

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.

Watch a video of this Learning Guide

Learning Guide: Identifying Family Concerns and Priorities

- Informed decision-making includes three inter-related 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 can only 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 from formal sources of support such as early childhood teachers and therapists.
- 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.
- In those instances where supports and resources are not available from known persons or organizations, work together with the parents to seek out and obtain family-identified supports and resources.
- 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 Susan and Bill 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, Susan 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 and mother together identify about half a dozen childcare centers that meet all of the mother's requirements. The two go through each one and identify both strengths and weaknesses. After narrowing the list down to the two best picks, the home visitor shares the fact that one of the two centers is operated by a nurse who has considerable experience with children with Zoe's medical condition. The mother decides to visit that center first and eventually enrolls her daughter in that program after the director's explanation of the care Zoe would be provided.



You'll know the practice is working 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

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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