Stephanie:

Hey everyone. My name is Stephanie. Welcome to the intentional IEP. I am your host here for all of these teacher trainings, as well as the founder of TII. I'm here with one of my friends today, Heather and we are gonna be talking all about parent relationships. So Heather share with us about you, your educational experience, your teaching experience, your role at the IEP table and anything else.

Heather M:

Okay. So I have been teaching for four years. This is my fourth year. And of course, you know, I started the year before COVID shut everything down. So I don't really know much about teaching before COVID. Um, I sit on both sides of the table when it comes to working with families, because I have a child that has down syndrome and I work with special ed kids. So my experience is, um, varied across the board.

Stephanie:

I love that though. It makes you a very well rounded teacher, but also a well rounded parent because you see both sides of it, you know?

Heather M:

Yes. And it is definitely two different roles.

Stephanie:

Uh, I have heard, well, I am very excited to chat today about parent relationships. Um, so I think today we're gonna be talking mostly about the teacher side of it, but I'm sure that leads into like the parent aspects of, you know, being a parent of a disabled child out as well. So let's just get started. What are your top three or four tips for building a positive relationship with families?

Heather M:

So I went with three tips. I'm gonna keep it simple. Um, teachers really need to know that things probably aren't easy around the house. And I know that seems like it's pretty basic, but I know in my household, when we get home, it's kind of every man for himself, it's chaos. We're trying to get baths done. We're getting homework done. We're trying to fit in appointments and meetings and therapies, and it's overwhelming for the family. So keeping that in mind, when you dealing with them and knowing that you're gonna have to schedule and reschedule and really work with them is one of the best ways to build a positive relationship. My second tip Grantham, grace, they, again, these families have so much to deal with that they didn't forget about the teacher or the paperwork that they needed to get done. It just wasn't the top priority right at that moment. And my third big one, which is again, a no brainer, take the time to get to know your families. It's a great way to start off the year is just calling. 'em introducing yourself, making that initial contact it, lulls parents into this sense of confidence in your ability. And it lets 'em know that you're gonna work with them. They're your top priority that they mean something.

Stephanie:

I think that's so important.

Heather M:

It is because they really they've been through the ringer time and time again, they don't understand a lot of the legal jargon in an IEP. I mean, it's a lot to wrap your head around as a teacher.

Stephanie:

Yeah. I think one of the biggest things that I learned as a teacher and it took me a lot of years to, to realize this was that, and you can speak to this as well as like the teacher and the parent. So when we, so let's say that I'm teaching like a fourth, fifth, sixth grade classroom. So I have a student who's coming into my classroom at fourth grade that maybe this child was diagnosed in kindergarten. So the parent has been through the ringer for kinder for second, third, maybe had a great experience, maybe didn't, but they're bringing all of that baggage good and bad baggage with them. That is they may be, they may have preconceived notions about us as teachers without even needing us first. So it's just really important to remember that that it's not anything personal against us, but it also, at the same time as teachers, we have this really important responsibility to build that rapport and be that positive experience for a parent throughout their process. No matter if you're getting them in pre-K or 12th grade, like we have that ability to do that as teachers.

Heather M:

Absolutely. And you know, one, one tip that I've always taken is just smile. It's hard to be mad at somebody who smiles at you first offers you their hand to shake and says, what can I do for you?

Stephanie:

I think that's really important. I'm actually, so I'm, I'm in a bunch of Facebook groups and I'm in some parent IEP, Facebook groups just to I'm alar. I just wanna know like what information they're getting, where I can pop in to help and be that positive person and like steer them the right way. But also like, I think it was last week or the week before there was a, a poll a teacher created, or wasn't a teacher, it was parent created a poll in one of the Facebook groups and was like one of how many have you ever? And then one of them was like, how a teacher roll their eyes at you in an IEP meeting or have the IEP meeting. Like it was all negative things. And you would not, I mean, I'm sure you would actually believe all of the votes that were in for each one. And I was just like, oh my gosh, guys, as teachers, we have such a huge responsibility. And like, we can change that.

Heather M:

Yes. Like one thing I like to do in a meeting is the parents are hearing so much negative turn around and tell 'em your kid is really neat to work with or yeah. They have great ideas. The parents need to hear something uplifting after everything they've just heard.

Stephanie:

Yeah. And I think, I think it's just that mindset change. Like I said, like, I didn't have that mindset change for many years until I taught self-contained and I was like, oh my gosh, like these parents have been through the ringer before they got to me, like, I have the opportunity to that for them. Yes. And it's such a empowering feeling like we get to change special ed. Like we get to do that as teachers, even if it feels overwhelming, like little baby steps, make all the difference,

Heather M:

Just one family at a time, make their It's more positive. That's all you have to

Stephanie:

Do. I love that. Well, what strategies or tips do you have for working with parents who maybe don't respond or don't show up to IEP meetings because we've all worked with a parent that just doesn't seem interested in the process. And I do air quotes. If you're listening on the air quote, I, you

Heather M:

Know what though, it's, it's, I've definitely dealt with those parents. It's quite a bit and I try it all and you're not gonna be able to get every parent every single time, especially after again, COVID because parents really didn't take a huge role. So now they're, they're used to sitting back and propping up their feet and being like, all right, the school's got this. And so I have used remind, I have emailed, I have texted, I have used my personal cell phone. I sent letters through the mail. I have sent them home with students. We've even gone to houses to deliver them.

Stephanie:

Wow. So

Heather M:

I'm, we pull out all the stops and the worst case scenario, if a parent can't meet with me, what I offer to do is run. I have to of course run the meeting because of compliance issues. But if, if they can't, I'll run a second meeting just for them, just whatever meets the needs of the family and you, again, they can't make everything, but right. Meet them halfway with what they can't make.

Stephanie:

And the, I think the one good thing, and I think we had this maybe conversation last year during the summer PD series as well was I think one good thing. Now I have not, COVID taught, I will not pretend that I have COVID taught, but from the outside, looking in will. One thing that I feel like is a good thing about all of that, is that the access and the ability for schools to provide virtual, like zoom, IEP meetings.

Heather M:

I love them. Like,

Stephanie:

I love that. That is now more of a thing, even though it's written into the law and you can have meeting, however you need have it. I love that. That is more of a thing now. And it's more accessible for parents to attend IEP meetings. Like I am here for that.

Heather M:

I've had parents attend IEP meetings from the cubicle in their office,

Stephanie:

But they're attending like,

Heather M:

But they're attending and this might have been a parent that didn't attend the, you know, the previous five.

Stephanie:

Yeah.

Heather M:

So, I mean, I love the virtual meetings. They are phenomenal.

Stephanie:

I love it. I love it so much. Well, so you talked about like all the things you literally do, all the things you do, home visits and send all the letters and like literally everything, but what else can a teacher do to collaborate with a family? Maybe not specifically for an IEP meeting, but maybe more in general,

Heather M:

Uh, stay in contact. And I know that's a lot, especially when you take into consideration what's going on, but if you develop a rapport with the family, it becomes easy to just shoot them a quick email or shoot them a quick text and say, Hey, so, and so didn't turn this in. And I know we had talked about this the other day and it's, it's just really developing that relationship. So it makes it easier on you and the family to create a safety net for this kid, because these kids are gonna fall through the cracks. If you don't.

Stephanie:

And I see in your notes that you said it takes a village.

Heather M:

Yes, It does. It takes a village. It is. Everybody has to be all hands on board in order to work with these kids. And you know, if I'm falling down on my job, then chances are, they're gonna start failing in math. If I haven't let the parent know, then they can't follow up on the backside and ask, did you do your math homework? It's just, it's such a collaborative effort.

Stephanie:

It really is. And I recently read a book. I think it was actually a in last fall. I read this book and it was about, um, advocating with parents and collaborating with them as well. And in the middle of the word, collaborate is the word labor, like collaboration doesn't just happen. It actually takes work. So I love that that all came up. So how do you collabo collaborate with families for IEPs aside from sending them all the notes and trying to get in, contact them all the ways. What other ways do you collaborate with them for IEPs?

Heather M:

I I'm lucky. I have a small caseload. I have eight this year and we typically stay below 12 and it makes it easy for me to get ahold of my parents. Um, I get and small county, so I know most of my parents. Yeah. I have had the opportunity to meet with them at open house, discuss my expectations, discuss, you know, how I'm gonna send things home, what it's gonna look like and ask them. I ask, I don't tell them, I ask, what's gonna work for you guys. Will this be okay with what you guys do? I, you have to ask as well as tell and I spend a lot of time asking questions.

Stephanie:

I think that's really important. I mean, asking, instead of telling it also is in how, like it's more friendly. I feel like when you ask them, instead of tell, tell them what's happening, like asking them questions, like what works for you? I don't think a lot of parents get asked. Yeah, it does give them the power.

Heather M:

Well, and I mean, in an IEP, the parents really do have a lot of power.

Stephanie:

So yes they do.

Heather M:

It's I'm not, I'm not taking anything away from 'em. I don't wanna take anything away from 'em. I would rather they know that they have that power when I'm working with them.

Stephanie:

I love that. I think that that in itself creates a great rapport with a family is just asking. I'm curious now, like I wanna, I wanna ask all the people, like I wanna get in these parent Facebook groups and be like, has anyone ever asked you, like what you would want for your, for your IEP? I'm curious.

Heather M:

I, I would be curious to hear, because you know, on my, Nobody has ever told me unless I specifically asked

Stephanie:

Really?

Heather M:

Yes.

Stephanie:

Hmm. I'm like, so

Heather M:

I'm taking on that one. I take my experience into consideration.

Stephanie:

Wow. That makes me really sad too, though. Teachers are you listening? We have such a huge role and it just is like one little thing. Just ask them, Oh my goodness. Well, I don't know how you taught that actually, but what, what is your best piece of advice for developing rapport with families?

Heather M:

Take the time to get to know 'em talk to, 'em not Adam. I mean, are we are always talking to those families. We are always trying to get to know 'em, but really, and it's like, you and I have talked about, they, they don't see it like that. They've probably carried some baggage with them and they feel like we

are talking at them constantly, which is why, you know, asking them, given that power back. It, that really that's what takes you the furthest.

Stephanie:

Yeah, for sure. I think that's really important. And I love, and for teachers that are thinking, like, I don't wanna give parents the power and maybe you're not thinking that exactly. I want you to think about it in terms of you're sharing the power because you're building relationship, right? Yes.

Heather M:

And that's it. It's not like you're trying to give them all of it.

Stephanie:

You're doing it together.

Heather M:

Yes. You're trying to give them that collaboration power and that is going to make a world of difference with your students in your life. It's gonna lighten your load just a little bit.

Stephanie:

Yes. Oh, I, oh my gosh. I'm so here for all of this. Well, Heather, thank you so much for being here today and sharing your knowledge and expertise. Not only as a teacher, but also as a parent. Um, I'm so glad that we got to talk about parent relationships from both sides of the table, but will you share with us where we can find you online? Um, whether it's like a Instagram or a blog or anything. And then as with any of these videos, y'all, you will find links to all of Heather's things below and you can just click and go.

Heather M:

I'm actually, I'm working on getting my blog up and running. It's been a

Stephanie:

Rough school year, but I should have those details for you when I get 'em up and running. Awesome. And when she sends them to me, y'all, I will make sure to put them in the description of this video. Um, so you can go check out her blog and her website and interact with her when that is ready and we will celebrate the release of her blog. That's so exciting. Well, thank you so much again for being here, Heather, thank y'all so much for tuning in for this teacher training. I'm so happy that you're here. I hope that you learned something, um, at least one thing that you can take away from this chat and implement tomorrow in your classroom. If you have school tomorrow, depending on what day it is today, you're watching this. Um, but thank y'all so much for being here. Thank you again, Heather. And I'll see y'all in the next chat.