

Engaging Families as Assessment Partners

Engaging families as partners in their child's assessment includes methods and strategies for gathering information from families and promoting their participation during the assessment. Gathering information from families is critical for identifying a child's strengths and needs and for making informed decisions about the goals and objectives on intervention plans. Practitioners ensure that family members play an important role in their child's assessment when they listen to family members, encourage them to share their knowledge, and clarify their concerns, priorities, and goals for their child.

Watch a video of this Learning Guide

Learning Guide: Families' and Their Child's Assessment

- Explain to the family that the purpose of an assessment is to identify a child's abilities in everyday activities, to make decisions about a child's eligibility for intervention services, to develop an individual plan for the child and family, or to monitor child progress.
- Describe the assessment process and the kinds of information the team gathers: What assessment instruments or tools will be used? What will team members be doing? How long will it take to complete the assessment?
- Ask the family to identify optimal times of the day for their child. Provide options for where and when their child's assessment will take place.
- Share ways the family can be involved in the assessment process (e.g., interacting with the child, providing information about their child during or after the assessment). Discuss the importance of family input about the child's characteristics, abilities, and challenges.
- Ask the family to describe a typical day for their child. Together with the parent, use informal observations, discussions, checklists, photos/videos of the child, and other methods to identify the child's strengths, interests, needs, and the ways in which their child participates in everyday activities.
- Acknowledge family members' concerns and input about their child's behavior, skills, interests, and development by summarizing their comments. Check with the family to confirm that your understanding is correct. Encourage the family to reflect on their child's performance during the assessment and ask questions about any assessment procedure.
- Describe the results of the assessment, including the child's strengths, interests, and challenges in everyday activities/routines. Also describe assessment findings about the child's developmental level and how it relates to the child's eligibility for intervention services or describes the child's progress.
- Solicit the family's input on the accuracy of the results of the assessment. Engage the family in a discussion of their priorities and/or the focus for next steps.



A Quick Peek A school district assessment team is forming to evaluate Jenn, a 33-month-old, to determine her eligibility for preschool special education services. Anna, the district's parent coordinator, meets with Jenn's mother, Erin, and a school psychologist. The professionals listen to Erin's concerns about her daughter. The psychologist describes the play-based assessment used as one part of the eligibility evaluation, and Anna explains other parts of the process. They offer to answer any questions Erin might have and suggest how she can be involved. Erin asks the team to observe Jenn during a center rotation at her childcare program. Erin feels the classroom setting will give the team a good chance to see Jenn in a place where she is comfortable and interacting with other children. On the day of the assessment, Anna, Erin, and one of the childcare providers observe together. Anna solicits and confirms her understanding of Erin's observations before writing them down. Later, during the meeting to determine eligibility, the professionals make sure that Erin feels a part of the meeting by inviting her questions, soliciting her observations, confirming that she understands the information, and including her priorities in the intervention plans.

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

- Families are actively engaged throughout their child's assessment
- Family members share their knowledge about their child's abilities, interests, and challenges in everyday activities
- Family members provide information that helps identify the priorities and next steps for their child

Among the helpful activities and resources you can access online is "[Gathering and Giving Information with Families](#)" by Juliann J. Woods and David P. Lindemann.