



Listening to Families

SESSION

2

Facilitator's Script



3 hours total

Listening to Families



5 minutes

Introduction and Overview

Welcome to our training session, "Listening to Families." My name is _____. I represent the voice of _____ (family, early intervention, early care and education). Facilitating with me today are _____ (name/voice) and _____ (name/voice).



Facilitators briefly introduce themselves and describe the unique background and experiences they bring to this session.

Today we're going to focus on listening to families, a skill that is essential for service providers in order to provide responsive services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.

This session will lay the foundation for building relationships with families. Relationships depend on good communication, and the most important communication skill is listening. We need to individualize the way we work with each family, and the only way we can truly individualize is to listen and hear what each family is saying. Listening skills are critical whenever we work with families as we are:

- ◆ *Planning together*
- ◆ *Delivering services*
- ◆ *Transitioning to the next program*



Add participant introductions/openers, as needed.

Review Learning Outcomes and Agenda.

See Facilitator's Guide.

Learning Outcomes



Handout #1: Learning Outcomes

The learning outcomes for this session are:

- ◆ *Participants will practice listening to families to learn about their resources and priorities.*
- ◆ *Participants will practice listening to families whose cultures differ from their own to learn about the families' resources and priorities.*
- ◆ *Participants will consider situations where the values, beliefs, and practices of families and service providers may differ.*
- ◆ *Participants will develop strategies for bridging cultural differences between families and service providers.*

Agenda

Agree on Ground Rules

Listening to Families

- Definition of Families
- View DVD: *Family Voices*
- Large-Group Discussion

Listening to Families When Cultures Differ

- Elements of Culture and Large-Group Discussion
- View DVD: *Aracelly and Elizabeth*
- Large-Group Discussion

Building Relationships Across Cultures

- Cross-Cultural Communication:
Large-Group Discussion and Lecturette
- Small-Group Discussion
- Large-Group Share-Back

Wrap-Up

Reflections/Continuous Improvement

Agree on Ground Rules

Establishing ground rules creates a climate of respect and caring. It is important to be respectful and nonjudgmental while practicing active listening.



5–10 minutes



See Facilitator's Guide.

Chart and post ground rules.



35 minutes total



5 minutes



Listening to Families

Definition of Families

Let's think about working with families. The New Mexico Task Force on Young Children and Families has defined families as:

Handout #2: Definition of Families

Read the handout aloud.

“. . . big, extended, nuclear, multigenerational, with one parent, two parents, and grandparents. We live under one roof or many. A family can be as temporary as a few weeks, or as permanent as forever. We become a part of a family by birth, adoption, marriage, or from a desire for mutual support . . . A family is a culture unto itself, with different values and unique ways of realizing its dreams; together our families become the source of our rich cultural heritage and spiritual diversity. . . . Our families create neighborhoods, communities, states, and nations.” (Excerpted from the Report of the House Memorial 5 Task Force on Young Children and Families, New Mexico, 1990)

When we say families, we mean the broad definition in your handout that includes people who are important in the child's life, not only the mother or father. Every family operates differently, so learning who makes up each family is part of building relationships with families. It is important to understand each family's structure and decision-making process, so those who need to be included in decision making can be appropriately informed and involved. In some families, this may be the mother and father; in others, it may be the grandparents or other

elders in the community. In this module, we will hear the voices of many family members. The experiences they share provide us with opportunities to practice our listening skills. The same skills should be used when working with **all** families.

Each family determines the priorities for your work with them. Sometimes it takes different skills to build relationships with different family members. Listening is **always** a critical skill. Families tell us that being listened to is the key to building trust with service providers. All positive relationships are built on trust.



15 minutes

View DVD: *Family Voices*

We are going to watch *Family Voices*, a DVD produced by the Hilton/Early Head Start Training Program, and focus on listening to families who have children with disabilities share their experiences and perspectives.

We are going to listen so we can identify the families' resources and priorities in the inclusion of their child with a disability in community programs.



Handout #3: Acknowledgements: *Family Voices*

Handout #4: Guided Viewing: *Family Voices*

Please take out Handout #4: Guided Viewing and record your thoughts to the following questions as you view this DVD:

- ◆ *What do families say about their resources and priorities?*
- ◆ *What do families say is important to them when including their child in community programs?*



Start the DVD: *Family Voices* (10 minutes)



15 minutes



Large-Group Discussion

What did you hear the families say about their resources and priorities?

What was important to them when including their child in a community program?



Add any of the following examples from the family quotes not mentioned by the group:

- ◆ *I know my wish for Christopher is to be as independent as possible, to do the things that he wants to do as he sees other kids do it, and to be able to, whether it's public transportation or whatever it may be, I want him to have the ability and not to have any fear of trying to do that on his own. I just want him to be as independent as he can be.—Penny Purser*
- ◆ *What we've learned [is] to deal with the things that we have because of Early Head Start. Because I know that there's that support here, and I know that I can do it.—Jennifer Merwick*
- ◆ *What I try to encourage parents to do is to go at the pace that's most comfortable for them, but not ever to lose sight of the fact that at some point, decision making really should rest with them. It is their child. This is their life.—Ellie Valdez Honeyman*

- ◆ *You are not alone. We are part of this together, and we're going to work at a solution together.—Marcia Callendar*
- ◆ *Before I came here, it was like, whatever was happening, it just happened. I never said anything about it. Just let it go on. But since I've been here, I know that I can make a change. Just by being the mom, I can make a change.—Eurika Grady*
- ◆ *It's not a matter of getting services. It's a way of life. They're not professionals, they are my family. I don't think of them that way, because they've become a part of us. They are all special. We understand that the program has changed the way we are, because, in the process of teaching the baby, they have taught us, too. How to be, to learn how to do, almost like the baby does, because they have trained me to be able to deal with people you come across.—Jesus Gomez*

Listening to families enables service providers to provide services that are designed with individual families and that meet their priorities and needs. By listening to the DVD, we have had a chance to practice listening to families and hear their priorities.

Our next activity will give you a chance to hone your listening skills further by practicing listening to a family whose culture may be different from your own and by considering the effects of culture on ways service providers and families interact with one another. It is important to listen to all families, but we need to attend especially well when we are listening to a family whose culture is different from our own.



60 minutes total



20 minutes

Listening to Families When Cultures Differ

Elements of Culture and Large-Group Discussion

We are going to explore service delivery with families whose cultures differ from our own. We are going to consider how culture, values, beliefs, and experiences affect service delivery and how to provide culturally sensitive services to all families.

Each of us brings our own culture, values, beliefs, and experiences to each relationship. Our background and experiences affect everything we do—the way we talk and use language, how we organize our household, how we raise our children, and how we view disability. We may be unaware of how our experiences affect our perceptions. Each of us needs to become consciously aware that our culture, with its values, beliefs, and experiences, influences our relationships with families.



Handout #5: Definition and Elements of Culture

Allow a few minutes for everyone to read the handout.

Let's consider one definition of culture. Take a minute to read this handout and then we can discuss it.

Definition of Culture:

"The way of life of a group of people, including shared views of the world and social reality, values and beliefs, roles and relationships,

and patterns or standards of behavior (such as communication styles). Cultural features are linked to a sense of shared ancestry and continuity with the past and can be based on race, ethnicity, nationality, geographic location, as well as other dimensions of diversity." (Chen, et al., 1998).

Let's consider some elements of culture:

- Culture is a way of life of a group of people.
- Culture is learned, not innate.
- Culture includes a group's shared
 - values,
 - beliefs,
 - behaviors,
 - preferences,
 - verbal and nonverbal communication styles, and
 - relationship patterns.
- "Cultural assumptions are beliefs which are so completely accepted within the group that they do not need to be stated, questioned, or defended." (Chen, et al., 1998)



Facilitators can take a few comments from the large group on each question and then move into the lecturette.



What stands out for you in these definitions?

Do you have any elements you would like to add?

What implications might these ideas have on the process of building relationships?

We each bring our culture, values, beliefs, communication style, life experiences, and perspectives to interactions with others. Every family has a culture of its own. A clear understanding of what we bring to relationships helps us to develop stronger ties with others, both personally and professionally. Building strong positive relationships based on mutual respect and trust takes time and thoughtful attention.

Families and service providers bring their own personal and family culture to their relationships. In addition, service providers work within an “organizational culture.” An awareness and knowledge of our own cultural values and those of the service organizations we work for create an important foundation for understanding the interactions we have with others.

In many situations, we interact with individuals whose cultures are quite different from our own.



How do we build strong positive relationships with those who have different values and beliefs? How do we learn about their cultures, values, and beliefs?



Take a few comments from the group about how they have built positive relationships and learned about other cultures.

In our work with infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families, we also need to take into account cultural influences on each person's perceptions of disability. Culture-specific views toward disability are influenced significantly by values and beliefs about the cause of the disability, the nature of the disability, and traditional healing practices.

While an important aspect of developing relationships with families is understanding and appreciating culture-specific values, this information must **never** be used to stereotype or assume that **all** members of any culture maintain the same values.

From a service provider's perspective, we also need to look at the culture in which we operate professionally. Many professions, professional organizations, and personal interest groups also operate within a kind of "culture" of their own; promoting certain values and beliefs associated with their goals. Our affiliation with these groups and our training and work experience influence our beliefs and values about how the work is done. These values and beliefs may influence our relationships with families and relationships between service providers from different agencies. One example of this type of difference is the importance of timelines to service providers. Language barriers or the decision-making style of the given family may not make it possible to meet legal timelines.

What it boils down to is that we **always** need to listen to the family with which we are working. This is especially true when there is an obvious difference in our languages or cultures. If families do not speak English, it is critical to have trained interpreters and translation services available. There will always be some difference; possibly one between the professional culture and the personal beliefs and experiences of families. Listening with respect and trusting that families want what is best for their child will help ensure that we are responsive to the family.



10 minutes

View DVD: *Aracelly and Elizabeth*

Now we're going to watch an interview with Aracelly Valverde, the mother of four children. Her second daughter, Elizabeth, has Down Syndrome. Aracelly, her parents, and her four sisters are from Costa Rica and now live in California. Her children were born in California. Aracelly's parents and her sisters all live within a one-mile radius of one another. The family has always been very close, and includes an extended family of 400 relatives in Costa Rica.



Handout #6: Acknowledgements: *Aracelly and Elizabeth*

Handout #7: Guided Viewing: *Aracelly and Elizabeth*

This DVD is short—about 7 minutes. Please focus on the following things that could be a part of the IFSP or other plan if the family desired:

- ◆ *Aracelly's family strengths and resources*
- ◆ *Aracelly's concerns*
- ◆ *Aracelly's priorities*
- ◆ *Aracelly's values and beliefs from her family and Costa Rican heritage*

You may take notes on Guided Viewing Handout #7.



Start the DVD: *Aracelly and Elizabeth* (7 minutes)



30 minutes



Large-Group Discussion

How did you react to what Aracelly was saying?

If you were working with Aracelly and Elizabeth, what would you identify as their family's strengths and resources?



Add any of the following key points not mentioned by the group:

Aracelly's strengths and resources:

- ◆ *Faith*
- ◆ *Family support*
- ◆ *Aracelly's determination*



What were some of Aracelly's concerns?



Add any of the following key points not mentioned by the group:

Aracelly's concerns:

- ◆ *Knowing about Down Syndrome*
- ◆ *Getting family support*
- ◆ *Getting competent, supportive medical assistance*
- ◆ *Elizabeth's development*



What would you identify as Aracelly's priorities?



Add any of the following key points not mentioned by the group:

Aracelly's priorities:

- ◆ *Elizabeth's nutrition*
- ◆ *Elizabeth's heart condition and her survival*



Which of Aracelly's values and beliefs come from her family and her cultural background?



Add any of the following key points not mentioned by the group:

Aracelly's values and beliefs stem from family and cultural background:

- ◆ *Closeness of her family*
- ◆ *Strong religious beliefs*
- ◆ *The varied family responses to Elizabeth's birth*

A big part of being responsive to families is being a good listener, particularly with families whose culture is different from one's own. It is critical to learn about the culture of each family we serve. Each family is unique and brings its heritage—the history of its people—as well as its cultural beliefs and values. It is also critical to avoid stereotyping or making assumptions based on a family's cultural roots.

Sometimes families do things when they are working with service providers that are not consistent with their culture, but that service providers think are fine because these things fit in with their own training and beliefs. For instance, providers may meet with only a mother to plan services. If Aracelly believes—and her culture advocates—that other members of her family should be involved, Aracelly may or may not tell us. Some cultures regard it as rude to challenge a provider or a perceived authority figure. So she may meet with the service provider alone, even though she doesn't believe it is appropriate. That is an example of the norm—or what is expected—from the service provider's perspective (a mother meeting alone with a service provider) being inconsistent with the norm from the parent's perspective. But how would we know if we haven't listened or asked about it?

The service delivery system may not be set up to respond to the different cultures of families. For instance, each system has timelines for the delivery of services. These timelines can be difficult to meet because families of infants and toddlers with disabilities are often very busy with doctors, medical issues, or just life in general. With families whose members take more time to make decisions or who include their extended family or community elders in decision making, it may be impossible to meet the system's timelines. The system focuses on getting things done within timelines, while the family might operate more on a "things get done when they get done" basis.



55 minutes total



20 minutes

Building Relationships Across Cultures

Cross-Cultural Communication: Large-Group Discussion and Lecturette

Let's consider how cultural assumptions guide the delivery of services to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.

Service systems currently believe that a child's abilities are advanced by early intervention and early care and education, and that the sooner the intervention begins, the better.



*What are some other beliefs of the professional/
service provider culture?*



Add any of the following key points not mentioned by the group.

Beliefs of the professional/service provider culture:

- ◆ *It is important to build relationships with all family members.*
- ◆ *Intervention is best directed/provided by families and service providers as a team.*
- ◆ *Intervention is most effective when we promote children's growth through exposure to typically developing children, rather than through direct instruction in an isolated setting.*
- ◆ *A child's disability must be addressed.*
- ◆ *Services must fit the family's routines and priorities.*

You heard Aracelly mention several things that happened that were inconsistent with her cultural values or expectations. One of those concerned the interventionists coming into her home. Again, a value of our system is to work as much as possible in “natural environments.” For some families, having interventionists come into their homes may be a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it may be a supportive and convenient way to get the services they need for their child or family. On the other hand, it may not be “normal” or it may be uncomfortable, awkward, or even insulting, to have people in their home. Remember, Aracelly said she was insulted when strangers went through her kitchen cabinets to see if she was providing adequately for her children.

Another situation in which the values of the family and the provider may be different is in the discussion of the family’s concerns, resources, and priorities for developing service delivery plans with the family. The recommended practice for developing outcomes or goals is to have the family tell its story and discuss issues related to their child and family. Some cultures regard this information and their own personal feelings as very private and may not want to discuss them or have them written down. Other families may hesitate to suggest something for their child because they believe it would be disrespectful of the service providers’ positions as perceived authorities.

Every family is unique, and we must get to know them and gather information on their cultural values and beliefs. We also need to remember to take time to explain **why** we are asking for information and how that information will be used to address their priorities for their child. It can make our information gathering far less intrusive and threatening.



15 minutes



Small-Group Discussion

Handout #8: Bringing Families and Service Providers Together

Let's break up into small groups. Use the handout, "Bringing Families and Service Providers Together," to guide your work. Each group will identify values that might differ for families and service providers, using the questions listed on Handout #8:

- ◆ *Identify values Aracelly expressed regarding services to Elizabeth or to her family.*
- ◆ *List values and beliefs from your experiences and organizational culture.*
- ◆ *Identify one area where your perceptions and values differ from Aracelly's.*
- ◆ *What could be done to be more responsive to Aracelly's values and priorities? Identify one or two strategies that could be used to build a respectful relationship with the family.*

Work for 15 minutes in your small groups and be prepared to share 1 difference and strategy.



Allow 15 minutes and then bring the groups back together for discussion.



20 minutes

Large-Group Share-Back

Would each group please share:

- ♦ *One difference in values and beliefs*
- ♦ *One proposed strategy*

If one of your ideas has been shared already, please present a different one.



After all groups have shared, summarize the discussion.



5 minutes

Wrap-Up

As we have discussed, it is important to listen to the values and beliefs of each individual in the relationship and then work to find common ground. We need to be thoughtful and sensitive when bridging cultural values and beliefs so we can develop strong, positive relationships and provide high-quality services to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.

We have discussed building respectful and trusting relationships between families and service providers; we have practiced listening for strengths and priorities; and we have considered situations where values and beliefs and practices of families and service providers differ. Finally, we have done some problem solving to address these situations.

Each family you meet offers you the opportunity for new experiences and learning. When cultures differ, it is a wonderful and challenging opportunity for personal and professional growth.



Are there any questions or comments about the training today?



Review Learning Outcomes.

See Facilitator's Guide.



10 minutes

Reflections/Continuous Improvement

We would like to give you an opportunity to think about how this session applies to your work situation. Please take a few minutes and list 2–3 strategies you can start to use right away.



Gather Continuous Improvement feedback.

See Facilitator's Guide.

Your suggestions for improvements help us to make our sessions responsive to your needs as learners. We'd like to hear about what worked for you in this session and what could be done to facilitate your learning.



Divide a piece of chart paper into 2 columns, as shown. Entitle 1 column **“What Worked?”** and the other column **“Suggestions for Improvement.”**

What worked?	Suggestions for Improvement



Chart participants' comments without rebuttal or discussion. Facilitators can act on these suggestions, as appropriate, in future training sessions.



What worked for you today?

What suggestions for improvement do you have?

Thank you for your participation today.

End training session

References:

Chen, D., Chan, S., Brekken, L., Lynch, E. & Valverde, A. (1998). *Project CRAFT: Culturally Responsive and Family-focused Training: A learning activities guide*. Northridge, CA: California State University Northridge, Department of Special Education. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED426552)

Report of the House Memorial 5 Task Force on Young Children and Families, New Mexico, 1990