Envisioning the Future Today: Family Strengths, Professional Practices, Beliefs, and Values

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FAMILY STRENGTHS INTERVENTIONS

Intervening from family strengths requires practices that shift power to the family and the role of the professional to facilitator rather than intervenor. This requires a mindset — beliefs and underlying values — that affirms family competence, suspends judgement, and practices from a place of curiosity to understand the family. Our professional mindset transacts with our mindset about families. Exercising a strengths-based mindset can enhance the development of strengths-based practices.

OUR PROFESSIONAL MINDSET

A growth mindset (Carol Dweck*) is the belief that “intelligence” is malleable not fixed. If you have a growth mindset, you are more willing to try new things, take risks, and be open to new understandings that are perhaps different from what you once believed. You prioritize the need to learn new information and work to master new skills even if the work is hard.

MINDSET ABOUT FAMILIES

- There are many ways and cultural styles of parenting.
- Families are successfully meeting their family and child priorities.
- Families are actively thinking about and promoting their child’s development, even if not able to articulate it.
- Families have knowledge and skills (i.e., developmental strategies) outside of those learned in Early Intervention.
- Promoting development is a parenting role. Professional role is to support parenting.

FAMSICLE APPROACH: FAMILY STRENGTHS IN CONSTRUCTING LEARNING EXPERIENCES

- **Contextual Assessment**
  - Practitioner Reflections of Family Strengths
    - Identify important aspects learned about the family
    - Identify potential current, tweaked, and new strategies to meet family priorities
    - Uncover Goals and Strategies Together
      - Turn goal clusters into goals
      - Agree on strategies (current, tweaked, new) to meet those goals
    - Facilitating Goals and Strategies During and Between EI Visits
      - Use FAMSICLE processes of observing, discussing, affirming currently effective strategies, tweaking current strategies, and suggesting new strategies during home visits
      - Map out family use (frequency and fidelity) of developmental strategies in between visits

- **Collaborative Planning**
  - Observing Developmental Strategies in Context
    - record the ways the family helps their child develop (environmental adaptations and responsive caregiving)
  - Discussing Developmental Strategies with Family
    - learn from the family how strategy was identified, why strategy was chosen, and strategy effectiveness

- **Ongoing Home Visits**
  - • Valued the FAMSICLE as a Clear and Cohesive Approach
    - I’ve been involved in a lot more things that sound [like] training for myself — interventions for him — that were much more involved...The little bit of time that we spent together I gained a lot of information from it. So, I was actually very happy that I did it.
  - • Opportunity for Discovery of Goals
    - I think that we [both parents] – sort of unspoken – we’ve always been on the same page of trying to work towards her being as independent as possible...to discover that, serendipitously, and intentionally or not, we were doing things strategically to make that happen.
  - • Developing Self-Confidence
    - It was kind of enlightening as to what it is that we do try to help him...without realizing it...The interview process is good for families because they’ll learn that they are, regardless of what they think they’re doing, they are doing something to help...their child
  - • Con-Constructing Developmental Plan
    - I felt like we were more connected in the process (than IFSP development) because I understood why we were making the goals we were making. We actually made them together so we were involved in it...It was written in a way that makes sense to me.

CONCLUSIONS: FAMSICLE...

- • Has strong potential as a way to deeply explore the learning strategies the family uses and how those strategies reflect the family’s values, understanding of child learning and everyday activities
- • Assessment (Observation and Discussion) processes and intervention planning can be family learning opportunities
- • Uncovered the family’s true goals for their child, their strengths in promoting their child’s learning, and intervening in ways that facilitate family confidence and competence.
- • Might promote parenting self-efficacy by highlighting what the family already does to help their child learn
- • Might have potential to impact EI service delivery by illustrating and facilitating partnership and practices to families


National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.