

**Module: Family-Centered Practices
for Infants and Toddlers With Visual Impairments**

Session 2: Teams and Service Coordination

Handout F

Thoughts From the Field: Including Parents on the Early Intervention Team

EIVI Training Center. (2002). *Thoughts from the field: Including parents on the early intervention team*. Chapel Hill, NC: Early Intervention Training Center for Infants and Toddlers With Visual Impairments, FPG Child Development Institute, UNC-CH.

Compiled from the Early Intervention Listserv (April 2002) of the Early Intervention Training Center for Infants and Toddlers With Visual Impairments.

Building Relationships with Families

- Include families in all aspects of decision-making.
- Lend an ear when caregivers need to talk, vent, cry, etc.
- Provide specific positive reinforcement for all attempts parents make to interact with you and follow through.
- Make sure the family knows you are willing to discuss needs and concerns of the entire family and not just concerns regarding the child with the disability.
- Build a relationship of trust with families.
- Ask permission to interact or work on a specific skill before making recommendations.
- Express appreciation when parents offer information about their child.
- Remember that respect is built one step at a time!
- Watch and learn to interpret parental body language. If you notice that parents are uncomfortable, stop and address their concerns immediately.
- Accountability builds trust and respect; therefore, do what you say you will do.

Parents as Advocates

- Include families in all aspects of decision making.
- Families need to see the team working together. Model appropriate behavior.
- Outline the process of early intervention; teach parents that they are the “yea or nay” sayers at each step of the process.
- Remind families that they can reject ideas of the team.

- Make certain that parents know they can make changes in the team, if they feel someone is not a good match for their family.
- Remind parents that it is acceptable to say, “Stop, enough already!”
- Involve parents in program decision-making activities.
- Allow/ invite parents to become advisors at staff meetings, to present at trainings, and to participate in workshops.
- Parents must believe their opinions are valuable.
- Help parents understand their rights and not just specifics of the “system.”
- Help parents learn to find and secure resources independently, rather than being dependent on the service coordinator or other professionals for answers and assistance.
- Help parents understand that they can refuse a service, and that decision can always be reversed later. The same applies to accepting services.
- Actively encourage parent opinions and input.
- Connect parents with other parents if they are interested in doing so.
- Help parents find resources and teach them how to access them.
- Provide appropriate resources.

Interacting with Families

- If possible, provide some center-based supports and activities with parents and children. Some families report that having the opportunity to see other children with VI and meet other parents is very helpful.
- Model interactions appropriately and invite the parent to try it with you. If they decline, do not pressure or judge.
- Recognize, respect, and understand parents’ learning styles.
- Follow parents’ pace and style.
- Continually reinforce and respect parental efforts to make informed decisions about goals, techniques, equipment, services, etc.
- Spend time helping parents understand their child’s disability. Use other parents, videos, books, and pamphlets to help them understand the disability while also noting the differences in children with visual impairments.
- Understand there is not a set formula for working with families. Continually assess whether or not you are really responding to the family’s needs and priorities, and never assume you know what an individual family needs.
- Parent participation will be minimal when you use a “one size fits all” approach to intervention.

Parents and Teams

- Keep in touch with all members of the team via calls, e-mail, letters, and covisits.
- Help families to understand each team member’s role.
- Help families understand that the team wants their input and feedback.
- Are services offered when the parents can attend or participate?

- Are the parents in school or at work when you are planning or holding meetings and intervention sessions or offering playgroups?
- Give parents time for forethought. Leave some questionnaires and assessments in their homes prior to requesting information from them.
- Determine: Is the service appropriate for the child?
- Are the services appropriate for the parents' priorities and needs?
- What are the family's priorities and needs? Using Maslow's hierarchy, does the family have other basic needs that must be met before the parents can think about their child's individual intervention needs and being a part of a team?

IFSP Ideas

- Use parents' own words on the IFSP.
- Limit your influence on the IFSP and thereby ensure parent ownership and responsibility.
- Meet with parents prior to the formal IFSP meeting to discuss priorities and leave responsibility of selection of goals in their hands.
- Leave the IFSP "Concerns, Priorities, and Resources" page with the family before the IFSP meeting.
- Sit next to the parent during the meeting.
- Ensure parents have the same materials during the meeting that other team members have.
- Stop and explain jargon used during meetings.
- Before closing a meeting, make certain that parents' concerns and questions are answered.
- Suggest that parents write down questions or concerns prior to the IFSP meeting and take that list with them. Sometimes parents may get overwhelmed in the meeting and forget mental lists or questions.
- Adjust meetings to parents' pace and literacy skills.
- Establish times for meetings by speaking with the parent first and finding a convenient time for them, even if that means nights or weekends.
- Use an agenda during meetings and set time limits.