

## The Emotional Bank Account

We all know what a bank account is. It is where we put our money, make deposits, save for the future, and make withdrawals when we need to. An Emotional Bank Account is a metaphor that describes the amount of trust that has built up in a relationship. It is feeling safe with another human being. Trust is what allows people to take risks and fail freely because there is a bond with one another.

If I make deposits into an Emotional Bank Account through courtesy, honesty and by keeping my commitments to you; if I consistently treat you with kindness and respect, I accumulate a treasure. Your trust towards me grows, and I can call upon that trust when I need to. It is even possible to overdraw my account at times because I have established good credit with you. I can make mistakes and that trust level, that emotional reserve, will compensate for it. Even if my communication is confusing or garbled you will get my meaning because when the trust level is high, understanding is easy and effective.

But if I have a habit of rudeness, disrespect, cutting you off, if I overreact, behave arbitrarily, ignore you, betray you, threaten you, or insist on making all the decisions without regard for your opinions, eventually I will overdraw my Emotional Bank Account. The trust level gets very low and bankruptcy looms.

The benefits of building good relationships are pretty obvious. It is mutually beneficial to parents and professionals. Creativity blossoms, levels of support increase for all, meetings are shorter and good things happen for **children**. But why bother with creating an Emotional Bank Account when you are dealing with people you neither like nor respect? Well, for one thing this geographically large state is really more like a small town with a lot of space between our houses. We are all connected on some level. Another and more important reason is that when everything is said and done, when the arguments are settled, we will be working with the very same people we had the disagreements with.

In order to build your Emotional Bank Account you need to develop careful listening skills and work to understand the individuals who are part of the child's IEP team. Pay attention to the little things such as being on time for meetings, and call as soon as possible if you need to cancel. Please and thank-yous are not just for kids. Remembering to call or write thanking people for their efforts are valuable "deposits". Open communication is not only desirable but also critical to implementing the best plan for any student. While it is not necessary to broadcast every detail of family life or even every detail of private evaluations, it is paramount to share knowledge that affects your child's educational performance. Make sure the information you share is accurate. Nothing will destroy your credibility faster than failing to tell the truth. Telling the truth, keeping promises and showing integrity are the cornerstones of any relationship. If for some reason you miss a meeting, give inaccurate information or make other "withdrawals" promptly and sincerely apologize. Begin immediately to rebuild trust. Always remember praise is free.

Building an Emotional Bank Account does not mean that you avoid problems, compromise yourself or fail to meet the child's needs. It does mean that you focus on problems and **Solutions** rather than people, that you establish good working relationships built on mutual respect, that you deal appropriately with anger (usually not at a meeting), and that you express feelings in a constructive way.

Tips for  
Building Your  
Emotional Bank Account

- Be a Careful Listener
  
- Make a good effort to Understand One Another
  
- Attend to the Little Things
  
- Tell the Truth
  
- Keep Promises
  
- Have Personal Integrity
  
- Apologize Sincerely for “Withdrawals”  
(not only with words, but also with actions)
  
- Remember - A Positive Attitude is Free!

## Building Positive Working Relationships

Give Introductions and a brief history.

Explain Parents Lets Unite for Kids (PLUK) and the services we provide (use inside cover of the PLUK News for an example of the standard explanation).

Be sure to explain that we are there for everyone—parents, schools, and anyone who wants information about disabilities.

### Introduction to Workshop

Goals of Workshop:

- Examine qualities that comprise good working relationships
- Explore parent needs
- Explore educator needs
- Discuss pitfalls of working under stressful conditions
- Discuss how to break bad news

Group Activity:

Using a whiteboard or large newsprint tablet ask the group to list the features of a good relationship.

Possibilities:

Control

Choices

Empathy

Respect

Listening

Knowledge

Expectations Met

Promises Kept

Analyze—*What are we all looking for (parents, educators, other professionals, children, etc.)?*

*(Remember the child)*

Possibilities:

For the child to Succeed

Belonging for the child

Good working relationships between parents and professionals can be difficult to establish. These relationships are time-consuming and require patience; however, there are compelling reasons why the effort is worth it. The most compelling one is the CHILD.

Rather than each group (parents, teachers, therapists, etc.) working separately, the idea is to work together as a team for the benefit of the child. Also in Montana, The Office of Public Instruction, (OPI) requires the IEP team to come to decisions by way of a consensus. The team considers the whole child and what that child needs to progress in the educational setting. The three areas to look at are: academic, social/emotional, and physical.

Building effective partnerships is a skill. Each person who attends a meeting for a student brings a different kind of experience and training. We can all learn from each other.

### Hints For Building Relationships with People

(Handout and power point)

- Listen to each other with an open mind
- Speak in Understandable Language (do not Patronize)
- Keep information CONFIDENTIAL  
Explain limitations of confidentiality (threatens to bring harm to self or others, abuse, and neglect)
- Show Empathy
- Respect (Even if you disagree with the other person's choices)
- Error On The Side Of Hope
- Work On Specific Goals that the team has set
- Recognize Team Members' Efforts
- Break Bad News In Private
- Have Patience
- Remember Good Relationships Take Time

### Ten Important Things to Know About People

(Handout and power point)

Single-minded	Uninformed
Action-oriented	Realistic
Demanding	Unrealistic
Emotional	In denial
Knowledgeable	Loyal

Some parents develop negative attitudes about school personnel and other professionals. Parents are often under an incredible amount of stress that can make them touchy and defensive. Their feelings and emotions may cause them to contradict themselves and get in the way of rational judgment. It helps to keep your cool if parents are having trouble keeping theirs.

School people have personal stress too. Many are parents, and some have children with disabilities. Teachers feel a strong obligation and work diligently to educate their students to help them succeed.

We all have our issues and are really more alike than we are different. Who among us has not had to face a stressful situation such as a death in the family, divorce, or financial difficulties? Who among us has not behaved as well as we would have liked in such a situation? It should not be too hard to put ourselves in someone else's shoes.

People under stress do not always behave well. At times it can be difficult to face others let alone be in the mood to compromise. When faced with a crisis, people sometimes cycle through awful memories of a past event. Even though the current school situation is not directly connected to the past event, the fallout often happens at school.

People Experiencing Stressful Situations May:  
(Handouts and power point)

- Not hear or retain much of the information they are being told. Be sure to keep copies of the child's records and put things in writing.
- Need frequent repetitions of information
- Be unable to prioritize the child's needs
- Reveal more information about themselves than they intend.
- Treat others discourteously.
- Misunderstand what is being said.
- Need to vent anger and frustration.
- Want others to make decisions for them.

It is important to deal with people gently at this difficult time. Try to understand common stressors people face in life. Is there something you can do to reduce the pressure? Often lending a sympathetic ear is the most helpful thing you can do. Remember anxiety makes people do strange things. Have compassion even for difficult behavior because most people are doing the best they can.

### Family Stresses

(handouts and power point)

- Lack of time to do what needs to be done
- Keeping Track of appointments.
- Managing the child's behavior and emotions
- Financial Burdens
- Facing unknowns
- Loneliness

### Parent Needs

- Education and information about the child's disability
- Personal Counseling
- Emotional Support
- Respite Care
- Referrals to other agencies
- Behavior Management strategies
- Financial Resources
- Educator Support

### Educator needs

- Education and information about the child's disability
- Emotional Support
- Referrals to other agencies
- Parent Support
- School wide Support
- Behavior Management Strategies
- Support Staff
- District Funding and Support

Breaking bad news to families can be one of the hardest jobs for professionals. It is never an easy thing to do. Professionals hate giving bad news almost as much as parents hate getting it. Here are some suggestions that may help when breaking the bad news.

### Tips For Breaking Bad News

(Handout & power point)

- Establish A Comfortable Atmosphere
- Explain Your Role
- Explain Things without Jargon
- Give Assessment Results in Simple Language
- Give A Diagnosis, I f Possible
- Offer Services, Support, and I nformation.
- Describe the child's strengths and areas of promise. Be honest.
- Encourage Communication
- Make a Plan

# **Hints for Building Relationships:**

**Listen to each other with an open mind**

**Speak in understandable language (Do Not Patronize)**

**Confidentiality (Explain limitations of confidentiality: threatens to bring harm to self or others, abuse, and neglect)**

**Show empathy**

**Respect (even if you disagree with the other person's choices)**

**Error on the side of hope**

**Work on specific goals that the team has set**

**Recognize team members' efforts**

**Break bad news in private**

**Have patience**

**Remember, Good relationships take time**

# **Ten Important Things to Know About People:**

**Single-minded**

**Action-oriented**

**Demanding**

**Emotional**

**Knowledgeable**

**Uninformed**

**Realistic**

**Unrealistic**

**In Denial**

**Loyal**

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## **Family Stresses:**

**Lack of time to do what needs to be done**

**Keeping track of all appointments**

**Managing the child's behavior and emotions**

**Financial Burdens**

**Facing Unknowns**

**Loneliness**

## **Parent Needs:**

**Education and information about the child's disability**

**Personal Counseling**

**Emotional Support**

**Respite Care**

**Referral to other agencies**

**Behavior Management Strategies**

**Financial Resources**

**Educator Support**

# **Educator Needs:**

**Education and information about the child's disability**

**Emotional Support**

**Referrals to other agencies**

**Parent Support**

**School wide support**

**Behavior Management Strategies**

**Support Staff**

**District funding and support**

# **Tips For Breaking Bad News:**

**Establish a comfortable atmosphere**

**Explain your role**

**Explain things without Jargon**

**Give assessment results in simple language**

**Give a diagnosis, if possible**

**Offer Services, Support, and Information**

**Describe the child's strengths and areas of promise. Be honest.**

**Encourage Communication**

**Make a plan**

## Communication Blockers

1. Assuming you know what someone is feeling.
2. Being close-minded.
3. Interrupting when others are talking.
4. Defensive body language.
5. Being overly critical.
6. Blaming others.
7. Lack of empathy.
8. Speaking unclearly.
9. Raising your voice.
10. Name calling
11. Focusing on the past.

## Communication Builders

1. Be a Good Listener
2. Wait your turn to speak.
3. Try to understand each other's point of view.
4. Focus on a person's strengths rather than their weaknesses.
5. Check for clarity and understanding to make sure you do not misinterpret anything being said.
6. Be aware of your body language.
7. Speak Clearly. Keep it short and to the point.
8. Use "I" statements.
9. Be open-minded.
10. Give your full attention to others. Don't do other things while they are talking.
11. Speak up when you have an opinion or a question.
12. Focus on the present.
13. Describe the problem, but then move quickly to finding a solution.
14. Be honest and trust each other.