



Resource Article

In the article, *Collaborative consultation in natural environments: Strategies to enhance family-centered supports and services*, Woods, Wilcox, Friedman and Murch (2011) provide a compelling argument for the use of adult learning principles in working with families in Early Intervention (EI).

The philosophy behind family-centered intervention is to support families and provide services in ways that allow them to make decisions about the development and welfare of their child with special needs and their family. Providing services in this fashion has progressed from traditional intervention methods in which providers were viewed as the experts and the family listened to and watched what the providers did with the child. In traditional therapy, the family took a passive role in their services. So passive sometimes that they waited in the waiting room while a specialist worked with their child.

We know that fundamental principles of collaboration are

essential for promoting active parent engagement and participation in the dynamic early intervention process. These behaviors and practices include providers being respectful of caregivers and the decisions they make, asking for their perspective, establishing a partnership with caregivers, and providing services in a culturally sensitive manner. Yet, while there is agreement in the value of these practices, a gap exists between the idea of family-centered services and its full implementation. Some examples of less than family-centered practices include: providers taking the lead in decision making as opposed to caregivers, providers bringing materials into the home instead of using those readily available in the home or other locations the family spends time, and providers focusing on the child rather than the parent and the parent-child dyad.

Building collaborative partnerships that ultimately enhance caregiver confidence and capacity to meet their child and family needs is the

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goal. But how do we engage caregivers so that can truly play an active role? Adult learning theory suggests that for adults to have optimal participation in a learning activity, the information needs to be considered important to the learner. Additionally, coaching and practice should take place in meaningful contexts and the results should be timely and functional.

Recognizing the critical importance of adult learning in early intervention, Woods, et al., conceptualized a three part, *Learning Cycle for Parent-implemented Embedded Intervention*. It begins with *Observations*, *Problem-solving*, and *Reflection*, in which each action sets the stage for the caregiver's active participation in the intervention. In the next step the provider joins the caregiver for some *Direct Teaching* and *Demonstration* of strategies. While direct teaching can lead to passive participation of the caregiver, the authors address this concern directly, "Direct teaching as a consultation strategy is not *unfamily centered* or inappropriate for EI when it is offered within a responsive and respectful relationship with the caregiver" (p. 386). Next in the cycle is *Practice* and *Feedback*, in which the caregiver uses a strategy (or is guided by the provider in the use of said strategy) and the provider gives feedback. The cycle then continues with more *Observations*, *Problem-solving* and *Reflection*.

This cycle can be repeated for use with one strategy and/or it can evolve to include novel strategies that may be related peripherally to the caregiver's initial concern. To help providers with application of this cycle, a table of *Family-centered scaffolding strategies and examples for caregivers in early intervention* is provided. The table describes and provides examples of specific strategies that can be used throughout the learning cycle (e.g., Expanding on the Caregiver's Idea, Linking Information Sharing to Family Priorities, Naming the Dilemma, Commenting and Reflective Feedback). These strategies are helpful when providers reflect on visits to consider how they engaged the caregiver and what they might like to try in future visits.

The application of principles of adult learning supports the active engagement of caregivers in the provision of family-centered services. Knowledge of these principles and strategies for implementation are essential skills for early intervention providers supporting families in natural environments.

Woods, J. J., Wilcox, M. J., Friedman, M., Murch, T. (2011). Collaborative consultation in natural environments: Strategies to enhance family-centered supports and services. *Language, Speech, and Hearing in Schools*, 42, pp. 379-392.



What do the data say?

Pay now or pay later?

James J. Heckman, a Nobel-winning economist from the University of Chicago makes a convincing argument that greater investment in younger children and coaching their parents generates a higher return on investment. Investing in early childhood and supporting parents with promoting their young child's development reduces the need for higher costs associated with crime and dropout rates. Analysis of the Perry Preschool Program revealed a 7% to 10% per year return on investment when factoring the reduced costs associated with remedial education and criminal justice expenses. In another study of parents and children participating Chicago's Child-Parent Centers, which are made up of high quality preschool and parent coaching programs, found participating children to be 20% less likely to have a felony arrest or be incarcerated as young adults compared to those who did not attend. Additionally, these participants were more likely to finish high school than their non participating peers.

A strong link exists between high school dropout rates, crime, and poverty (Rumberger, 2013). While there are many factors associated with school dropout there is increasing evidence that early development enhancing learning opportunities for very young children and parent coaching can help lay a foundation for these children's enhanced development (Dunst, Hamby, Trivette, & Raab, 2000) and later academic success (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Early childhood is a critical time for shaping children's future success. Between birth and five years of age, a child's brain develops rapidly and forms the foundation for their future learning and success in school and life. Because parents have an immense influence on their children's development, coaching and helping them identify and enhance natural learning opportunities for their child is an important part of quality early childhood and early intervention programs. The 2004 Hart and Risley study provides a powerful example of the influence parents have on their children's development. In this study, children

from different backgrounds were observed monthly in their own homes over a two year period. The researchers recorded the number of words their parents spoke to them and the difference was remarkable. Their data revealed that professional parents spoke 45 million words, working class parents spoke 26 million words, and parent on welfare spoke 13 million words. The amount of words spoken to a child has an impact on their vocabulary development. Yet, every parent does not know this and does not know how to facilitate this for their child in ways that are meaningful for them and their child. This is where coaching comes in as a critically important component of early childhood and early intervention programs. By helping parents figure out ways to promote their child's development in doable and sustainable ways they can positively influence their child's development and future success.

By extending critical funding and ensuring high quality early childhood and parent coaching programs for parents of very young children, especially those at risk, we can lessen the need for more costly expenses associated with crime and decrease remedial and specialized education costs. In fact, in the "I'm the guy you pay later" report by Fight Crime: Invest in Kids (2013), it was quoted that nearly \$75 billion is spent Nationally each year to incarcerate adults. It's known that there we'll continue to need prisons, but monies spent now on high quality early childhood and parent coaching programs could contribute to increased high school graduation rates and reduce the number of people who become prisoners and the high costs associated with the prison.

In response to the question, pay now or pay later Heckman (2013) states that "we should invest sufficiently in younger children and coaching their parents because those early investments will generate the greatest return" (p. 2).

Christeson, W., Bishop-Josef, S., O'Dell-Archer, N., Beakey, C., & Clifford, K. ((2013). I'm the guy you pay later. Fight Crime: Invest in Kids. Accessed from [http://cdn.fightcrime.org/wp-content/uploads/1%27m The Guy Report.pdf](http://cdn.fightcrime.org/wp-content/uploads/1%27m%20The%20Guy%20Report.pdf)

Heckman, J.L. (2009). Invest in early childhood development: Reduce deficits, strengthen the economy. www.heckmanequation.org



Consultation Corner

From January through July 2015 we are excited to have Peggy Gallagher and Eileen Kaiser as our consultation corner experts addressing the topic

“Ensuring the Genuine Application of Family-Centered Practices”

This month we explore the following dilemma:

I leave the visit feeling like we talked about all the same old strategies. They are good strategies, but it seems like our visits are “in a rut”.

It’s great that you feel like the strategies you’ve been working on with the family are strong ones. It may be time to check in with the family on how they are feeling about progress and the strategies being used. Consider speaking with the parents/family members about the outcomes. Ask some questions like

- “I feel like we’ve been working on helping Sophia feed herself with a spoon for several visits now. Do you think we’re making progress?” Or
- “Is this outcome still a priority for your family?” Or
- “Do you think she’s met this outcome? I know you wanted her to be feeding herself by her sister’s birthday so she could enjoy ice cream with everyone” “When is Sister’s birthday again?” Or
- “Are there other times or situations during the day when it would be helpful for Sophia to work on feeding herself with a spoon?” “How does she do with feeding herself when you go to your favorite restaurant or when she stays with your friend Theresa?”

At a point like this in ongoing visits it’s a good idea to understand from the family’s perspective whether they feel that progress is being made. If they think there is progress, then try to figure out what other times of the day the functional skill is used and see if you can support them during those times. And perhaps, begin the conversation of what is coming next and that there may be other priorities they’d like to address with the assistance of early intervention.

If the family feels like there is not much progress, you may explore the possibility of video tapping the child using the skill during times when you are not there and then review the video together to see how it’s going. You can then “tweak” the technique or move back a step if more practice needs to happen on an earlier skill. Using video with parents can be so rewarding for them and for the early intervention provider. You might ask open-ended questions such as “What have you tried” or for them to tell you more about the setting and logistics of the time of day being taped.

You might also ask the parents questions such as

- “Did things go as you expected by using that strategy?” If not, what might you do differently?”
- “What went well?”
- “Who eats with you and Sophia at breakfast (lunch, dinner)?”
- “What else would make mealtime easier?”

This could get them thinking beyond just feeding with a spoon to what else is going on during lunch or supper times. Perhaps the neighbor’s child is often over and likes to interact with Sophia. Perhaps some meal times are more hectic than others and not really the best time to help Sophia learn to use her spoon. It could be that there are other priorities that the family would like to work on to make this or another time of day easier. Perhaps Sophia is reaching for her older brother’s glass of milk and helping her learn to hold a cup is a new priority.

Another possibility is that the parents no longer really feel the outcome is something they want to work on at this point in time. It is of course perfectly acceptable for them to feel this way, particularly if progress has not been strong. Your role can then be to support them in waiting, assuring them there will be another time when the outcome makes more sense to work on, and that you all can come back to it.

It may be helpful to pull out some questions from

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the Vanderbilt Home Visit Script (McWilliam, 2004) such as

- Do you have anything new you want to ask me about?
- Is there a time of day that is not going as well for you?
- Do you have enough or too much to do with Sophia?

The full script is available at: http://www.siskin.org/downloads/Vanderbilt_Home_Visit_Script.pdf

Other resources such as the ABC Content Matrix (Wilson & Mott, 2006) can be helpful in identifying new opportunities to practice skills during family or community activities. A copy of the matrix can be found at the following link: http://fipp.org/static/media/uploads/casetools/casetools_vol2_no4.pdf

The key is to understand from parents what is working, what they still want to work on, and what they would like to see the child working on next. It is important for family members to realize that just because the child can complete a skill in one context, that doesn't necessarily mean they can do it the next day, or at the neighbor's house. In other words, the concept of generalization is critical.

When parents turn to you as the expert, be sure you let them know that they are the expert on their child and their family, including the routines of the family, so in fact, they are critical to the child's moving forward with important skills. Likewise, parents know whether certain activities will work in their family context, so focusing on the interests of and using the assets of the family are important. While strategies are supposed to be developed in partnership with the family, you as the provider may need to support them in coming up with new ideas. For instance, you may be working with a family whose priority was to have their child learn to walk so they don't have to carry him and the child has mastered the outcome. The family might

not be aware of the next skills in the developmental progression, such as increasing balance and control in walking to walk on uneven surfaces, such as outside or across carpeting and rugs in the home.

You can discuss this functional skill development with the family and together identify some activities that the family enjoys doing that would give the child practice in this area if they decide it is something they would like to work on. If the family likes outdoor activities, going to the park or playground would present opportunities for the child to walk on a variety of surfaces. If they prefer staying inside at home, you could have a discussion about what materials they could use to help the child get practice in negotiating non-level surfaces.

You may need to provide some information to spark a conversation, and then encourage the caregiver(s) to think of ways to develop strategies that fit with their lifestyle. As a provider, being open to what the family sees as important, even if it may not be in your cultural purview, is essential.

In summary:

- Support the family in developing new priorities and strategies as appropriate.
- Scaffold the opportunities so that as the child progresses, he or she can move to the next level.
- Discuss times of day that are easy or hard. This can lead to additional strategies that can be targeted.
- Ask questions about how a strategy worked, what could be done differently, how to expand to the next level, or adding additional roles for the child to complete.
- Expand the strategy to a new activity or setting (listening to a story at library story hour, or feeding self at a restaurant, for example).
- Add new features to the strategy to promote flexibility; remember repetition and variation!
- And last but not least, get ideas from your team members. Share your stories with other providers who can give you great feedback!



On the WWW

The web resource this month is a video produced by Connecticut Birth 23 System. It's a short (11 minutes) clip that describes an early intervention (EI) visit. It's available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8fOJGmldj0c>

This clip explores not only what happens on an EI visit, but also why visits happen the way they do. EI works best by helping families make the most of the natural learning opportunities that occur in a typical day. EI recognizes that families have a great influence on their child's development and by

supporting families with identifying and enhancing children's learning opportunities intervention can happen throughout the day rather than only during EI visits. The visits can then focus on building parents' confidence and competence to effectively use strategies that are doable in the context of their day. This in turn leads to more intervention, greater generalization of skills, and longer lasting development enhancing learning opportunities for the child. It also facilitates parents' certainty in what they do day in and day out to support their child's learning now and in the future. .



Continuing Education for KIT Readers

The Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) is offering a continuing education opportunity for KIT readers.

In line with the focus on *Ensuring the Genuine Application of Family-Centered Practices*, readers are invited to receive continuing education contact hours for reading the monthly KIT publications (January through June) and completing a multiple-choice exam about the content covered in these KITs.

KIT readers will receive the exam in July 2015. There is no need to register for the CEUs. Rather, if you are interested complete the exam online at www.edis.army.mil

Upon successful completion of the exam, you will receive a certificate of non-discipline specific continuing education contact hours.

KIT Newsletters
are available
online at
www.edis.army.mil

Thank you for your continued interest in the KIT.
Please share your KIT questions/ideas via email to
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