



Five Tips for Successful Home Visits or Meetings with Early Childhood Families from Diverse Cultures

Effective communication between parents and professionals can support improved outcomes for all young children with disabilities. Because the early intervention and special education system may be especially challenging for culturally and linguistically diverse parents to navigate, it is even more important that families and professionals establish a collaborative relationship. Following are five tips that early childhood professionals can follow to help promote positive communication and build trust when meeting with families.

1. Review information with interpreters prior to meeting

Interpreters play an important role in establishing trust with families. Ideally interpreters should be bicultural in addition to being bilingual so they can also help professionals to understand the family's culture. When possible, discuss the purpose and topics of the meeting with interpreters in advance. Explain any terms that they may not be familiar with.

2. Introduce all meeting participants and their roles

Early childhood families, especially those experiencing a new diagnosis, are likely meeting many new professionals who will be involved in their child's life. At the beginning of each meeting, be sure to introduce each person and explain how they will be helping the child and family. This is especially important for professionals who are new to the team. Ensure families are aware about confidentiality issues and how the information they share about their child will be used.

3. Respect and understand cultural differences

It is important to be aware of cultural norms, especially when visiting a family in their home. Following basic customs such as removing shoes if everyone else does or accepting an offer of food or drink can go a long way in establishing a positive relationship. Understand that the family home may be busy with multiple children or extended family. Be flexible with the meeting environment.

4. Explain early childhood systems and the importance of parent involvement

Depending on a family's background, they may view education as the school's responsibility and not their own. They may not be able to answer questions such as "what types of services do you want for your child?" because they do not know what to ask for or do not feel comfortable making a suggestion. Providing examples of what types of services may be appropriate can help families understand what is possible. Explain that parents are an important part of the team that will make decisions about the services their child will receive.

5. Have high expectations

Parents want to know that professionals know and like their child. Open the discussion with positive comments about the child's strengths. Understand that in some cultures, children with disabilities are not expected to become independent adults. Help families maintain high expectations for their young children while considering the family's questions and goals.

In general, the tips for engaging with diverse families are the same as those that work to establish positive relationships with all families. There are always cultures within cultures, so not all families from the same background will share every communication style or preference. However, being intentional about establishing a trusting relationship is always beneficial to improving outcomes for young children with disabilities.