



Outcomes of Family Support

September, 2001

Families who are Supported Early On:

... have less need for advocacy and ultimately less litigation

Families who are supported early on have stronger relationships and more trust in the professionals who work and interact with their child and family. It is a trusting relationship that allows families and professionals to work out their differences and find common ground when there are challenges. Professionals who are involved with local family support projects have reported this.

... are more able to identify and voice their needs

Families who are supported early on have been shown the world of the possible: from other parents who are mentors or peer models, from professionals who share and fully disclose all information and options in an open manner. Parents who are supported are likely to have a more complete understanding of the choices and opportunities that exist for their child and family, have more confidence in the choices they make and are less likely to find themselves unhappy at a later date after discovering there were other choices and options they weren't aware of.

... don't get "stuck" in anger and denial

The Beach Center at the University of Kansas has done a long term study on family support and found that families who are supported are more able to move on from the anger and denial which may be present for parents of children with special needs. Parents who don't get bogged down in anger or remain in a state of denial find "normal" for their families faster and are better able to make choices regarding their child and family.

... function better as partners with professionals

Parents who have been supported by parents and professionals feel that people have walked through some of the hard times and challenges with them and have a better understanding of their lives and child. It has been reported on numerous occasions that when a parent feels valued and supported it is easier to establish a trusting relationship, which leads to real partnerships.

For families who are supported early on there are many positive outcomes. These positive outcomes can have tremendous impact not only on the family and child, but also on professionals who work and interact with children and their families.

Family Support is both a *set of beliefs* and an *approach* to strengthening and empowering

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families and communities so that families and children can thrive. There are many ways in which a family can find support both formally and informally through a “resource-based” model. This can mean both emotional and informational support.

In a traditional “service based” model, services are designed and provided “to” or “for” families by professional service providers. Services are based on available personnel, eligibility criteria, funding sources, etc. In a “resource based” model, however, the strengths and resources of each family are used as a basis for reaffirming families. Every parent has used some sort of support system outside of his or her immediate family at one time or another. It might be a grandmother giving advice, a neighbor offering childcare, a faith community, a community service group, a doctor, teacher, or another professional. Whatever the offer, whatever the connection, the result builds a linkage that demonstrates care and gives the message that “you are not alone”.

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A “family supportive community” is one which connects and revitalizes families. It offers families better access to information and better access to each other. Better information and connections lead to more personal confidence.

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