



First Steps

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Family-Centered Services

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-Centered services are based on a set of deeply held values and beliefs about relationships—between children and their families; between professionals and parents; and the role of community services as a whole. Family-Centered services ensure the well-being of all children including those with developmental delays and disabilities and their families.

Family-Centered Care is based on developing mutual partnerships between professionals and the families to insure that services are planned and delivered to meet the unique needs of the family as a whole. Family-centered care is based on these core concepts:

- *Dignity and Respect*—Listening to and honoring the family perspective and choices.
- *Information Sharing*—Building family capacity by providing unbiased information in ways that are affirming and useful. Sharing timely, complete and accurate information to provide choice and empower informed decision-making.
- *Participation*—Encouraging and supporting families to participate and make decisions that affect the outcomes for their family member
- *Collaboration*—Using processes to promote family involvement in developing policies, implementing programs and evaluating results. Practices insure that family knowledge, values, beliefs and cultural backgrounds are included in planning and delivering services and care.

Source: Institute for Family Centered Care <http://www.familycenteredcare.org>

Family

Families are big, small, extended, nuclear, multi-generational, with one parent, two parents, and grandparents. We live under one roof or many. A family can be as temporary as a few weeks, as permanent as forever. We become part of a family by birth, adoption, marriage, or from a desire for mutual support... A family is 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.

New Mexico Young Children's Continuum, 1990
Edited by Polly Arango

What Will a Family-Centered Approach Mean for My Family?

The ultimate outcome of a family-centered approach is to enhance the well-being of the family as a whole. It is designed to minimize stress, maintain or enhance relationships within the family, and makes it possible for the family to (as closely as possible) follow the lifestyle they choose for themselves. The definition of success looks different for each family.

“One of the greatest gifts we can give our children is our talent for dreaming!”

What is the Purpose of Family-Centered Services?

Family-centered care is *family empowerment*. Families share expertise on their child and gain the sense of confidence that comes from making informed decisions that are right for their family. The outcomes benefit the well being and development of the child and family as a whole. Family-Centered Care is the continual pursuit of being responsive to the priorities and choices of families.

Family-Centered Professionals:

- View the family as a whole for service delivery and recognize that the well-being of each family member has an impact on every other member of the family.
- Recognize child and family strengths and views them as capable and competent. Providers help parents recognize their own personal and family strengths. They encourage families to build upon existing knowledge and skills. They show families genuine respect and sincere appreciation of even their smallest successes!
- Respond to family priorities to help families accomplish *their* DREAMS, not what the professional thinks should be important to them and share expertise without judgment.
- Individualize service delivery through plans tailored to family priorities. Services are not “one size fits all”. It is the family that determines the “best fit” for their family.
- Respond to changes in family priorities through trusting relationships formed during continuous communication that goes beyond an annual meeting or set of scheduled visits.
- Support family lifestyles and recognize that families go about their daily lives in different ways. Families change as they cope with events in their life (child birth, caring for a child with special needs, illness, employment, relationships or cultural traditions).

Making a Difference for Your Child and Your Family

- ★ Be proactive. Share your expertise, concerns and suggestions regarding your child.
- ★ Ask questions about your child's development and intervention plans. Ask how progress will be measured, how it will be documented and what success will look like for your child.
- ★ Attend all meetings and appointments. Ask that terms be explained in words you understand. If you disagree with a proposal, speak up and share your concerns.
- ★ Share your dreams with the professionals in your life.
- ★ Take time to make a list of meaningful priorities for your child and family before each meeting with the professionals and service providers in your life.
- ★ Communicate with professionals to develop a trusting relationship with them. Compliment your team members when services are successful.

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.

