



First Steps

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Tips for Service Providers—A Family Perspective

Our children do not come with instructions. Parents Reaching Out provides resources that help families make informed decisions about the care and education of their children. We thank the families who have asked questions and found successful ways to advocate for their child for providing the inspiration for these fact sheets.

Family involvement is about choices and opportunities. It is personal and specific to each of the families living in the diverse communities throughout New Mexico. Connecting with families should build partnerships that promote and support *three basic qualities*:

Usefulness: Families have learned many skills that may be useful for other parents in their search paths leading to success and independence for their children. *Invite families to share!*

Sense of belonging: Everyone wants to feel like we belong. Families are no different. When families feel like they are included and respected by others, they work toward the greater goal of helping others. *Welcome families as partners in the process.*

Competence: As families care for their children and navigate complex systems, they gain information about what each child needs to grow, learn and succeed. *Offer new tools and learning opportunities.*

Families who have participated in the Early Intervention program work with many service providers and learn from each experience. Here are some tips for providers shared from a family perspective.



- Even though we may have been through similar experiences and challenges, we are different in our own way. Please don't let a one size fits all assumption cloud your vision as you work with us.
- Your world is new to us and our world is new to you. We are beginning a journey together and it's important for us to have trust in the people that will join us in this journey. Trust doesn't happen overnight, but it is the key to building relationships.
- Explain the Early Intervention process to us and describe each step in this journey. Check for understanding as you tell us about the process and who will be involved. Please explain the roles of the direct staff providers who will be supporting our family as we travel on our path.
- Remember that you are asking us to share the most personal and private details of our lives. Let us know that this is part of your job and how the information will be used to support the healthy development of our children.
- Take time to get to know us. Listen to our stories without judgment. Respect the culture, beliefs and priorities that we share with you as a way of building a safe environment for our journey. When we know that we are respected, we will be able to return that respect to you and be more open to your ideas suggestions and recommendations.
- Tell us about the purpose of evaluation and its benefits. Show us the evaluation tools that you will use and explain how these tools will link to supports and services for our family.

- Help us understand that part of your job is to ask questions. Use examples to help us better understand why you are asking these questions. Answer our questions in words we will understand and explain the acronyms mean in everyday terms.
- Build our level of trust by telling us how you will use the information that we share. Explain each Release of Information form that you ask us to sign. Tell us what “confidential” means. Where will this information be stored? Who will see our information? How can we review this information and have an opportunity to discuss or comment on what has been recorded?
- Identify the strengths in our situation as building blocks for the future. Let us know how the process of sharing our heartache and success will help us to enhance our entire family, if that is what we chose. Explain how our input will lead to goals for our child and our family. Ask us how we want to participate so that we have ownership in the process and take pride in what we are doing. *Let us know that we have choices and options.*
- When you teach us about the process of evaluation, remember that you are teaching us about a lifelong action called informed decision making. Help us understand that this is a process that can be used in any given situation to make choices based on what we need. By sharing a copy of our evaluation and our progress reports, you are giving us information a sense of where we were and how much we have achieved.
- We all have a need for belonging. In order to belong and be proactive in the decisions we make, we need to know the rules and expectations so that we can follow through. We need to know about outcomes and ways we can check on our own progress during this journey.
- Please don't under estimate our potential because our environment may not be what you call “typical”. We have developed skills to meet our needs even if the outcomes may not always be favorable. Take the skills we have and help us use them for positive outcomes. You will most likely find that our skills include: survival, loyalty, flexibility, adaptability and the perseverance to hold true to our beliefs.
- Give us the encouragement and the tools to stand on our own and navigate the systems in our life. Don't give us crutches that we can not do without when we leave the Early Intervention system. Other systems will not think about our family unit; they will focus on our children. We need to know how to advocate for our family and our child to make healthy, informed decisions. Teach us how to ask questions, get answers and find resources to improve outcomes.



*Remember, you are planting seeds of hope in our life. You are exposing us to a whole new life that, in our hearts, we really want. Please be patient. Keep sowing. Be genuine in your words and actions—we can tell when you're not. **Believe in Us!***

For more information call Parents Reaching Out. We offer phone consultations and provide workshops in English or Spanish to communities throughout New Mexico. This publication was developed under a grant from the New Mexico Department of Health Family Infant Toddler program. However, the views here expressed do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Health and should not be assumed to be an endorsement by the New Mexico Department of Health.