

# With Families, Together We're Better!

Families of young children with disabilities or developmental delays have at least one professional who provides specialized care for their child. It may be a pediatrician, a social worker, a speech therapist, a public health nurse, or another individual who provides services for young children and their families. Many children with disabilities participate in county Birth to 3 early intervention or school special education and have a team of professionals, each with a unique specialty, who work together to design intervention that facilitates the child's optimal growth and development.

When parents enroll their child with a disability in your program, you have an opportunity to become part of that team, and each team member becomes your resource.

Frequently, the family and the team have already met and the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP) is in place. You may ask the parent for a copy of the developmental goals and objectives team members use to guide their services so you can become an additional asset in nurturing the child's development. If parents do not invite you to become part of the team, you may wish to bring it up as it is advantageous for you to be actively involved at some level. However, your actual participation on the team may vary, depending upon the child's needs and the parent's wishes.

### Until you become a formal team member, you can:

- Review current literature/materials about the child's disability.
- Ask child care providers or other early childhood professionals who include children with disabilities for ideas and feedback (remember confidentiality).
- Confer with the child's family on a regular basis.
- Ask parents for a copy of the developmental goals and objectives identified on the IFSP or IEP.
- Participate in training relevant to inclusion.

### When you become an active team member—and you have the family's permission to do so in writing, you can:



- Contact therapists and invite them to schedule therapy and/or intervention during your program activities.
- Observe the child in other settings (therapy, home, preschool, evaluation).
- Contact the individuals providing services (especially the service coordinator) to ask questions and convey interest in receiving current information.
- Receive training and information regarding strategies to enhance the child's development during program/group activities and routines.
- Arrange with parent (s) (and/or service coordinator) to be included in developing and reviewing the IFSP or IEP.

Specialists and child care providers are valuable resources for one another. Special educators work hard to ensure that their services focus on the family's priorities while at the same time they contribute their professional expertise on behalf of the child's development. Early childhood professionals also work hard to form effective partnerships with parents. Your experience with young children and your early childhood setting form a natural environment to encourage play and development of social and other important skills. Working together as a team, you have the resources that make inclusion work for every child.

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**If the team is going to work together, frequent communication is very important.**

Think of how busy you are. It is likely that the other team members are equally as busy. Here is a list of ways teams can communicate.

**Team meetings:** If the meeting is scheduled when you cannot get away, take responsibility to write down your ideas and give them to another team member so your observations or questions can be addressed.

**Written reports:** Sharing reports does not happen automatically. In order for a therapist or physician to share their latest report, two things must be in place:

- They must know you want and need a copy.
- They must have written permission from the child's parent.

**Working together:** Many teams regularly schedule opportunities for two or more team members to observe the child together, using the results to plan interventions.

**Telephone calls:** When a meeting is impossible to schedule, regular contact can be maintained through phone calls.

**Team notebook:** When many different team members are involved, it is often difficult to keep everyone current about the child's progress day to day. Creating a notebook that goes back and forth with the child allows team members to regularly communicate about the child's progress. This notebook is an especially useful tool for new team members because it shows the child's progress over time.

## RESOURCES

- Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations of Early Learning <http://csefel.vanderbilt.edu/>
- Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards <http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/wmels-about.php>
- Division for Early Childhood Recommended Practices <http://www.dec-sped.org/recommendedpractices>

## TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

- The Registry Training Calendar <https://www.the-registry.org>
- WI Early Care Association (WECA) Training Calendar <http://wisconsinearlychildhood.org/>
- MECA Special Needs Support Program (SNSP) <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/meca/specialneeds>



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