

SUPPORTING FAMILIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The perspectives reflected in this handout come from family listening sessions sponsored by the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) Family Committee. The tips for professionals and families are based on these perspectives to improve services and supports for young children with disabilities through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Family-Centered

"Encourage parents to do the things they are already doing...that is already helping our kids develop!"

Tips for Professionals

- Consider children with disabilities unique needs when designing instruction and intervention. Materials and activities need to be accessible and feasible in a home.
- Meaningfully involve families in developing distance learning plans responsive to the family's home routines and activities. Ask them to describe yesterday or a typical day and what materials they have in their home. Find ways to make daily routines inclusive of therapeutic goals.

Tips for Families

- Honestly and openly communicate your priorities and needs. Help the professionals and team to understand your home routines and activities so services and supports can be integrated.
- Continue advocating for distance instruction that is individualized to your child's needs. Your child always has a right to a free and appropriate education.

Family Capacity Building

"I'm learning how to do the strategies myself."

Tips for Professionals

- Celebrate families' successes! Ask families what has been going well and what they have been doing together as a family. Remember that learning occurs all the time--especially during interactions with family members.
- Model strategies in the home environment and with similar materials and routines of the family. Invite families to practice strategies while you can watch and provide feedback

Tips for Families

- Ask questions. If you are unsure about something suggested by your early childhood team, ask them to explain it again, model it, or watch you practice it with your child. You can do this during a virtual meeting, through email, or in a phone call.
- Share with your early childhood team what has been going great! What have you done with your child that has really worked? Also what is not working and why.

Family and Professional Collaboration

"I encourage all parents to communicate what you need and where you are. This is survival mode."

Tips for Professionals

- Ask families what they want to focus on or learn today and how they want to learn it (e.g., model for them, give them web resources, send articles). As families spend more time together, they find new outcomes or goals to consider.
- Consider that learning happens at home with families in between distance learning or intervention sessions. Develop a clear communication system with families to share their progress on collaborative outcomes and goals.

Tips for Families

- Remember that you are an equal and important member of your child's early childhood team.
- Review your child's current IFSP or IEP and discuss with the team if your outcomes or goals are still relevant to you during this time.
- Tell your team how you like to communicate with each other. What is feasible for your family (e.g., phone calls, texts, emails, videoconferencing).