



Communicating with Families

Tips for Success

Preparing for the conversation:

Make objective notes about the challenges the child is experiencing.

List specific examples from your observations.

- For example, "Jamal communicates with us using gestures and an occasional word."

Role-play with a colleague. Practice exactly how you will present your concerns to the family.

Schedule a meeting with the family.

Consider approaches that are culturally and linguistically appropriate.

Know your community resources. Be prepared with suggestions about where the family can go for answers to their questions.

Gather your thoughts; stay calm and focused.

Expressing your concerns:

Choose a private and comfortable setting for your conversation.

Assure the family that your discussion is confidential.

Listen first.

- Start with the family's stories, visions, dreams, concerns, and priorities.
- Ask the family to talk about their child. For example, "What does he like to do at home?" "Does she like to play with her sister?"
- Provide specific, nonjudgmental examples of your concerns. For example, "When I call Lisa's name she does not turn her head."

Be open to new ideas and different viewpoints from the family and others.

Express empathy and compassion.

Remember that this may be difficult for families and that they may express a variety of emotions (e.g. shock, relief, anger, disbelief). Listen with respect and be nonjudgmental.

Session 4 Handout #2



Answer questions honestly. If you don't know the answer, it is okay to say that you will follow up and get back to them.

If parents are ready to consider further steps, have suggestions ready (the referral and assessment process, phone numbers, etc.).

Remember that you are there to support the family with the next steps.

Following up:

If the family needs time to think about what was discussed, offer to meet again in two weeks, or at their convenience.

If the family is ready for referral, explain the referral process and support them in the next steps.

If the family disagrees with your observations, continue to observe and document for future discussions.

Continue to be an advocate for the child and family—accompany them, if requested, to meetings and appointments.