



Fostering Family-Centred Service in the School

FCS
Sheet
#16

This FCS Sheet is #16 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 #14: Advocacy: How to get the best for your child
- FCS Sheet #15: Getting the most from appointments and meetings

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

When Susan's dad shared her success at the karate club with the team, they realized they could create a really great gym class where Susan could be actively involved with the other kids. Susan's teacher said, "This would be a great opportunity for Susan to be seen in a leadership role by her classmates!"

Relevance

From year to year, children will move from one teacher to another, but their family will remain constant. Families have been through many experiences and have gained knowledge and perspective on what is important. Parents have hopes and dreams for their child and their family. Schools are responsible for, and genuinely concerned with, maximizing each student's potential. By working together, parents and school staff can support each other and the child.

Facts & Concepts

How can family-centred service work in the school system?

Most people who work with children who have special needs recognize the importance of involving the family (King et al., 2000). However, many do not know how to make family-centred service work in their environment or are concerned that involving families will take a lot of extra time. The success of family-centred service depends on the commitment of the people involved and the process that is in place.

Often, the process becomes much more efficient when the priorities and experiences of families are valued. Information can be obtained, goals can be prioritized, and services can be identified quicker when past experiences and family preferences are considered. Long-term planning and goal-setting are more successful when it is a positive experience for all (Bunch, 1999).

Strategies for Fostering Family-Centred Service in the School

Meetings

- Involve families in all planning and decision-making for their child. Family involvement is important, even in situations where the school staff or other team members have different opinions. It is important for parents to know that there are different ways of doing things.
- Inform families of all school meetings about their child before they occur, and invite them to attend if that is their wish. This includes informal meetings that are often arranged to quickly bring school staff up to date on how the child is doing.
- Schedule school meetings at a time that is convenient for the family. The person coordinating the meeting may specifically ask the family what the best time of day is for the meeting.
- Communicate meeting dates to all team members well ahead of time to allow schedules to be arranged.
- Parents should be encouraged to bring another person with them to school meetings for support.
- Parents can prepare questions before the school meeting and write them down to ensure that they are answered.
- Begin school meetings and planning sessions by identifying strengths.

- Share school assessment results in their entirety, allowing enough time to explain them carefully and to give practical implications. Check often to see if families have any questions.
- Write a summary of the school meeting, including action plans, and give it to the family if they are unable to attend.
- Give parents time to make decisions. Encourage them to take the information away from the school meeting, so they can think about everything before replying.

For more information and strategies for meetings, refer to:

- FCS Sheet #15 - Getting the most from appointments and meetings
- FCS Sheet # 12 - Making decisions together: How to decide what is best.

Communication

- Make sure that the communication between the home and school is open and frequent.
- Set up a routine communication plan together. For example, put together a daily communication book, or arrange for weekly telephone updates.
- Inform each other about important things that are happening at home and school.
- Keep parents advised of achievements and sticky points in their child's program.

For more information and strategies for communicating, refer to:

- FCS Sheet #8 - Effective communication in family-centred service.

Setting Goals

- Work together to identify the goals that the child will be working on at school and at home.
- Acknowledge that the child will best be able to meet his/her goals when supported by **both** the family and the school.

For more information and strategies for setting goals, refer to:

- FCS Sheet #13 - Setting goals together.

Advocacy

- Accept advocacy as a joint responsibility of both the child's family and the school staff.
- Be as imaginative and creative as possible when planning.
- Do not allow currently unavailable resources to limit planning.
- Access all resources that will support the child at school. Include the family, school staff, and the community in this process.
- Ask parents how they would like to be involved in their child's program over the year.

- Involve parents as volunteers in the school. Principals can send a note home asking if any parent would like to help out on a regular basis with a student at school. Know what you want parent volunteers to do before asking them to be involved.
- Schools can adopt policies that foster cooperation amongst students.
- Schools should be aware of, and identify, potential conflicts of interest. School staff need to be true to the interests they represent –rather than their personal interests or the interests of the organization.

For more information and strategies for advocating, refer to:

- FCS Sheet #14 - Advocacy: How to get the best for your child.

Summary

By working together, families and schools can ensure the best possible school experience for a child. Establishing a clear, mutual understanding of each other's expectations and goals lays the foundation for working together successfully.

Resources

Bunch, G. (1999). *Inclusion how to: Essential classroom strategies*. Toronto, ON: Inclusion Press.

King, S., Kertoy, M., King, G., Rosenbaum, P., Hurley, P., & Law, M. (2000). *Children with disabilities in Ontario: A Profile of children's services. Part 2: Perceptions about family-centred service delivery for children with disabilities*. Hamilton, ON: McMaster University, CanChild Centre for Childhood Disability Research.

Porter, G.L., & Richler, D. (1991). *Changing Canadian schools: Perspectives on disability and inclusion*. Toronto, ON: The Roeher Institute.

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