



Elements of Family Support

September, 2001

In Minnesota, on an annual basis, each Interagency Early Intervention Committee (IEIC) is asked to develop an annual allocation plan. This plan addresses the local support needs of families and accesses funding available through Part C and Part B, Section 619 federal funding. Every IEIC develops a “family support subcommittee,” and this group is then responsible for the implementation of the “family support plan.”

In addition to specific services, families often express a need for connections and resources. These might include: talking to another parent who has “walked the walk” they are now facing; getting all the information available about a specific disability; learning how to deal with sibling issues; looking for a support group.

These needs are most often met through local family support plans. Local IEIC Family Support work plans must address at least two of these elements:

1. Parent-to-Parent Networks

Using trained mentor or veteran parents to support other parents

2. Information, Referral and Resources

Linking to information, resources and services (newsletter, brochures, informational mailings and referrals to community resources)

3. Community Support

Contributions of formal and informal support that strengthens the family’s ability to thrive and provide care for their child (*formal*: parent reimbursement for responsibilities provided by parents for family support activities, reimbursement for conferences, child care or mileage, flexibility and increasing community awareness of issues families face. *Informal*: Honoring support from friends, family and community groups.)

4. Networking Activities

Opportunities for family members to meet and network in a casual setting (outcome-based events, not solely recreational events)

5. Sibling and Extended Family Support

Activities that address the concerns and validate the roles of siblings, grandparents and extended family members (Sibshops, informal activities and networks, targeted resources)

6. Leadership and Advocacy Training

Activities and training to empower parents to be leaders and advocates (participation on boards, linking to advocacy organizations, creation of political action committees, etc.)

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7. Training

Plan, offer and evaluate conferences for parents, professionals and community members. Parents serve as co-trainers or presenters.

8. Parent Support Groups

Self-help, problem solving, topical or educational groups for exchanging information, emotional support, and resources.

Besides the immediate benefits these elements offer to families, research also tells us that families who are supported early on:

- have less need of advocacy and ultimately less litigation with agencies
- do not get “stuck” (in anger, denial, etc.)
- are more able to identify and voice their own needs
- function better as partners with professionals

In addition, research regarding the effects of support confirms that the positive effects of support provided by informal sources generally exceed the positive effects of support attributed to formal support services (Bess, Lingerfelt, and Nelson, 1990).

