



# The Transformative Process of Collaborating with Parents and Family Members: *Engagement, Involvement & Partnership*

**Kathy Wright**  
New Jersey Parents' Caucus, Inc.

**Thanks to the support of:**

*SAMHSA*

*HRSA-Maternal & Child Health Bureau*

*Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health*

*National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice &  
Permanency Planning*

*National Juvenile Justice Network*

*Axis Group*



**Graphics & Design by: Vivian Cheung**

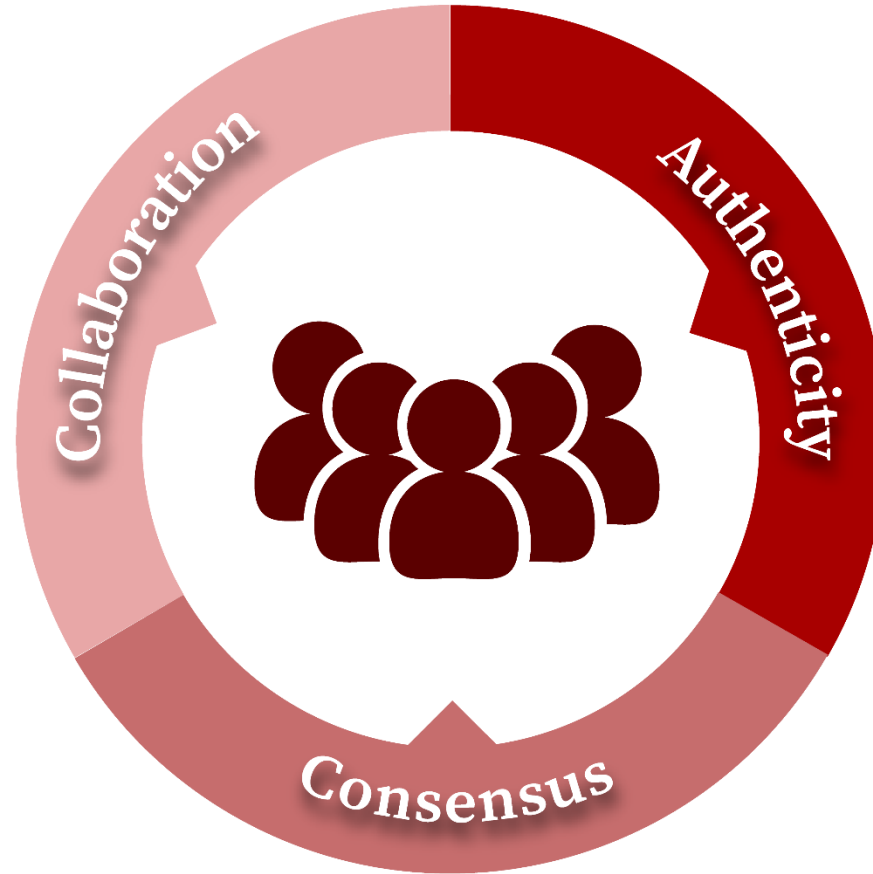


# Index

- [Building Authenticity, Consensus, and Collaboration ..... 3](#)
- [The Process .... 4](#)
- [Goals of Parent and Family Collaboration .... 5](#)
- [A Paradigm Shift ..... 6-7](#)
- [Group Exercise I: Collaboration Strategies .. 8](#)
- [Group Exercise II: Barriers to Collaboration. 9](#)
- [Elements of Collaboration with Families.10-13](#)
- [Barriers to Collaboration with Families: Parents & Family Members ..... 14](#)
- [Barriers to Collaboration with Families: Professionals ..... 15](#)
- [Benefits of Collaboration with Families ...16-17](#)
- [Ongoing Issues of Collaboration ..... 18](#)
- [Group Exercise III: True Family Collaboration ..... 19](#)
- [Family-Specific Strategies: No ‘One-Size-Fits-All’ ..... 20](#)
- [Family-Specific Strategies: Communication .21](#)
- [Family-Specific Strategies: Universal ..... 22](#)
- [Family-Specific Strategies: Selective ..... 23](#)
- [Family-Specific Strategies: Intensive ..... 24](#)
- [Additional Strategies and Resources ..... 25](#)
- [Challenge to Workshop Attendees ..... 26](#)

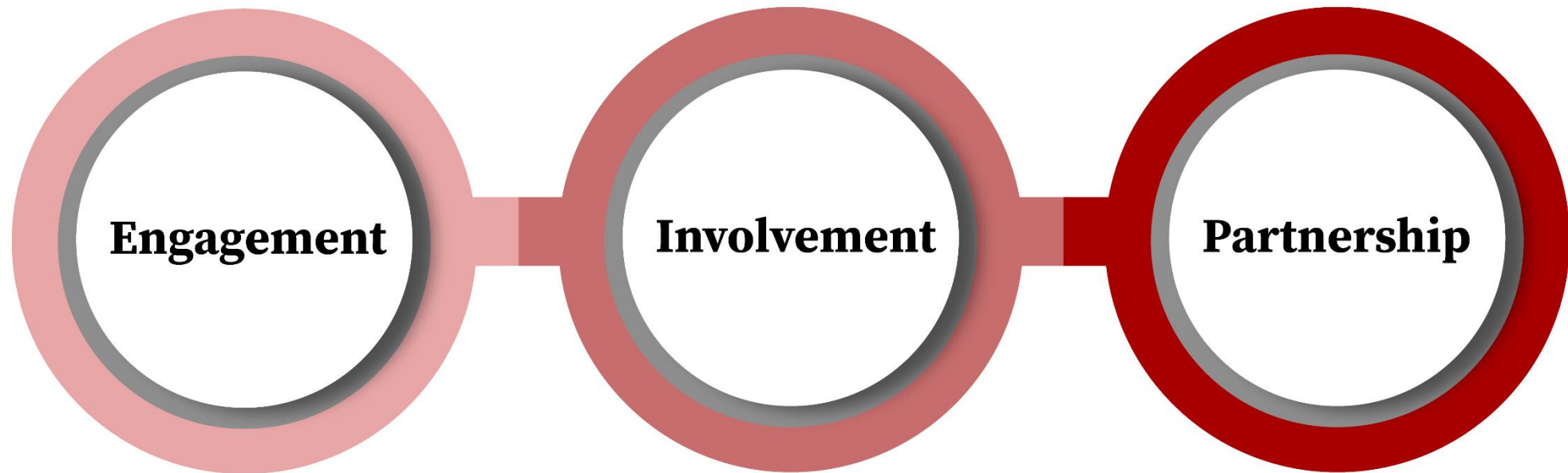


# Building Authenticity, Consensus, and Collaboration





# The Process





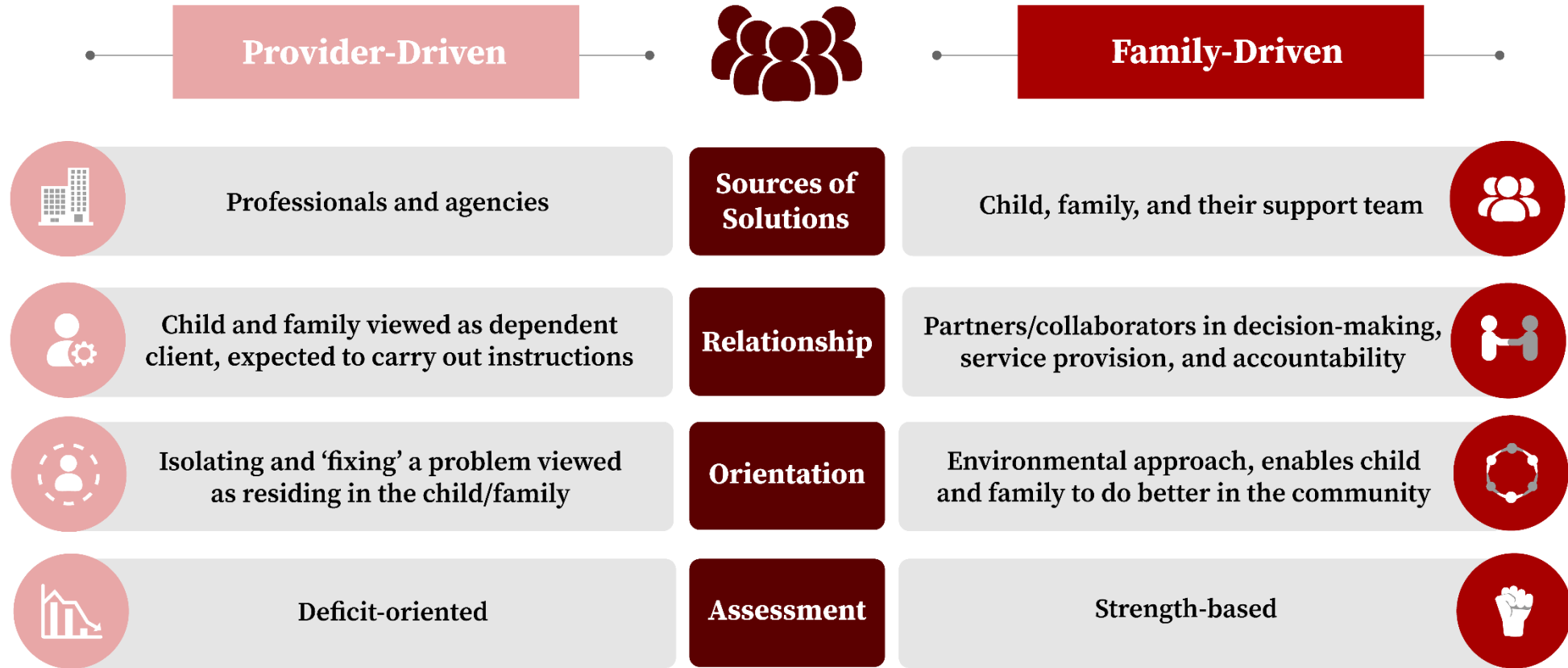
# Goals of Parent and Family Collaboration

- Improve the well-being of families raising children
- Ensure families and children remain together in their home and local communities
- Support families and children to thrive

**Increase positive outcomes for children,  
youth, and families.**

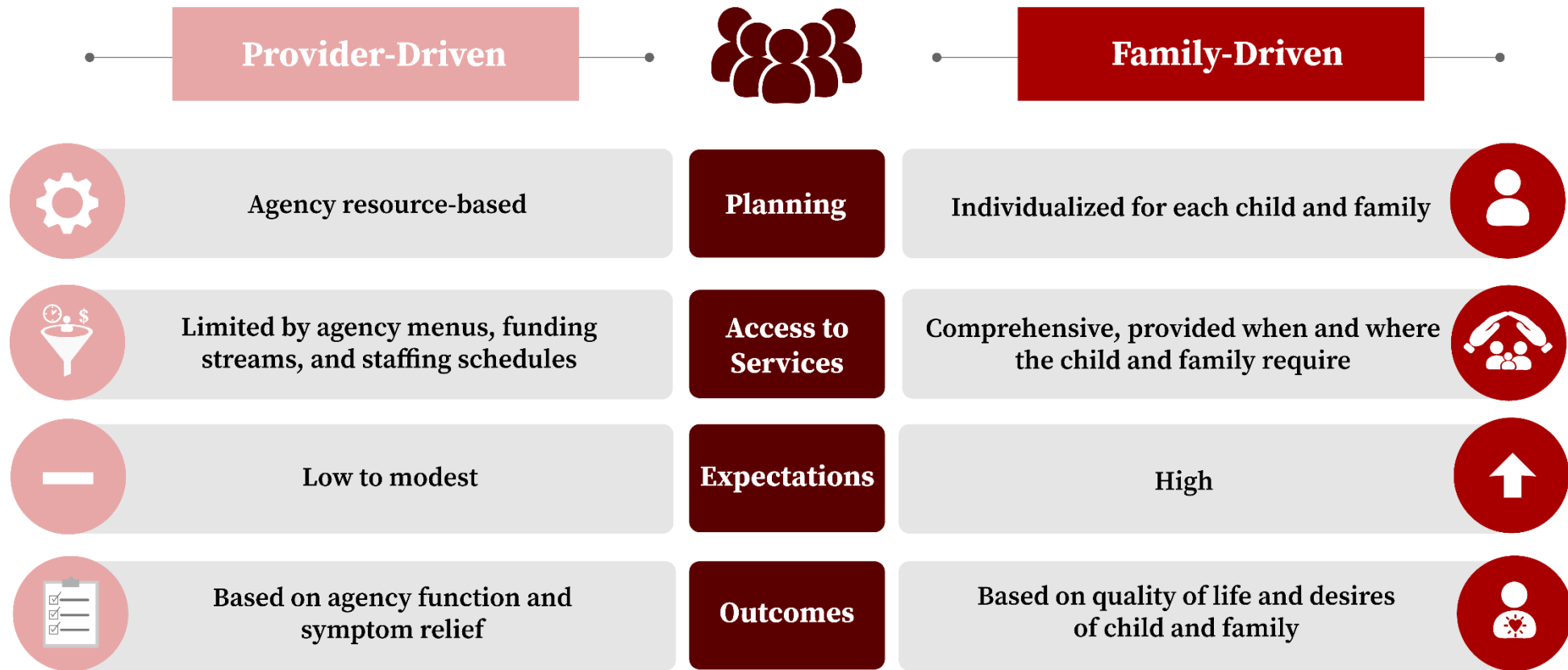


# A Paradigm Shift

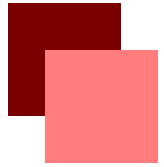




# A Paradigm Shift







# Group Exercise I: Current Collaboration Strategies

**How do you currently collaborate with parents and family members in your organization?**







# Group Exercise II: Barriers to Collaboration

**What are some of the barriers that parents and family members currently face in your organization?**





# Elements of Collaboration with Families

- Understand and acknowledge different perspectives
  - Professional, para-professional (*i.e.* advocate), parent and/or family member, individual
- Do the work and bring your full self
  - Examine and be aware of one's own biases and prejudices
  - Ensure cultural and linguistic competency in yourself and your organization
- Authenticity and trust are the ultimate frameworks in any successful, collaborative relationship

**Listen. Respect. Empathize.**





# Elements of Collaboration with Families

- Invest time in learning about the family
  - Past experiences, current situation
  - Concerns
  - Strengths and weaknesses
- Respond to concrete needs which are often the most pressing ones
- Identify the supports and/or resources that are needed
- Clearly establish the purpose of family collaboration
  - Recognize and communicate value





# Elements of Collaboration with Families

- Organization
  - Identify & communicate bottom line/boundaries
  - Be clear & upfront about your expectations and the family's
- Create initiatives that support instead of fix
  - Remember: the paradigm shift

**Recognize that all parents want their children to do well.**





# Elements of Collaboration with Families

**Embrace the philosophy of partnership and be willing to share power with families - this is key in creating true collaboration.**

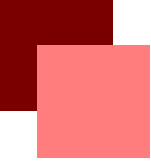




# Barriers to Collaboration with Families: Parents & Family Members

- Mistrust is one of the biggest issues
- Parents may view the process as intrusive
  - Mitigate with clear, upfront explanations of what is necessary
- Lack of parental knowledge and/or resources
  - Work schedule conflicts
  - Transportation
  - Parental health and/or mental health needs
- Parental ambivalence about court involvement (*i.e.* personal history with judicial system)





# Barriers to Collaboration with Families: Professional

- Lack of cultural and/or linguistic competency
  - Lack of translators
  - Insufficient diversity in staff and/or boards
  - Lack of understanding of family and/or individual culture
- Insufficient notice of meetings
- Lack of a clearly defined role for family participation
- Lack of appropriate communication strategies
- Tendency to focus on ‘fixing’ behaviors and acts instead of prioritizing the individual child and their well-being







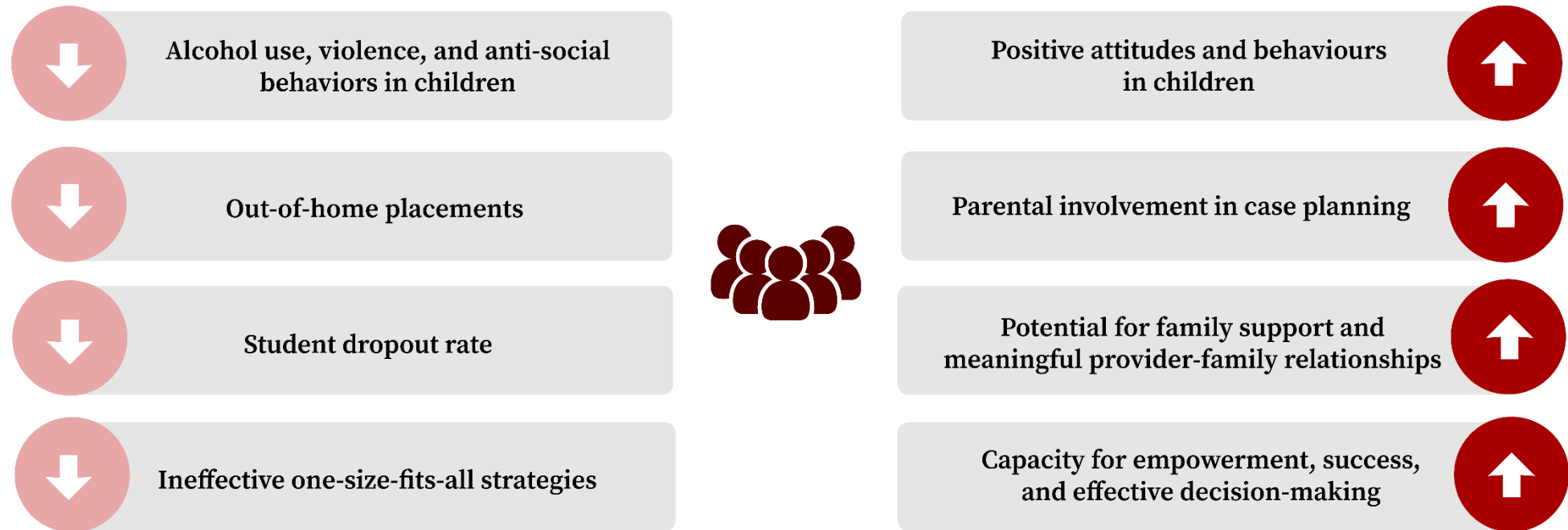
# Benefits to Collaboration with Families

- The most accurate predictor of children's achievement is the extent to which their family is able to (Schargel & Smink, 2001, pp. 52-54):
  - Create a home environment that encourages learning
  - Communicate high, yet reasonable, expectations
  - Become involved in their children's education
- There is a positive relationship between family engagement and improved academic achievement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002)
  - Holds true across socioeconomic, racial/ethnic, and educational background (Mapp, 2004)



# Benefits to Collaboration with Families (cont'd)

## The Influence of Family Collaboration





# Ongoing Issues in Collaboration with Families

- Family collaboration can be complicated by:
  - Institutional restrictions
  - Court orders
  - Child welfare involvement
- The paradigm shift to a strength-based, family-driven approach is a long-term process that requires active commitment

**Focus on improving outcomes for children!**





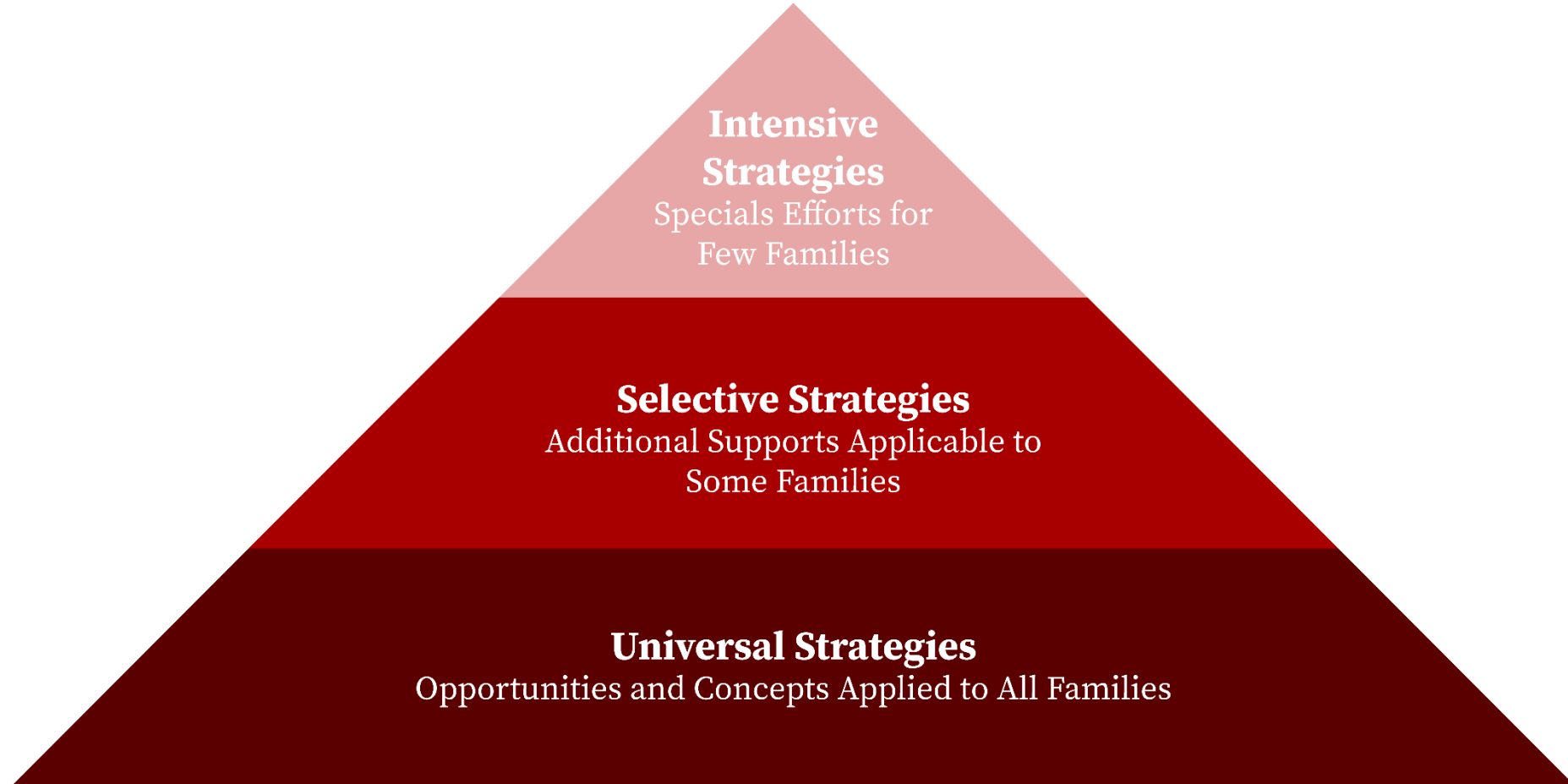
# Group Exercise III: True Family Collaboration

**Looking back at the previous group exercises,  
now consider: which ones of your listed  
strategies represent true family collaborations?**





# Family-Specific Strategies: No ‘One-Size-Fits-All’



(NDTAC)





# Family-Specific Strategies: Communication

**Some families face more challenges that make them harder to reach and engage with...**

- Put the effort in:
  - Use multiple strategies
  - Make that second or third or fourth attempt
- Seek and understand the best way to communicate

## Things to Consider:

- ☐ Trouble reading and/or writing in English?
- ☐ Access to internet and a working email account?
- ☐ Unable to take calls during work hours?
- ☐ Have no-one to leave a message with when calls are missed?
- ☐ Require calling back collect?
- ☐ Prefer face-to-face meetings?



# Family-Specific Strategies: Universal



## A welcoming environment

Make sure staff are courteous to ALL family members. Have qualified translators on hand, comfortable meeting areas, and appropriate toys for siblings. If applicable, have refreshments available.



## Social events

Consider sponsoring events like cultural fairs and activities that are youth and family-driven. These are fantastic opportunities to foster community and a sense of unity.



## Communication

Make the effort to establish ongoing communication and determine what the best medium is (i.e. face-to-face, phone, text, email, etc.).



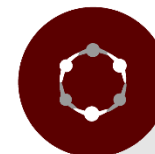
## Positivity and respect

Avoid blame and shame. Seek and encourage family input. Acknowledge the family's values and culture, respect their practices, and fold that respect into your strategies and approach.



## Training

Training programs specific to issues families face can help them understand technical information and the value of the work. Parent advocacy training programs are also a valuable asset.



## Connection

Have families come together and support each other through parent and family-facilitated peer groups. Experienced parents and family members are a great resource for mentorship.







# Family-Specific Strategies: Selective



## Skill-specific training

Unlike general training which is concept-focused, skill-specific training provides families support in areas they may need additional help in such as ESL or computer literacy.



## Location-specific events

Certain families may not be able to attend events even if you can sponsor them. An alternative option is to have staff attend an event in the child's own community.



## Accessible resources

Make resources such as training documents, videos, and DVDs available for families and parents who cannot physically visit a facility.





# Family-Specific Strategies: Intensive



## A tailored approach

Create individual-specific strategies by taking the time to identify and support accomplishments that aren't so readily apparent. Know the strengths of both child and parent and incorporate them.



## 1-on-1 mentorship

Parent advocates, liasons, and mentors experienced in the identified system are extremely valuable. Try to tap into one for focused mentorship with the families you are working with.



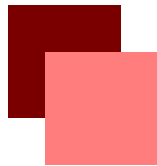
## Deeper understanding

Find ways to better understand different perspectives and feelings. A good place to start is by visiting the family at a place that they prefer, such as at home. Offer services to help resolve parent-child relationship issues if needed.



# Additional Strategies and Resources





# A Challenge to Workshop Attendees

We leave you with a list of overall checkpoints that you can use to gauge your progress as you improve your work as an advocate and seek to build and implement programs and resources that will:

- ☐ Increase the number of parents and family members who are **informed of available services and support** through service professionals, community, and government agencies in their local community, county and state.
- ☐ Increase the number of parents who **receive peer support** and offer them opportunities to meet other parents and share their strategies for addressing the needs of their children and families.
- ☐ Increase the number of parents who are **better able to make informed decisions** about the services their children receive.
- ☐ Increase the number of parents who are **better prepared to partner with professionals** and advocate for their children and families
- ☐ Increase the number of parents who are **empowered to provide informal support** to their local communities.

