It's Not the “What,” It's the “How”: Four Key Behaviors for Authentic Leadership in Early Intervention

Individuals at all levels and in a variety of roles in an early intervention service delivery system, including program administrators, direct service providers, and family members, can and do serve as leaders and participate in formal and informal leadership opportunities every day. For example, an early intervention program administrator might engage with other administrators and parents to change state-level policies to better meet the needs of the children and families served by her program. A service coordinator might use a coaching strategy to address a father’s self-identified need to communicate more effectively with his son’s physicians. A speech and language pathologist might share several feeding techniques with a new colleague. In these examples, each individual influences others to address shared goals and aspirations.

Leadership is not confined to a particular role, title, or position. It can be “learned and is available to everyone” (Northouse, 2012, p. 13). Acquiring leadership skills is a developmental process (Rodd, 1996), and individuals can gain confidence in their ability to lead from using leadership behaviors, watching others that they think are similar to themselves lead, getting feedback from those they trust, and feeling success in their attempts (Bandura, 1986, 1997). Authentic leaders are true to their values and beliefs (Avolio, 2011; Avolio & Gardner, 2005). They are proactive in influencing others to achieve common goals (MacGregor Burns, 2003; Yukl & Falbe, 1990; Yukl & Tracey, 1992), engaging in lifelong learning (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Preskill & Brookfield, 2009), building working relationships founded in trust (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Hoy & Smith, 2007; Rodd, 1996, 2005), and acting in ways they want others to act (Hoy & Smith, 2007; Kouzes & Posner, 2011, 2012).

In this article, we highlight four key behaviors that typify authentic leadership. Authentic leaders (a) exercise influence to reach shared goals, (b) engage in continuous learning, (c) build and nurture relationships, and (d) model behaviors they want others to display. Although the behaviors are presented as distinct, they are inextricably linked and can be observed happening simultaneously. The four behaviors and indicators listed in Table 1 and described here...