

## Practitioner Family-Centered Practices for Working with Families

Family-centered practices are a particular way of working with and developing collaborative relationships with families. These practices include two key elements: Relationship-building and participatory parent and family involvement. Both practices, when used together, increase the likelihood that any type of intervention practice done in a family-centered manner will have optimal parent, family, and child outcomes and benefits.

[Watch a video of this guide](#)

### Family-Centered Practices

- Relationship building takes time. Trust and respect—the cornerstones of family-practitioner relationships—develop when the two people work together, each contributing to achieving desired family goals and outcomes.
- Put yourself in the parent’s shoes. The more you can understand parents’ concerns and priorities from a family’s point-of-view, the more you can help them.
- Develop and use effective listening skills. Show sincere concern and empathy for parents’ struggles and celebrate family strengths and accomplishments. Acknowledge and be responsive to family members’ beliefs about their situation or circumstances. Remain nonjudgmental even if you do not agree with a parent’s point-of-view.
- Be responsive to each family’s unique circumstances. This includes a parents’ personal and cultural beliefs and values. It is important to remember that beliefs influence how a family sees and responds to their situation.
- Building relationships with parents starts with identifying what a family wants to accomplish as part of their work with you. Move beyond just talking, however, to taking concrete steps to achieve family-identified goals or outcomes.
- Doing for others rather than people learning to do for themselves perpetuates a need for help. Family participatory involvement means that parents are actively engaged in obtaining family-identified supports or resources and taking action to achieve desired outcomes or goals.
- As part of any intervention plan, ask the parents which steps or actions they feel comfortable doing themselves and which steps or actions they want to do together with you. Things parents feel comfortable doing build on family strengths. Things parents do together with others promote new abilities.
- Parents look to professionals for advice and guidance. As part of identifying the steps and actions to obtain supports and resources, offer suggestions and ideas for parents to consider. These should be shared in an unbiased manner and not be imposed on the parents.
- Remember to engage the parents in a review of their actions and accomplishments. This helps strengthen their sense of confidence and competence in achieving desired goals and outcomes.

### A Quick Peek

Jen is a single parent whose 4-year-old son, Adam, has significant developmental delays. An avid outdoor enthusiast, Jen enjoys bicycling on trails in a park near her home. She mentions to their early childhood practitioner that she would like Adam to be part of this activity but cannot afford a specialized bike trailer for her son. The practitioner acknowledges this situation and asks Jen to describe what she has been able to figure out so far. She tells the practitioner about finding an organization that provides such adaptive equipment free-of-charge if it is considered medically necessary. The practitioner asks if Jen has asked anyone who works with Adam to prescribe the bike trailer. She responds yes, but the therapist said she did not see it as necessary for Adam’s development. When Jen and the practitioner brainstorm about other avenues, she remembers that Adam’s pediatrician also enjoys outdoor sports. Together they come up with a reason for needing the bike trailer, and Amanda explains her situation to the physician and the benefits to Adam. The physician agrees that the bike trailer will provide Adam many different social and physical-development opportunities. Amanda and her son now spend lots of time together enjoying the outdoors.



### You’ll know the practice is working if...

- The parent is comfortable sharing information with a practitioner
- The parent indicates he/she and the practitioner work well together
- The parent plays a central role in achieving desired outcomes

This practice guide is based upon the following *DEC Recommended Practices*: Family 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7  
 The DEC Recommended Practices are available at <http://dec-sped.org/recommendedpractices>

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