



Elements of Effective Teaming

Introduction

We all participate on a variety of teams in our personal and professional lives (for example, a basketball team, program team, management team, community team, Individualized Family Service Plan team, family team). Teaming, and the skills for working together with others, are particularly critical for all of us who are working to provide effective, coordinated services to infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.

The following five areas are the focus for reflecting on your team's functioning:

- ◆ *Mission and Goals*
- ◆ *Roles and Responsibilities*
- ◆ *Communication and Interpersonal Relationships*
- ◆ *Problem Solving and Conflict Resolution*
- ◆ *Reflection/Continuous Improvement*

Mission and Goals

Effective teams have a clear, shared mission and well-defined goals. These serve as the group's compass, helping them stay focused on what they want to accomplish.

A clear mission statement for the team will describe the purpose of the team—the "why" of its existence. High-performing teams have a larger sense of purpose that indicates how that team will contribute to the world in its own unique way (Senge, 1994). An empowering mission statement focuses on the accomplishments and contributions the team wants to make, the qualities the team wants to develop, and the values the team wants to live and work by (Covey, Merrill, and Merrill, 1995). The mission will guide the team members in their activities and in the development of the team's goals. The statement of the mission itself may be brief and simple, but its effect on team functioning can be quite dramatic.

"... [high] performance teams have both a clear understanding of the goal to be achieved and a belief that the goal embodies a worthwhile or important result" (Larson and LeFasto, 1989, p. 27).

Session 5 Handout #2



Roles and Responsibilities

Effectively serving infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families requires a variety of skills and perspectives. A coordinated team approach to service delivery is needed. However, the team will be effective only if everyone on the team is aware of the strengths and skills of other team members and there is a clear understanding of who is doing what, so there are no gaps or duplication in services. Teams may experience conflict in this area unless there is ongoing communication and clarification about roles and responsibilities.

Communication and Interpersonal Relationships

To work effectively as a team, members must communicate on an ongoing basis about the children and families they are jointly serving, their progress on goals, and their work as a team. The relationships among team members also can facilitate or inhibit the work of the team. Having strategies to communicate effectively and build interpersonal relationships supports your team in working in a coordinated way to meet the unique needs of infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.

Problem Solving and Conflict Resolution

Problem solving is a necessary life skill. A problem can be defined as “any situation in which a gap is perceived to exist between what is and what should be” (VanGundy, 1998). Using this definition, it is clear that not only will groups always encounter problems, but problems should be viewed as opportunities.

For teams working with infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families, every situation is unique, requiring continual problem solving to provide individualized services. Teams need strategies to address the bumps in the road when working toward their visions and goals for children and families. There may be problems in implementing goals or conflict among team members (the up- and down-side of having multiple perspectives). Resolving these conflicts can make the difference between positive teaming and ongoing struggles.



Reflection/Continuous Improvement

As is true of all effective organizations, continuous improvement is a foundation for Early Head Start/Migrant and Seasonal Head Start services. As teams work toward their goals, they need to continually evaluate how they are doing their work and how they can do it better. This spirit of openness and reflection creates a climate for making our services the best they can be for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.

References

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