

# Working with Anxious Parents

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# Introduction

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- The Neurobehavior HOME Program
  - Medical and Mental Health Care
  - People with Developmental Disabilities
  - Children and Adults
  - Lots of different caregivers to work with
  
- The things we will discuss are simple, but this is what works for us.

# Considerations

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- Key difference between you and us
  - The exit option
- “I’ve tried all this”
  - Approach
- The Burnout Factor
  - A key symptom is to classify by default (police, mental health, education)



# Who are we talking about?

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# “Anxious Parents”

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- Sometimes referred to as “difficult” or other negative identity descriptors.
- Usually unhelpful to think of parents in this way.
- They often fear being thought of in this way, increasing their anxiety and making them harder to work with.
- And it impacts your world view of them, changing your interactive style.

# “Anxious Parents” (cntd)

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- People who care about their kids (better to assume this).
  - People who may have guilt over their kids.
  - People who may have their own issues.
  - People who may not have the same skills you do for dealing with challenges.
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- **People who want to feel good about the situation.**

# Keys to Interaction

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1. Be proactive
2. Set and hold boundaries
3. Keep your focus on the child
4. Negotiate the negotiable
5. Don't over personalize
6. Remember where they are coming from

# 1. Be Proactive

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- Call them before they call you
- Check in even if there is nothing new
- Tell them what you are going to do
- Be sure to do it and let them know you did it!
- Being proactive will reduce anxiety and build your relationship
- Their calling will reduce when they know you are “on it”

## 2. Set and hold boundaries

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- Do this in a timely manner.
- How to communicate and when.
- Establish contact person(s).
- Train staff to redirect to appropriate person.
- Team needs to be aware and consistent.
- Remember who is the focus (the child).
- Dealing with profanity and yelling.
- Use your relationship and pattern of follow through to allow you to set these boundaries and call the parent out when necessary.

### 3. Keep your focus on the child

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- You may need to give the parent some of the focus to allow you then to get back to the child.
- Give the parent a reputation for wanting what is best for their child.
- Redirect back to the issue.
- Remember that ALL parents are a part of their child's challenges and are therefore part of the solution.
- We cannot redirect to the child simply because we want to avoid the parent.

## 4. Negotiate the Negotiable

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- Part of boundary setting.
- Be clear about what you can and can't do or support.
- Quickly end discussion about things that are non-negotiable or unchangeable.
- Know when the door can and can't be ajar
- Validate feelings and concerns.
- Use reflection.
- Write it down so they have a reference.

## 5. Don't over personalize

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- Parent's lack of skills may lead them to attack you as a way of expressing their frustration.
- See this for what it is.
- Avoid getting defensive.
- Acknowledge feelings but keep to the issue at hand.

## 6. Remember where they are coming from

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- Possible lack of communication, social, or coping skills.
- Possible mental health issues and feelings of guilt.
- Faking understanding.
- Anxiety over the unknown, fighting the system, the unpredictable, and being slighted.
- Fear that their complaints will get poor treatment for their child, increasing their need to monitor you.
- Be aware of these issues, but do not let them impair the quality of your interactive style.

# Conflict Resolution

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- SLOW DOWN
- LISTEN
- ACKNOWLEDGE FEELINGS
- LOOK AT CONFLICTS AS PROBLEMS-  
NOT AS A WIN/LOSE SITUATION
- AVOID 'YOU' MESSAGES
- SEEK HELP/TEAM MEETING
- ADMIT MISTAKES

# Principles for Dealing with Resistance

Mitchell, C. W. (2005). *Effective Techniques Dealing with Highly Resistant Clients*. Johnson City, Tennessee: Clifton W. Mitchell.

- Maintain an Attitude of Naïve Puzzlement
  - (You are from another planet/Act like Columbo)
  
- Never Label Parents with Terms That Imply Resistance
  - For example: “You are not listening.”
  - Better Response: “At that point in time, you seemed to ...be hearing other options.”
  
- Frame All Desires in the Positive
  - For example: “Give me an idea of the problems you are having with the school”
  - Once you have an idea of the issue, then you move forward in a positive perspective.
  - Also for future conversations “be positive” and avoid bringing up the “not’s”

# Questions

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