



Family Centered Tips and Strategies

September, 2001

The concept and meaning of family centered care continues to grow and change. It is important to use strategies that are family centered and allow for change. Incorporating these strategies into daily actions and attitudes can improve our success in working with children and their families.

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Consider these strategies to increase family-centered practice.

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1. Start with family priorities

- What is their response to the referral to you, your services or your system?
- Be aware of their perception of the situation and what they see or believe to be their child's disability.
- Start with where they are. Maybe this is a crisis to them and maybe it's not... find out!
- Start with their questions, not yours.
- Ask if they have specific concerns, fears and thoughts.
- Is early intervention for their child a priority of the family? Are there other issues, challenges and concerns that are more immediate and pressing for the family?
- Does the family see this as a big enough issue to want to make any changes?
- Echo the words and terminology the family uses and make sure you understand what they mean.
- Listen more than you talk!

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2. Use family strengths and capabilities

- Watch and listen—You can learn volumes about a family by what is said and what is not said.
- Identify something good about this family and state it.
- Say something REAL about the child that is positive. It may be the only positive thing they have heard about their child.

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3. Identify supports and resources

- Offer information, offer information, offer information! It may be on the first, fifth or the tenth time that you offer something that a family hears it or realizes that what you are offering might be useful to them. We remember far less than what we hear. Under stress it is difficult to retain what does not appear to be essential immediately.
- Connect parents to other parents and families in similar situations.
- Look for the informal supports that already may exist for a family recognize,

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build, validate and use those supports. It is the most natural support that exists for many families.

- A family's life is bigger than formal services and requires more than those to be supported. (Research proves that the positive effects of support provided by informal sources generally exceeds the positive effects attributed to formal support sources.)

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4. Honor Family Values and Beliefs

- □ A family's religious beliefs and lifestyles are integral to how they function.
- Ethical and moral choices are the family's domain.
- Ethnic and cultural customs need to be recognized and may not be obvious.
- Alternative medicine is now a real choice for families. Support them in their choices by encouraging them to ask appropriate questions and seek accurate information.
- Not all families will choose to utilize services. Choosing not to access services does not make the family uninvolved or neglectful.

5. Problem Solve Options

- As you listen to a family, record, sort and organize issues, themes and activities for them to use in planning.
- Ask probing (not prying) questions in order to get to priorities. "What have you tried so far? What do you want to see happen? Where do you want to start?"
- Every once in a while you will hit a brick wall and work with an extremely difficult family. Don't assume it is the norm. Don't let it eat you alive. Bring it back to the team and seek support.

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6. Develop a Relationship

- Be patient...it takes time to develop any relationship.
- You are not going to "click" with every family. If you aren't the best match for a family, do not take it personally. Go back to your team and ask for input and help to decide if there is another person who may have better rapport with the family.
- When we reach a point that we are asking ourselves "What good is THIS family?" We probably should be asking ourselves, "What good are WE to this family?" Be honest with yourself when a negative attitude is pervasive regarding a family.
- Encourage a proactive partnership.
- Realize the feeling of inequity that exists. One day a parent may be capable and

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competent, the next day they are suddenly “needy” of services and supports. Professionals appear to have all the power, money and information. Strive to find equity. Let the family reciprocate, even if it seems small or unimportant to you.

- Make a concerted effort to spend a small amount of extra time developing a relationship. Studies show that an additional 3.3 minutes of interaction is all it takes to help establish a relationship and reduce litigation.
- Actively seek opportunities to build a relationship.
- Talk a bit about yourself. The old way of thinking was to keep your life private and separate. Professionals are now encouraged to share a bit about themselves so that families can see them as people with lives and families too.
- Be aware of your own feelings and history. Recognize that we all have our own history, background and baggage, which may influence how we perceive and work with families.
- Be authentic. It is the quickest route to a trusting and respectful relationship.

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REMEMBER...A change in thinking will lead to a change in actions. A change in actions will lead to a change in thinking.

