



Negotiation: Dealing Effectively with Differences

FCS
Sheet
#11

This FCS Sheet is #11 of an 18 part series on family-centred service.

If you are interested in this FCS Sheet, you may also want to read:

- FCS Sheet #12: Making decisions together: How to decide what is best
- FCS Sheet #14: Advocacy: How to get the best for your child

Key definitions and a list of the topics in this series can be found at the end of this FCS Sheet.

My son is entering junior kindergarten in the fall. The school board representative recommended a special program on the other side of town. I want my son to go to the school in our neighbourhood so he can play with his school friends after school and on the weekend. We have a lot of things to work out...how can we do this?

Relevance

In family-centred relationships, service providers and families work together closely. The **service provider** is responsible for ensuring that the family has the information needed to make an informed decision. The **family** is responsible for making the ultimate decisions (Rosenbaum et al., 1998). Although this relationship appears clear, there are likely to be situations in which differences of opinion occur. Negotiation is one way to address these differences and reach a mutually agreeable solution that fits with the family's preferences.

Facts & Concepts

What is negotiation?

Negotiation is the process of talking with another person to settle a matter. Negotiation occurs when two or more people attempt to make a decision in a situation where there is no one solution that easily meets the needs of all involved (Lewicki et al., 1993).

Negotiation is not a mysterious thing done only by professional negotiators. We negotiate with others every day: with our spouses around household chores, with our co-workers about roles, with the auto mechanic about the price of car repair, and with our children around just about everything! We use negotiation to influence others and to achieve personal objectives. We negotiate for resources, information, cooperation, and support (Lewicki et al., 1993). We negotiate one-on-one and in teams.

Why is negotiation needed in family-centred approaches?

Negotiation is used to come to an agreement on issues related to services for children and their families. Commonly negotiated issues include frequency of services, location of services, and methods of communicating between the family and the service provider.

Negotiation also occurs when there is a difference of opinion. The following are examples of situations where differences of opinion occur:

- Each family member and service provider brings different knowledge, experiences, perspectives and values to the relationship. All of these things can lead to differences in opinion.
- Service providers must follow professional guidelines and the rules and regulations of the organization they work for. The decisions made by parents may not fit with these guidelines and rules, creating a need for negotiation.
- Service providers may make recommendations that do not fit with the family's needs, resources or values. If the family is still interested in working with this service provider, negotiation will be useful.

What are the characteristics of an effective negotiation?

Fisher and Ury (1983) suggest that effective negotiation is one that:

- Ends with a wise agreement,
- Is concluded efficiently, and
- Doesn't damage the relationship of the people involved.

Strategies for Effective Negotiation

The following are a few key strategies taken from the rich literature on negotiation.

Keep your long-term relationship with the other person in mind (Fisher & Davis, 1993).

- In services for children, the ongoing relationship between the parent and the service provider is often very important. Be sure to address specific issues, but focus on the long-term relationship. Acknowledge your interdependence.
- Separate the person from the problem (Fisher & Ury, 1983). Don't let the relationship become entangled in the problem.
- Create a positive atmosphere (Main, 1993). Negotiation should involve mutual respect, not confrontation.

Approach the discussion with flexibility.

- Be willing to compromise.
- Identify the things that are most important to you and the things that you are willing to do differently.

Learn about the other person's needs and responsibilities (Main, 1993).

- Inquire about and listen to the other person's point of view.
- Recognize that you may have different perspectives and discuss these together.

Communicate in a friendly, honest and open manner (Lewicki et al., 1993).

- Treat each other with respect.
- Use everyday language to express your point of view.
- Express your feelings appropriately. Know that the issue can be very emotional for yourself or the other person. Learn to recognize this emotion and how it can affect your behaviour, and ability to communicate and negotiate.
- For more information about communicating, refer to other FCS Sheets in this series such as FCS Sheet #8 – Effective communication in family-centred service, and FCS Sheet #9 – Using respectful behaviours and language.

Negotiate about interests, not about positions (Fisher & Ury, 1983).

- A common mistake is to focus on the particular position ("I want this to happen") rather than on the interests underlying the positions ("I want this to happen because..."). Focusing on negotiating the interests (instead of the positions) often allows for more common ground.
- Be sure to explain your interest, as well as the reasons behind it.
- Come up with and discuss options that benefit both parties.

Use independent, objective criteria to settle differences (Fisher & Ury, 1983).

- Use problem-solving strategies.
- Decide on some objective standard on which you will both agree. Examples include standards of fairness, precedent (what has happened previously in similar situations), efficiency, or scientific merit (such as reference to well-designed research studies).
- Seek the opinion of an unbiased third party.

Summary

When working closely with other people, effective negotiation can lead to positive outcomes and can strengthen your relationships with others. Negotiations are most successful when all parties are respectful of each other and there is a full understanding of each person's perspective. Using negotiation strategies can help you voice your opinions, consider the opinions of others, and in turn, lead to more effective decision-making for all who are involved.

Resources

Fisher, R., & Davis, W. (1993). Six basic interpersonal skills for a negotiator's repertoire. In R.J. Lewicki, J.A. Litterer, D.M. Saunders, and J.W. Minton (Eds.), *Negotiation: Readings, exercises, and cases* (2nd ed., pp. 407-413). Homewood, IL: Irwin.

Fisher, R., & Ury, W. (1983). *Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd.

Lewicki, R.J., Litterer, J.A., Saunders, D.M., & Minton, J.W. (1993). *Negotiation: Readings, exercises, and cases* (2nd ed.), Homewood, IL: Irwin.

Main, J. (1993). How to be a better negotiator. In R.J. Lewicki, J.A. Litterer, D.M. Saunders, and J.W. Minton (Eds.), *Negotiation: Readings, exercises, and cases* (2nd ed., pp. 20-24), Homewood, IL: Irwin.

Rosenbaum, P., King, S., Law, M., King, G., & Evans, J. (1998). Family-centred service: A conceptual framework and research review. *Physical & Occupational Therapy in Pediatrics*, 18 (1), 1-20.

Key Definitions

Family-Centred Service – Family-centred service is made up of a set of values, attitudes and approaches to services for children with special needs and their families.

Family-centred service recognizes that **each family is unique**; that the family is the **constant in the child’s life**; and that they are the **experts on the child’s abilities and needs**.

The family works with service providers to make informed decisions about the services and supports the child and family receive.

In family-centred service, the strengths and needs of all family members are considered.

Service Provider – The term service provider refers to those individuals who work directly with the child and family. These individuals **may** include educational assistants, respite workers, teachers, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech-language pathologists, service coordinators, recreation therapists, etc.

Organization – The term organization refers to the places or groups from which the child and family receive services. Organizations **may** include community programs, hospitals, rehabilitation centres, schools, etc.

Intervention – Interventions refer to the services and supports provided by the person who works with the child and family. Interventions **may** include direct therapy, meetings to problem solve issues that are important to you, phone calls to advocate for your child, actions to link you with other parents, etc.

Want to know more about family-centred service?

Visit the CanChild website:
www.canchild.ca

or call us at 905-525-9140 ext. 27850

FCS Sheet Topics

The following is a list of the FCS Sheets. If you are interested in receiving any of these topics, please contact CanChild or visit our website.

General Topics Related to Family-Centred Service

- FCS Sheet #1 – What is family-centred service?
- FCS Sheet #2 – Myths about family-centred service
- FCS Sheet #3 – How does family-centred service make a difference?
- FCS Sheet #4 – Becoming more family-centred
- FCS Sheet #5 – 10 things you can do to be family-centred

Specific Topics Related to Family-Centred Service

- FCS Sheet #6 – Identifying & building on parent and family strengths & resources
- FCS Sheet #7 – Parent-to-parent support
- FCS Sheet #8 – Effective communication in family-centred service
- FCS Sheet #9 – Using respectful behaviours and language
- FCS Sheet #10 – Working together: From providing information to working in partnership
- FCS Sheet #11 – Negotiating: Dealing effectively with differences
- FCS Sheet #12 – Making decisions together: How to decide what is best
- FCS Sheet #13 – Setting goals together
- FCS Sheet #14 – Advocacy: How to get the best for your child
- FCS Sheet #15 – Getting the most from appointments and meetings
- FCS Sheet #16 – Fostering family-centred service in the school
- FCS Sheet #17 – Family-centred strategies for waitlists
- FCS Sheet #18 – Are we really family-centred? Checklists for families, service providers and organizations