



## Using Primary Service Providers & Coaching in Early Intervention Programs

### **Supporting Families Through Coaching**

Many disciplines across the field of early intervention have advocated for a partnership between professionals and family members and caregivers in children's lives. (Campbell, 1997; Dinnebeil, McInerney, Roth, & Ramaswamy, 2001; Hanft & Pilkington, 2000; Rush, 2000; Rush, Shelden, & Hanft, 2003). However, in the traditional model of service delivery families have often been viewed as the recipient of services and professionals as the experts who know what is best for the children and families they serve. In this approach, as discussed in the following pages, families view therapists and early childhood special educators as the people who can "fix" their child's "problem".

In contrast to this traditional model of service delivery, coaching is an evidence-based, helping strategy focused upon enhancing a caregiver's competence and confidence to promote the development and capacity of their children, whether they have a disability or not (Dunst & Trivette, 1996). The process of moving to a coaching model utilized in family settings includes: 1) identifying the primary coach; 2) identifying the primary learners in the family and in the family's every day activities; 3) redefining "hands on" intervention; and 4) reconsidering frequency of service and intensity of support. The family's role in the coaching process is that of learner and the professional embraces their skills and competence so they can ultimately increase the caregiver's capacity and increases the child's full participation in family and community life.

The following pages will describe how coaching supports families so there is not a mismatch between what actually happens and what families want for their children.

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## Concerns Families Share About Intervention

- Service providers don't clearly define options for 'REAL' participation
- Lots of forms and questionnaires drive the initial meetings
- Explanations of natural environments and early intervention are too abstract, do not apply directly to their concerns
- Caregivers are concerned about:
  - Saying the wrong thing or being judged
  - Asking questions that delay or limit services
  - Altering the relationship with the provider
- Confusion about what routines or activities are, how to share or choose because no one explains why they are important
- Assessment (and later service) doesn't relate to expectations (school or health care models)
- Information about the child and family is repeated multiple times...and not used
- Professionals would rather do activities/intervention than show families how to do it themselves
- Assessments use standard educational practices...not linked to intervention
- Interventions are discipline specific—not connected to priorities and family routines
- Providers play with toys and talk about what they think would be good activities to do in routines...and then leave



## What Families Want Regarding Services

- Opportunity to work together to learn about their child
- A "real" picture that reflects their child in familiar and functional settings using multiple methods to share information
- Participation with their child in meaningful activities
- Information to support informed decision making in the areas they identify as important or a priority

Adapted from Woods, J. (2004). *Enhancing service in natural environments*. Retrieved March 5, 2007, from <http://www.nectac.org/~calls/2004/partcsettings/partcsettings.asp>

## Benefits of Primary Service Provider (PSP) Model

As indicated previously, many families enrolled in early intervention and early childhood special education programs are most familiar with a traditional model of service delivery. Based upon their previous experiences and their own understanding that “more is better”, it is important to clearly articulate to families the benefits of using a primary service provider approach. Hanft, Rush and Shelden (2004) provide this “script” for helping families and their coaches understand the value of the primary service provider as a coach model.

“You’ve requested early intervention services from our local program. I’m looking forward to getting to know you and your family better. My role is similar to a coach. I’ll be here to support you, your family, and other important people in your child’s life. Together, we will focus on your priorities and your child’s interests to come up with ways for supporting and increasing your child’s participation in family and community life. My goal is to assist you in helping your child learn and grow. I need to spend some time getting to know you and your family so I know what is important to you, what you like and need to do, and how you prefer to spend your time. You know more than I could ever hope to know about your child and family. Also, you and the other important people in your child’s life spend more time with him than I ever could. So, my intent is for us to pinpoint what you’re already doing that promotes learning and work together to find ways to do this even more. We’ll also work to overcome any challenges you may be experiencing” (p. 36).

Coaching develops the competence and confidence to implement strategies to increase the child’s learning opportunities and participation in daily life, increases the ability to know when the strategies are successful or make changes to current situations, as well as, generalize solutions to new and different circumstances, people, and settings.

Adapted from Shelden, M. L., & Rush, D. (2004). *Enhancing service in natural environments*. Retrieved March 5, 2007, from <http://www.nectac.org/~calls/2004/partcsettings/partcsettings.asp>

- Family receives strong support from one person, not having to get to know multiple people
- Program for child and family is coordinated, not fragmented
- Weekly, family has to host only one visit in the home, not multiple visits

McWilliam, R. (2004). *Enhancing service in natural environments*. Retrieved March 5, 2007, from <http://www.nectac.org/~calls/2004/partcsettings/partcsettings.asp>

# Support-Based Home Visits

When using evidence-based practice in early childhood, a critical piece of the puzzle is determining what should happen during home visits for early interventionists. The emphasis on supporting and understanding families “where they are” is paramount to the success of using a coaching process to facilitate evidence-based practice.

- Focus on emotional wellness:
  - positiveness, responsiveness, orientation to the whole family, friendliness, sensitivity
- Include access to resources:
  - financial, basic needs, equipment, housing, Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Include access to information:
  - child development, disability, what to do with the child
- Embrace evidence-based practices:
  - A child’s relationship with primary caregivers organizes all his or her early development.
  - Children are active participants in their own development, based on their drive to explore and master their environment.
  - Improved outcomes are noted when consumers of all ages are actively involved in planning and implementing intervention.



Adapted from Hanft, B. (2004). *Enhancing service in natural environments*. Retrieved March 5, 2007, from <http://www.nectac.org/~calls/2004/partcsettings/partcsettings.asp>