can lead us...as we educate them and show the way.
- Never setting the bar low for a child– always keep expectations high.
- Follow through and stay positive about meetings. It will come together, and parents will learn, grow and realize its benefits.

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## Engaging and Fostering Parent Support

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For those of us working with families with children who have hearing loss, getting parent to parent support started in communities with limited resources or no services clearly varies. We must be creative and find approaches. It's vital.

When we hear about Parent Groups we mostly understand it's a bunch of parents sitting around and talking, and learning about something. We have our bias on what they look like, feel like, or sound like. I'd much rather call it plain and simple: parent support. Support that can be attained in many different ways, locations, and sizes. Regardless, it's vital to improving outcomes for deaf and hard of hearing children: social, emotional, academic, vocational. Language. Yes, the importance of developing language must be in there, somewhere!

Working in communities with limited resources in hearing health definitely has its challenges. Parents have so many other things to be concerned about. Factor in parent participation, engaging parents in the process, starting parent groups – it's a challenge. It's a challenge across the globe, no matter the resources.

Parent Support starts with a conversation – a conversation that meets the interests of the parent. It's not a lecture, it's not someone else's agenda. It's not telling parents what to do. It's really is about listening to the parent and understanding their thoughts. Conversations can happen at school, at church events, in a home, in the park, even outside a clinic. They can and should have everything to do with the parent's thoughts and need not be medically driven. Parents need to be heard and understood. To connect with parents or caregivers, we (practitioners, teachers, parent consultants, audiologists) must follow their lead and then engage parents and bring them along in the learning process to care for the hearing

health needs of their child. What are your goals? Ask yourself, "What outcomes do I want for this child? How might I work with parents to achieve these goals."

Enable parents by involving parents with your work. Teach them. Show them what you do and why. It might engage parents more and improve outcomes for the child. Walk alongside the parent...learn from them. Try to figure out what they are ready to hear, to learn, to grasp and put into practice! Connect with the parent and their thought process.

There are many ways to establish parent support: family gatherings, workshops, counseling in small groups, parent meetings, circulating a newsletter. Look at the resources within a community for the best possible approach. A school, church, community outreach specialist, or a clinic are considerations. Families will travel if they know they are getting something, and if they know it'll help them or their child. There are many opportunities to gather families, even when parent groups are not established. Kids love getting together.

It takes a concerted effort and determination to organize parent meetings or any consistent parent support. Always be positive and think, "Yes, we will make this work". Give it time, continue to meet, and never give up hope that connections will be made. Parents WILL become involved. They learn from each other, trust each other, and that becomes powerful.

Find someone who can dedicate time to coordinating a meeting and the location. A note may have to be written and hand delivered to the home. If the parent must work and can't attend, invite the caregiver – or someone who spends most of their time with the child at



Parent support in San Andres, Dominican Republic.

home: grandmother, aunt, friend, sibling.

Parent support meetings can be large or small. It can be tricky to run a large group, and someone who is skilled at facilitating is needed. The facilitator will need to know where the meeting should go, where it should end, and what information should be 'woven in'. Find clever ways to educate, while listening and embracing parents.

When we learn, we grow. And when we grow with knowledge, we become confident. And when we become more confident, we act upon what we know, helping our children...and maybe each other. Thus, we become empowered in the process...and hopefully more involved.

The value of connecting parents is endless... the benefits are reaped only after a parent 'experiences' these events. But inevitably, they look back and know – "I am not alone. I can share my story with someone in common. I have a place to go where I can be heard and understood." ♦