Supporting Family Member Informed Decision Making

Involving family members in informed decision-making increases the likelihood that child and parent intervention practices are responsive to family concerns and priorities. This can best be accomplished by working with parents and other family members in ways that are sensitive and responsive to each family's unique circumstances in order to develop and implement interventions to achieve desired outcomes and goals.

Learning Guide: Identifying Family Concerns and Priorities

Informed decision-making includes three interrelated activities. These are identifying: (1) parent concerns and priorities, (2) the support and resources for addressing concerns and priorities, and (3) the sources of those supports and resources.

Parents are more likely to make informed decisions if they are provided complete and unbiased information. Early childhood practitioners are important sources of that information. Provide information specifically in response to parents’ concerns and priorities.

Work with parents to identify what they want to accomplish for their child and family. Engage the parents in prioritizing their concerns and goals, placing them in order from those that can be met immediately to those that will take some time and effort to achieve.

Work with the parents to identify the types of supports and resources that are needed to address their concerns and priorities. This can include such things as child-rearing advice, childcare information, emotional support, parenting information, child-level interventions, and any other types of supports and resources to achieve desired outcomes and goals.

Engage the parents in discussing who is/are the sources of needed supports and resources. It is helpful to introduce the idea that help and assistance can come from informal sources of support such as family members and friends as well as formal sources of support such as early childhood health centers and their staff.

Parents are more likely to seek supports and resources from persons and organizations with whom they have had positive experiences. After identifying those sources of support and resources, engage parents in deciding who they feel most comfortable using to address family concerns and priorities.

Parents look toward and expect practitioners to make suggestions and provide advice and guidance. That is one of the most important reasons they become involved with early childhood practitioners.

A Quick Peek

Sue and Adam Adams are the parents of a 1-year-old daughter, Zoe, who has a disability and medical condition that requires specialized health care. The parents decided that as a result of their child’s health care costs, Sue needs to return to work. She brings this up during the next home visit by the family’s early childhood provider. The mother and home visitor discuss the kinds of childcare the child will need and which backgrounds and skills childcare staff will need to take care of her daughter’s health care needs. The home visitor introduces a nurse who has considerable experience with children with Zoe’s medical condition. They go through each one and identify both strengths and weaknesses of the two centers. After going through the two best picks, the home visitor shares the fact that one of the centers is located close to the family’s home. The nurse who has considerable experience with children with Zoe’s medical condition is well acquainted with the local resources to visit that center first and eventually enrolls her daughter in this program, after the director’s explanation of the care Zoe would be provided.

Learn more about helping families make informed decisions:
Making Decisions Together: How to Decide What’s Best from CanChild, the Centre for Childhood Disability Research at McMaster University in Canada.

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You’ll know a parent is making informed decisions if . . .

- A parent was actively involved in specifying his or her concerns and priorities
- The parent is confident with the persons or organizations who provided needed support and resources
- The parent judges the outcome of the supports and resources as addressing concerns and priorities