

Sharing Concerns with Families

Families everywhere go through times in their lives when they need help understanding their child and accessing information to help them navigate the circumstances they are dealing with. Families may have a question or concern, and you may be asked to provide information, suggestions, or recommendations about a variety of topics such as child and adolescent development, challenging behavior, friendships, community connections, services providers, etc. Sometimes you may have answers and sometimes you may have to look for answers. Sometimes the conversations you need to have with families will be more difficult for various reasons. If you have questions about how to handle situations in which families share information with you or you need to know how to address a concern with a family, talk to your trainer, supervisor, or program administrator. You can also consider some of the suggestions and ideas listed as part of this handout.

- Establish relationships and effective communication early on.
- Create a comfortable atmosphere for meetings and choose times when everyone can feel relaxed and have time to talk.
- Share strength-based information that is easy to understand, objective, and nonjudgmental.
- Arrange for someone to translate information if a family speaks a language unfamiliar to you.
- Think about your own culture and values and ways these things affect your practices—consider possible differences in culture, values, opinions, and practices.
- Ask families questions and think about what it is like to be the primary caregiver of the child or youth you are discussing.
- Describe behaviors by sharing what you see and hear and ask families questions about behaviors at home:
 - “Today I saw her _____. What are you seeing her do at home?”
 - “He seems to like art. You must have nurtured that in him over the years. What else does he really like to do?”
- Ask families for feedback; provide time for families to think, process, and respond.
- Help families learn more about child and adolescent development.
- Help families make connections with community resources and organizations.

It will also be helpful for you to be aware of existing services and approaches to supporting children and youth with identified or suspected special needs. To learn more, consider seeking information:

- By reviewing your program policies and documentation regarding screening and processes to determine the best approach to conversations with families.
- By reviewing your program policies related to making referrals if concerns emerge in a child's development.
- Regarding community services such as health consultation and mental health consultation.
- About your school district's service provisions.