



## Mindful Conversations with Families



In the health care world, practitioners use mindful conversations with families. These conversations are open, supportive, and clear without the distractions of agendas and biased thoughts. Early childhood educators know the importance of using communication that builds a trusting partnership with families.

Early Childhood organizations such as the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) support family-centered approach to services. Family-centered care supports families in their care giving roles by building on their unique strengths as families and on the strengths of

individual family members (TRAC curriculum, Western Oregon University, 2010).

Conversations are more likely to result in an interactive discussion when questions are open-ended. Close-ended questions that can be answered by a yes or no are best used when specific information is gathered. For example, "Are you currently in early intervention services? YES/NO"

It is important to listen to the family member and try to follow their lead.. Below we offer some guiding questions that were developed and updated by Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, & Soodak (2010). It is also important to realize that not every question should be asked of every family. The questions are a guide and you can skip some or insert others of your own.

It is also important to use active listening skills that can enhance your conversations. These include:

**Non-verbal cues** include showing respectful attention to the speaker. This might include physically leaning in toward the speaker to demonstrate attention. Showing empathy includes eye contact and gentle touch when culturally and context appropriate.

**Paraphrasing** is used to clarify points and insure that you accurately understand the person's communicative intent. It is also important to acknowledge feelings and paraphrasing can be used as a strategy. "So, you were feeling frustrated after the meeting yesterday."

*The following questions can be used as a guide for you as a mindful Conversation Guide:*

### Family Characteristics

What is one of the major strengths for your family?

Are there currently challenges or struggles that your family is having that might influence \_\_\_\_?

What are your child's strengths? (e.g. special favorite activities, special qualities, etc...)

What are your primary concerns regarding your child's development?

What is your BIGGEST GOAL or PRIORITY for your child over the next year?

What are your hopes and dreams for your child?

What resources and supports are currently available to you to support your child's development?

Does your child receive services from another agency? (e.g. Healthy Start, Cacoan Nurse, WIC, private therapy) If yes, please list:

Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about your child?

### Personal Characteristics

What things seem to be going especially well for \_\_\_\_?

What are some of the particular challenges \_\_\_\_ is facing now?

So much of \_\_\_\_'s day is spent at home or in preschool?

### Family Interaction

How do you and your spouse/partner share parental roles?

Given this pattern, what are your preferences for how you participate this year in \_\_\_\_'s Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) program?

Who is in your extended family? How often do you see them?

How have extended family members provided you with support and assistance in raising \_\_\_\_?

Would you like us to extend an invitation to your extended family to participate in IFSP conferences or program events?

## Family Functions

What is a typical day like in your family?

What are the most challenging aspects of the day?

Do you have time built in throughout the day for relaxation and rest?

As a family, what do you do for fun?

There are many different ways that we could communicate throughout the year, such as through e-mails, conferences, telephone calls, notes, or a notebook. What are your preferences for communication? What do you think will work best for you and your family?

Materials were adapted from:

Turnbull, A.P., Turnbull, H.R., & Wehmeyer, M.L. (2010). *Exceptional lives: Special education in today's schools* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Prentice Hall. (Chapter 4 – Today's Families and Their Partnerships with Professionals.)

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