

Involving Families in Obtaining Supports and Resources

Family engagement practices include methods and strategies that actively involve parents and other caregivers in obtaining family-identified supports and resources or engaging in family desired parent, parent-child, and family activities. The key to family engagement is active participation in actions to achieve outcomes in ways that strengthen child, parent-child, parent and family functioning. This is best accomplished by building on family strengths and interests.

[Watch a video of this guide](#)

Family Members' Active Engagement

- Start with the concerns and priorities, the supports and resources needed to achieve desired outcomes and goals, and the sources of desired/needed advice, guidance, information, and so forth. Remember to begin with the outcomes and goals that will be the easiest to achieve.
- Parents are more likely to be actively engaged in obtaining supports and resources that are easily accessible and take minimal effort to obtain. Parents are also more likely to seek out and obtain supports and resources from persons and organizations with whom they feel most comfortable.
- Parents are more likely to engage in parent-child activities that are familiar to their family. Parents are also more likely to engage their children in learning opportunities when they are done as part of everyday, familiar activities.
- A simple but effective strategy to engage parents in obtaining supports or resources or engage in desired activities is to develop together with the parents the actions or steps to achieve desired outcomes or goals. Go through the list one thing at a time and have the parent identify which actions or steps he or she feels they can do on their own and which ones both you and the parent will do together. In some instances, it may be necessary for a practitioner to “take care of” a few steps himself or herself when first working with a family.
- Another strategy for parents to engage their children in everyday learning opportunities is for both you and the parents to do the activities with the child together. Doing this as part of everyday familiar activities and routines will increase the likelihood that the experiences will be successful for both the parents and their child.
- Provide encouragement and suggestions as appropriate as part of obtaining supports and resources or providing a child everyday learning opportunities. Parents expect and want practitioners to share their knowledge and expertise. Genuine input is both welcomed and appreciated.



A Quick Peek

Sarah, an interventionist, and Robert and Janelle Saunders, the parents of Jackie, their daughter with cerebral palsy, have been working together for almost two years. Jackie likes bath time and Janelle has asked if there are any water-related activities in or around their community that might work for her and her daughter. The interventionist tells Janelle about a community pool, YMCA pool, and a pool at a local recreation center. She also mentions that the recreation center has a parent-child swim time three days a week. The mother and interventionist make a list of things that will need to be done to decide if the recreation center parent-child swim time might work for Janelle and Jackie. This includes visiting the recreation center to find out how to enroll a child, swim times and days, and other requirements. Janelle takes responsibility for all action steps, and now she and Jackie attend the swim-times two or three days a week.

You'll know the practice is working if...

- Parents are involved in developing an action plan
- Parents are able to do most of the plan steps with little assistance
- The actions result in desired outcomes and benefits

This practice guide is based upon the following *DEC Recommended Practices*: Family 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
 The DEC Recommended Practices are available at <http://dec-sped.org/recommendedpractices>

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