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Sessions to share from NAEYC Annual Conference 2016

Having the Hard Conversations with Parents-Strategies and Skills for Successful Communication.

This session was presented by Ronald Mah, a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, husband, father, former family childcare provider, preschool teacher, and director.

I think he had valuable ideas for us to think about sharing with our students or doing with our students

1. Mirror neurons- we need to avoid reflecting students' negative feelings. They will feel differently if you meet their anxiety, anger, fear or pain with positive feelings.
2. We need to help our students understand the consequences of bullying.
 - a. We start with curriculum and messages that each child is "special." (think about the "I am special" curriculum so many of our students start with). Telling children that they are special is the beginning of narcissism.
 - b. Narcissism perpetuates the idea that "I am above the rules." This leads to bullying.
 - c. Bullying is dehumanization.
 - d. Dehumanization is the first step towards genocide.
3. The Professional Personal Relationship- Investing in a positive alliance with the parent (or for us, sometimes the student)
 - a. Connection- it is our job to find a way to connect with each parent (or for us student)
 - b. Rapport- this takes different forms. Sometimes teasing is sending a message of "let's play" and starts rapport with adults
 - c. Integrity- this fits with ethics
 - d. Honesty- once we have connection and rapport, we can share hard truths
 - e. Knowledge- we need to back up what we are saying with documentation. Experience- we need to be clear about our experience with children and how that informs our knowledge
 - f. Availability- we need to be available both in terms of time and emotionally available
4. Steps to follow:
 - 1st step-psycho/emotional diagnosis/evaluation. The facts don't count. How the person is feeling is what counts

2nd step-psycho/emotional connection/validation- tone of voice, touch, etc. helps person feel validated. Provide a validating message ("You must feel so..." rather than immediately going into a reality statement)

3rd step The reality message: what is the truth. Be careful about how you construct the sentence.

"Or" means only one person is right

"but" is a minus. It doesn't validate the other person's position

"and" is a plus. Both parts are true.

5. The four Es of professionalism and communication:

- a. Education
- b. Experience
- c. Expertise
- d. Ethics

A professional tells the truth

"Based on my education I know that..."

"Based on my experience I know that..."

"Based on my expertise I know that..."

"based on my professional ethics I know that..."

If we use these phrases over and over, parents (and students) will know them to be what we base our messages on.

6. When you must give a hard to hear message, made a list of 10 things that have happened.

- a. Once an event happens three times, it is a pattern. Parents and adult students deserve to have the evidence, not generalizations. Don't write them on letterhead or people are afraid it will go in a permanent file. Having them in writing makes them true to the listener. If you just say it out loud, it is as if it never happened.
- b. Repeat for parents "this has the potential to affect his social and academic development."
- c. If the parent (or student) says you just don't like him or her, you can say you like him or her enough to be willing to have this uncomfortable conversation.
- d. Include:
 - i. Data
 - ii. Interpretation. Before interpretation ask, "do you see this at home, too?" If the parent says yes, ask what they think about it. If the parent says no, it could be true that they don't see it at home or it

could be that they are lying. If they are lying, you are not on the same side. If the parent asks what you think about it, they have accepted you as a professional. Even if they don't ask you what you think about it, tell them anyway.

iii. Recommendation.