

# **Family Centered Practice**

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Many organizations that provide services to children with special needs adhere to a model of family centered practice (FCP). FCP is a partnership between families and service providers that honors the family's values and choices, and provides support to strengthen and enhance family functioning. The family is recognized as being a child's ultimate decision maker. FCP occurs when parents and professionals treat each other with dignity and respect. The relationship is flexible, responsive and individualized to meet the family's needs. Most importantly, FCP is not something that happens spontaneously; it is a continual pursuit of being responsive to the values, priorities and choices of families.

Within FCP, families and professionals share responsibility, power, and control and work together to make informed decisions. FCP strengthens family functioning by providing supports and resources that build confidence and competence, and enhance the ability to have a "normal life". Since each family is unique, FCP tends to be individualized and flexible in order to meet the needs, priorities, and values of the family. A few values have also been identified as key elements to a successful FCP model:

- emphasis on families' strengths
- promoting family choice and control of resources
- developing a mutual relationship between parents and professionals
- understanding that family is the constant in a child's life

It is important for service providers to share information with families so that they can make informed decisions about their child's well-being, and to provide them with the support needed to care for their children in ways that produce optimal outcomes for everyone in that family. Research shows that FCP enhances child development and supports parental care giving by decreasing life stress, increasing satisfaction with services, and promoting better emotional well-being.

Parents are generally the primary care givers of their child; therefore, they tend to have the most influence in the child's life. Parents know their child the best and want the best for them. It is important to understand that each family is different and unique, and that optimal child development occurs within a supportive family and community. Overall, the ultimate goal of FCP is to enable and empower families to achieve goals and advocate for their family.