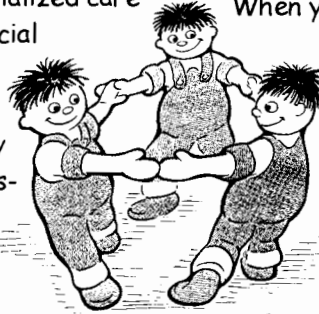


# Child Care plus+

## + Together We're Better!

Families of 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 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. In some cases, parents may choose to share information with you as they receive it (either in writing or verbally). At other times, parents may rely upon you and other team members to contact each other and work together.

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 parent(s) 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 parent's (or guardian'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. + CC+

| + In This Issue            |                            |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| + In Focus                 | + Putting It Into Practice |
| + Try It Out               | + Question                 |
| + Connecting With Families | + Resource Review          |

## + IN FOCUS

Some therapists and specialists provide services such as physical therapy, speech therapy, or cognitive stimulation, at child care sites during everyday routines and activities. Your program naturally includes learning opportunities with play materials, self-help routines, and peers. Specialists may need support from you to be successful in providing services in your program while at the same time, maintaining your program's integrity. Sharing your story books, songs, and play materials allows them to use items familiar to the child. Be willing to adapt your schedule if necessary; you could schedule circle time when the therapist can be there and encourage other children's involvement in the therapist's "games" during play time. Many specialists are aware that having too many adults in the room may inhibit children's interactions with each other and with materials. Specialists need your assistance and support to facilitate activities through the environment or to make subtle suggestions without interfering with children's play or social involvement.

Working together, you and these other professionals can learn from each other. If you watch a therapist, you may learn a great deal about facilitated play, just as the therapist learns important techniques—such as promoting social interaction—when he or she watches you and the other children interact with the child. When you take note of each other's techniques, you both have a better framework for asking questions and promoting collaboration about other issues. + CC+

## + TRY IT OUT

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: 1) they must know you want and need a copy, and 2) 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 telephone 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. + CC+



## + CONNECTING WITH FAMILIES

The child's parent(s) or legal guardian are the first and most important members of the special education team. Other specialists may be dedicated professionals who are highly motivated and very attached to the child, but no other team member has such an intimate relationship with the child. The role of parents is to help other team members come to understand their child, their hopes for their child, and their family's strengths and needs.

It is the parent's right to gauge your activity as a member of the child's team based on how he or she views your role at any given time. Find out what they expect from you and go forward accordingly. If parents want you to be an active team member, you will need to gather information from other team members. After you have obtained written parental permission, you have choices about the methods you use to gather information about the child's development and associated learning goals. You might: ask for copies of records; ask for a report or letter summarizing information; ask for information in a telephone consultation; ask the individual to talk with you at your facility; or ask to be included in therapy sessions. You also might use any combination of these methods. In every interaction, you must be cautious to ensure that you maintain the family's and the child's privacy. The only persons who can share whatever information they wish, when they wish, and with whom they wish are the child's parents (except in cases of suspected abuse or neglect). + CC+

## + PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Let's take a look at some of the ways early childhood professionals, therapists, and specialists support each other's efforts to include children with disabilities and developmental delays in the routines and activities available in the early childhood setting.

### *Share Developmental Information*

Partnership between you and a child's specialists is an important element in facilitating a child's development. You both must work with parents as well as with each other to ensure that you have current information about the child's development. Team members need to share with you copies of reports and relevant portions of the child's IFSP or IEP describing intervention programs and activities currently being used. You need to share observation notes, developmental records, and reports of the child's current play interests, participation level, and upcoming opportunities to practice specific skills.

At team meetings, you can offer feedback about what is working in your program for the child and what is not (or provide your input in writing). You should take the time to explain what actually occurs in your program in the course of the day. Team members need this information to support the child's inclusion in your activities and routines. Effective team members take the child care setting into consideration and create meaningful activities to help children reach their goals in your setting. They work in partnership with you in doing assessments, taking data, and problem-solving when something needs to be changed. They regularly let you know how the child is developing.

### *Observe the Child*

Many specialists believe that observation of children in natural settings enhances their ability to see children's strengths and meet their needs. In the few cases when observation is impossible, specialists do everything in their power to get an idea of what activities and routines occur day to day so they can still facilitate the child's inclusion. For example, they might use videotapes of the child in your program and review observations and other program information with you and other team members. Specialists may ask you to share your observations or take notes about the child's reaction to a new activity or play material. Observation allows team members to share modifications and adaptations to activities or equipment, suggest specific equipment or adapt typical toys to facilitate play or independence in the child, and support modifications to the

child's individual plan to meet real-life needs and priorities.

### *Provide Training and Technical Assistance*

You can educate specialists about your early childhood philosophy and your program activities and routines. Specialists, as well as parents, can provide you with training related to feeding techniques, positioning ideas for play, communication strategies, and other specialized skills that apply to a particular child's needs. Training may be one-time "show and practice" or ongoing, as the child's needs change or you offer different activities in your program.

### *Contribute Resources*

You provide a social setting and the ideal learning environment for young children, with suitable toys, equipment, materials, and activities. Your resources may include everything from information on how to make play dough to understanding theories of development. You may send regular notes home or have a program newsletter. Specialists can provide resources such as pamphlets, books, or videotapes about particular disabilities, and materials that illustrate the how-to's of various techniques. Therapists and other specialists also have access to adaptive toys and other play materials as well as specific equipment that may be helpful in including a particular child in your program's activities or routines.

### *Be Accessible to Each Other*

Team members know that there are times when explanations fall short, questions come up hours after the meeting, children cannot wait through a grown-up's discussion, or there is not enough time to address an important issue. It helps when team members share the commitment to regularly check in with each other and set aside time to visit with each other when a special issue arises. Team members who understand the value of being available to one another on a regular basis as well as during the occasional emergency have a variety of ways to be as accessible as possible. They may carry a beeper or use voice-mail on their telephones. Specialists may call you or stop by the program regularly—especially when your relationship is still developing—just to see "how things are going . . ." You may wish to specify the times of day you are able to return a call or visit for a moment. These are all ways that specialists become better acquainted with what goes on in your program so that the groundwork is in place for future discussions and problem-solving together. + CC+

## + QUESTION

**QUESTION:** *I have a child with disabilities in my program, but the parents said they will take care of all the team stuff. What should I do now?*

**ANSWER:** For a variety of reasons, a few parents may be reluctant to allow the release of any records or information to you. They may be unsure about how the information will be used or fear that if you know everything about their child's disability, you may treat the child differently. As you build a partnership with the family, it is likely that they will eventually recognize your need for information about their child. If not, this is a decision you must respect and accept without judgment.

Do not be alarmed if a parent refuses to provide consent for release of confidential information. Remember that this is their right, and in fact, many parents feel obligated to protect their child's records. Without the parent's written permission, you cannot obtain the child's records, but you can still gather general information from the local library or agencies familiar with young children with disabilities. Although not specific to the child, this kind of information can help you learn more about the care a child needs while in your program and formulate specific questions to ask the family from time to time.

Since the child's parents are your bridge to the team, offer information about your program (handbook, newsletters, schedule), collect samples of the child's work, and provide written notes from your observations for them to share with team members. You can invite team members

to visit your program, to observe, and play with the child during learning activities and routines. This kind of goodwill opens the door for collaboration and may eventually result in parents inviting you to become more actively involved on the team. + CC+

## + RESOURCE REVIEW

**NICHCY** stands for the *National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities*. NICHCY is a central source of information on:

- ▶ disabilities in infants, toddlers, children, and youth.
- ▶ IDEA, which is the law authorizing special education.
- ▶ No Child Left Behind (as it relates to children with disabilities).
- ▶ research-based information on effective educational practices.

Many NICHCY resources can be downloaded for free. For a catalog, visit [www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org).

*CHILD CARE plus+* is designed to support inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood settings by supporting child care providers, parents, and community service providers including social workers, therapists, physicians, teachers, and administrators.

*CHILD CARE plus+* is published quarterly. Subscription price is \$10 per year (four issues). Contents may be reproduced without permission; please include reference.

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