

Engaging Families as Assessment Partners

(ECTA Practice Guide) This information is based upon the following DEC Recommended Practices: Assessment 1, 2, 4, 3, 5, 6, 7, 11

Engaging families as partners in their child's assessment includes methods and strategies for gathering information from families and promoting their participation during the assessment. Gathering information from families is critical for identifying a child's strengths and needs and for making informed decisions about the goals and objectives on intervention plans. Practitioners ensure that family members play an important role in their child's assessment when they listen to family members, encourage them to share their knowledge, and clarify their concerns, priorities, and goals for their child.

Families and Their Child's Assessment

- Explain to the family that the purpose of an assessment is to identify a child's abilities in everyday activities, to make decisions about a child's eligibility for intervention services, to develop an individual plan for the child and family, or to monitor child progress.
 - Describe the assessment process and the kinds of information the team gathers: What assessment instruments or tools will be used? What will team members be doing? How long will it take to complete the assessment?
 - Ask the family to identify optimal times of the day for their child. Provide options for where and when their child's assessment will take place.
 - Share ways the family can be involved in the assessment process (e.g., interacting with the child, providing information about their child during or after the assessment). Discuss the
- importance of family input about the child's characteristics, abilities, and challenges.
 - Ask the family to describe a typical day for their child. Together with the parent, use informal observations, discussions, checklists, photos/videos of the child, and other methods to identify the child's strengths, interests, needs, and the ways in which their child participates in everyday activities.
 - Acknowledge family members' concerns and input about their child's behavior, skills, interests, and development by summarizing their comments. Check with the family to confirm that your understanding is correct. Encourage the family to reflect on their child's performance during the assessment and ask questions about any assessment procedure.
 - Describe the results of the assessment, including the child's strengths, interests, and challenges in everyday activities/routines. Also, describe assessment findings about the child's developmental level and how it relates to the child's eligibility for intervention services or describes the child's progress.
 - Solicit the family's input on the accuracy of the results of the assessment. Engage the family in a discussion of their priorities and/or the focus for next steps.

You will Know the practice is working if...

- Families are actively engaged throughout their child's assessment
- Family members share their knowledge about their child's abilities, interests, and challenges in everyday activities
- Family members provide information that helps identify the priorities and next step next steps for their child

Helping Families Be Full Team Members

Families are full team members when they participate in all aspects of assessment, evaluation, IFSP/IEP planning, and implementation of the plan. This is important because families are the most knowledgeable about child and family life and have much to contribute to child and family interventions. It is important to value and incorporate family input throughout the entire assessment and intervention process. This practice guide includes different things practitioners can do to involve family members meaningfully and actively in assessment, planning, and intervention practices.

- Schedule interactions that involve a particular child/ family at times and places convenient to the family. This will help the family be more relaxed and willing to participate fully.
- Clearly communicate and demonstrate that family members' input is a valued and a vital part of all assessment, planning, and intervention processes. This is accomplished by asking for family ideas and soliciting their opinions from the very beginning of the assessment process. This helps families recognize their contributions to child growth and learning.
- Providing family members with clear, understandable, and jargon-free information about the purposes of each and every interaction helps them to prepare for and participate in the assessment and intervention process.
- Provide lots of opportunities for family members to discuss openly information that is important to the family. This will help identify and focus on family and child priorities and preferences for assessment and intervention.
- Be sure to use active and reflective listening skills. Remember to listen more than talk during interactions with families. This will encourage

families to share information about what would be most helpful for improving child and family functioning.

- The more actively you involve family members in information sharing and informed decision-making, the more likely interactions will include family capacity building opportunities and consequences.

Educator Assessment Checklist

Give family the choice to

- Be an equal member
- Meet with the team before the assessment
- Choose the location of the meeting
- Identify strategies to use during the assessment
- Write down observations of the child during the assessment
- Review the draft written report and suggest changes

Be sure to

- Give parent positive feedback regarding their assessment involvement
- Develop written plans that integrates information provided to family

Crais, Roy, & Free, 2006

Communication Guidelines

- Highlight child strengths
- Seek family's preferred method of communication
- Determine the best time and setting to conduct the assessment
- Provide family time to share concerns
- Ensure family understands the purpose of the assessment
- Allow family members time to ask questions
- Avoid jargon
- Written communication should be accessible by all families

Macy & Bagnato, 2019

References

Crais, E. R., Roy, V. P., & Free, K. (2006). Parents' and professionals' perceptions of the implementation of family-centered practices in child assessments.

Macy, M., Bagnato, S. J., & Gallen, R. (2016). Authentic Assessment: A Venerable Idea Whose Time Is Now. *Zero to Three*, 37(1), 37-43.

Compilation and Summary of Resources: <https://tats.ucf.edu>

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