

Helping Families Be Full Team Members

Families are full team members when they participate in all aspects of assessment, evaluation, IFSP/IEP planning, and implementation of the plan. This is important because families are the most knowledgeable about child and family life and have much to contribute to child and family interventions. It is important to value and incorporate family input throughout the entire assessment and intervention process. This practice guide includes different things practitioners can do to involve family members meaningfully and actively in assessment, planning, and intervention practices.

Watch a video of this Learning Guide

Learning Guide: Supporting Families in Active, Meaningful Participation

- Schedule interactions that involve a particular child/family at times and places convenient to the family. This will help the family be more relaxed and willing to participate fully.
- Clearly communicate and demonstrate that family members' input is a valued and a vital part of all assessment, planning, and intervention processes. This is accomplished by asking for family ideas and soliciting their opinions from the very beginning of the assessment process. This helps families recognize their contributions to child growth and learning.
- Providing family members with clear, understandable, and jargon-free information about the purposes of each and every interaction helps them to prepare for and participate in the assessment and intervention process.
- Provide lots of opportunities for family members to discuss openly information that is important to the family. This will help identify and focus on family and child priorities and preferences for assessment and intervention.
- Be sure to use active and reflective listening skills. Remember to listen more than talk during interactions with families. This will encourage families to share information about what would be most helpful for improving child and family functioning.
- The more actively you involve family members in information sharing and informed decision-making, the more likely interactions will include family capacity-building opportunities and consequences.



A Quick Peek

"Is this Mrs. Sears? Hello. My name is Abby Lewis. I'm a teacher with the Early On early intervention program. I understand you called yesterday with some questions and concerns about your son Hal. Is this correct? (Pause). Is this a good time to talk to tell me a little more about those concerns and for us to discuss possible next steps? (Yes). Great. Can you tell me a little bit more about your concerns? (Yes....). Am I hearing you correctly that you are worried about his talking and minding you? (Yes...) If you

would like, let's set up a time that I can come to your home for about an hour to see Hal play with some of the things he enjoys and, possibly, for you to show me some of the things that you are concerned about. I can share more information about Early On and what we do. This will also be a time for you to ask questions and for us to talk about Hal and your family that will help us better understand what might be going on right now. (Pause) You are welcome to pick a time and place that works best for you and Hal. What is a good time during the day for you and Hal? Please feel free to invite anyone else you would like for us to meet with. I'm going to put in the mail today a little more information about the program and what an evaluation-and-assessment process is all about. See you next week!"

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

- Families are actively engaged in conversations with providers.
- Families offer suggestions and ideas about activities and strategies to help their child.
- Families report feeling valued and respected by other team members.

For more intervention activities, take a look at online resources such as "[Partnering with Families of Children with Special Needs](#)" from NAEYC.