

Helpful Hints for Working with Parents

by Deb Ramacher, Wisconsin Family Ties

The parent-provider relationship plays a major role in the success of a child involved in service systems. If the provider and the parent can work well as a team, the child will benefit from their teamwork. Following are some ideas, from a parent's perspective, that may help you to create and nurture strong, collaborative relationships with the parents of youth whom you serve.

1. Parents don't expect you to know everything. Many providers have expressed they feel pressure to always have the answers, or to know all the resources available for families. Most parents, when asking you for information, don't expect that you'll have the answer right off the top of your head. It's o.k. to say, "I don't know, but I'll find out for you."

2. Assume the best. Most parents want what is best for their child, and want very much to work with you. Some parents are intimidated by your education and expertise. Some parents are simply overwhelmed with the challenges of raising a child with special needs. Most want their children to be happy and successful. Your guidance and compassion can be instrumental in encouraging parents to be more involved in their child's treatment or education.

3. Ask parents questions. What are their dreams for their child's future? What are they hoping their child will achieve? How much time are they able to invest in homework or activities to supplement therapeutic or classroom work? Would they like information on resources for children with their child's particular disability?

4. Most parents have one common area of expertise. They know their particular child better than anyone. Use their knowledge to help you in your service planning. When faced with a room full of experts at a team meeting, nothing feels better than having someone in the room acknowledge that you, as a parent, also bring expertise to the table.

5. Tell parents what you like about their child. Parents who have kids with special needs hear a great deal about what is "wrong" with their child. Hearing something positive really helps the parent to know that you see the whole child. When children are going through a particularly difficult patch, sometimes a parent needs a reminder about their child's strengths too.

A variety of providers typically play a vital role in the families of children with special needs. Taking a few steps toward building strong relationships with parents can make the experience more positive and rewarding for everyone involved. Thanks for all you do for our kids and families!

Family-Driven ~ Defined

Family-driven means families have a primary decision making role in the care of their own children as well as the policies and procedures governing care for all children in their community, state, tribe, territory and nation.

This includes:

- Choosing culturally and linguistically competent supports, services, and providers;
- Setting goals;
- Designing, implementing and evaluating programs;
- Monitoring outcomes; and
- Partnering in funding decisions.

Guiding Principles of Family-Driven Care

1. Families and youth, providers and administrators embrace the concept of sharing decision-making and responsibility for outcomes.
2. Families and youth are given accurate, understandable, and complete information necessary to set goals and to make informed decisions and choices about the right services and supports for individual children and their families.
3. All children, youth, and families have a biological, adoptive, foster, or surrogate family voice advocating on their behalf and may appoint them as substitute decision makers at any time.
4. Families and family-run organizations engage in peer support activities to reduce isolation, gather and disseminate accurate information, and strengthen the family voice.
5. Families and family-run organizations provide direction for decisions that impact funding for services, treatments, and supports and advocate for families and youth to have choices.
6. Providers take the initiative to change policy and practice from provider-driven to family-driven.
7. Administrators allocate staff, training, support and resources to make family-driven practice work at the point where services and supports are delivered to children, youth, and families and where family and youth run organizations are funded and sustained.
8. Community attitude change efforts focus on removing barriers and discrimination created by stigma.
9. Communities and private agencies embrace, value, and celebrate the diverse cultures of their children, youth, and families and work to eliminate mental health disparities.
10. Everyone who connects with children, youth, and families continually advances their own cultural and linguistic responsiveness as the population served changes so that the needs of the diverse populations are appropriately addressed.

40 Developmental Assets® for Adolescents (ages 12-18)

Search Institute® has identified the following building blocks of healthy development—known as **Developmental Assets®**—that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.



External Assets

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| Support | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Family support—Family life provides high levels of love and support. 2. Positive family communication—Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents. 3. Other adult relationships—Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults. 4. Caring neighborhood—Young person experiences caring neighbors. 5. Caring school climate—School provides a caring, encouraging environment. 6. Parent involvement in schooling—Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school. |
| Empowerment | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Community values youth—Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth. 8. Youth as resources—Young people are given useful roles in the community. 9. Service to others—Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week. 10. Safety—Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood. |
| Boundaries & Expectations | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Family boundaries—Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts. 12. School Boundaries—School provides clear rules and consequences. 13. Neighborhood boundaries—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior. 14. Adult role models—Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior. 15. Positive peer influence—Young person's best friends model responsible behavior. 16. High expectations—Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well. |
| Constructive Use of Time | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17. Creative activities—Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts. 18. Youth programs—Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community. 19. Religious community—Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution. 20. Time at home—Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week. |

Internal Assets

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| Commitment to Learning | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 21. Achievement Motivation—Young person is motivated to do well in school. 22. School Engagement—Young person is actively engaged in learning. 23. Homework—Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day. 24. Bonding to school—Young person cares about her or his school. 25. Reading for Pleasure—Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week. |
| Positive Values | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 26. Caring—Young person places high value on helping other people. 27. Equality and social justice—Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty. 28. Integrity—Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs. 29. Honesty—Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy." 30. Responsibility—Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility. 31. Restraint—Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs. |
| Social Competencies | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 32. Planning and decision making—Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices. 33. Interpersonal Competence—Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills. 34. Cultural Competence—Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds. 35. Resistance skills—Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations. 36. Peaceful conflict resolution—Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently. |
| Positive Identity | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 37. Personal power—Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me." 38. Self-esteem—Young person reports having a high self-esteem. 39. Sense of purpose—Young person reports that "my life has a purpose." 40. Positive view of personal future—Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future. |