

Table 1
Practice Checklist for Engaging in Sensitive,
Respectful, and Responsive Interactions

	Be aware of your values and preferences and regularly reflect with colleagues to guard against biases.
	Recognize that there are no “cookie cutter” families—all families are individual and unique.
	Accept families where they are based on individual family circumstances and not where you may think the family should be.
	Establish partnerships with families by being responsive and open-minded.
	Spend time getting to know the family and understanding children’s strengths and needs from the family’s perspective.
	Ask questions such as: What is your child really good at? What are her/his greatest strengths? What does he/she like to do? What can we do to help your child succeed? How does your child learn best? What does he/she like about school? What do you want your child to be like when he/she is 3 or goes to first grade? Do you have any family traditions or routines that we need to be aware of when working with your child?
	Meet with families in their homes or community settings when and where they feel most comfortable.
	Allow time for families to listen and understand the information concerning their children and services.
	Provide opportunities for follow up so families can continue to ask questions and seek information as needed.

However, despite the multiple efforts to prepare early childhood professionals to become culturally responsive practitioners, there are service delivery gaps, which cause us not to realize the full intent of family-centered services (Dunst, 2002). In this article, we will highlight family-centered practice dilemmas described by early intervention practitioners. These dilemmas are taken from sessions referred to as Reconnect and Recharge (R&R), which are conducted to support the induction of graduates of an early childhood intervention master’s degree program in the Southeastern United States. Graduates participate in R&R sessions in which they share their practice dilemmas related to the recommended practices in their work settings. An overarching theme across dilemmas is the practitioners’ descriptions of “where the rubber meets the road” and how they apply the DEC Recommended Practices (2014) when delivering family-centered services. For example, here’s how one participant described a practice dilemma:

I have two families now that are in a homeless shelter. Both have children who get multiple services. But I can’t help but think: “Where did the SSI check go? Why were they evicted if both parents were supposedly working full time because they supposedly can’t ever come to school meetings?” And, it is hard not to be a little resentful. *But I have to just back off and accept them for who they are.*

This practitioner clearly understands that to fully realize family-centered services, she/he needs to fully accept and respect families and their life circumstances. This approach implies responsive and respectful partnerships leading to family capacity-building practices. In this paper, we describe strategies to assist practitioners in resolving their practice dilemmas by using the DEC Recommended Practices as guidance for problem solving and practice.