



## Getting the Most from Appointments and Meetings

### FCS Sheet #15

This FCS Sheet is #15 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 #10: Working together: From providing information to working in partnership
- FCS Sheet #13: Setting goals together

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

I got the call on Monday. Another meeting to discuss my child. “When is it?” I asked.

“Tomorrow at 3:30,” the secretary told me.

“I have to work tomorrow.”

“Sorry, that’s the only time we can get everyone together.”

“Well, could we have the meeting during school hours so I don’t have to arrange child care?”

“Sorry, we’d have to bring in supply staff and we don’t have the money to do that.”

“Oh. Well, what is the meeting about?” I asked.

“We’ll discuss that at the meeting. See you tomorrow at 3:30.”

*I went to the meeting alone – it made no sense to sacrifice my husband’s income as well as my own. I was shown into a meeting room where 12 people already sat around a large table. Who were they!? There were no introductions. Someone was invited to begin. For the next hour, the people around the table each took their turn to describe how my child could not do this and would not do that. I was asked if I had anything to say, but I just knew if I spoke I’d end up in tears. I said, “No.”*

The meeting was over. No one had taken notes, and no action plan was developed. I walked numbly to my car and burst into tears. What had just taken place was our “team” meeting. I wondered, “How could this have been done better?”

## Relevance

In a family-centred environment, parents are recognized as the constant in the child's life and expert on his/her abilities and needs. As such, service teams often depend on parents to fill the role of "information broker". The parent must be connected to all sources of information in order to make the best decisions possible on behalf of the child. Meetings and appointments that are well facilitated have potential to allow parents to give and receive good information while avoiding frustration.

## Facts & Concepts

There are many types of appointments and meetings, and there are many reasons for having them. Common purposes of appointments and meetings include sharing information, problem-solving, giving support, and planning a course of action. A successful appointment or meeting will leave everyone feeling that the purpose was achieved. To get the most from appointments and meetings, an environment must be nurtured that supports the best possible outcomes.

### Effective meetings involve:

- **Trust.** "Trust validates each person's expertise and implies a shared belief that everyone is interested in providing the best services for the child and family. Trust does not require agreement on all issues, nor does trust require perfect solutions." (Bishop et al., 1993, p.23).

- **Collaboration.** "A collaborative relationship is a trusting relationship where expectations, hopes, and dreams can be shared." (Bishop et al., 1993, p.23).
- **Action.** The meeting or appointment must fulfill a specific purpose, ultimately resulting in action.

## Strategies for Effective Family-Centred Appointments and Meetings

### Planning the meeting

- **Schedule appointments and meetings with lots of lead-time.** Put together a list of meeting dates and times for the entire year. These dates can always be changed later. This gives time for appointments and meetings to be recorded in agenda books, preparation to be completed, and work schedules to be arranged.
- **Schedule meetings and appointments at a time that is good for as many of the invitees as possible, with priority given to the time that is best for the family.** Acknowledge that parents may need to arrange for time off work (with potential lost income), and may need to arrange and pay for childcare and transportation. All of these things may present barriers to participation.
- **Schedule enough time to cover all topics.** Be clear about the length of the meeting. Allow extra time for questions. Give parents the opportunity to discuss other things that are important to them.

- **Invite all necessary people who have a contribution to make.** Make sure that the parent and child have input into who should attend. Encourage parents to bring a friend or other individual to provide support. Acknowledge attendees as team members. Acknowledge that all team members bring valuable perspectives to the discussion.

### Before the meeting

- **Be clear about people's roles.** Make sure that each attendee's role and expected contribution are clear. Write down each person's preferred title and role.
- **Acknowledge the parents' and child's expectations about how they want to be involved.** Acknowledge the parent as the leader of the child's team and support him/her in this role as necessary. In advance of the meeting, ask if the parent would like to chair the meeting. Include this information on the agenda.
- **Support the child's developing self-determination.** Include the child in any appointments or meetings at as early an age as possible. **Prepare the child ahead of time** so he/she can contribute in any way possible. At a minimum, support the child in commenting about what is going well, what is not going so well, any questions the child may have, and any actions that should be taken. Support the child in speaking at the appointment. Prepare the child's comments ahead of time; type them up and make copies for everyone.

Listen to what the child has to say. Take action as necessary.

- **Be clear about the purpose and anticipated outcome of the appointment or meeting.** The parent and a representative of the service team can have a brief, informal, pre-meeting discussion to prepare and enhance participation.
- **Prepare and distribute an agenda ahead of time.** Include direction regarding what preparation needs to be done, and indicate the anticipated outcome of each agenda item. Solicit input from all parties. Negotiate priorities. Make sure there is an opportunity to follow up on any previously discussed actions.

### During the meeting – Supporting the family

- **Provide a comfortable environment for appointments and meetings.** Provide creature comforts if possible (such as drinks, snacks, good lighting, appropriate temperature, comfortable chairs). Remove barriers that create unnecessary professional distance while avoiding excessive familiarity.
- **Acknowledge that discussion items may be emotional.** Offer support to a parent who is emotional, perhaps a tissue or a simple touch. Verbally assure the parent that you can see that the discussion is difficult. Give the parent time to regain composure. Avoid telling the parent, "I know how you feel." Even if you have been in a similar situation, it is unlikely that your feelings were the same.

- **Provide information in language that is best understood by the family and child.** Avoid using professional jargon. When professional terms are necessary, make sure that they are explained and understood by the parent so that the parent can communicate effectively with service providers.
- **Use respectful language and behaviours.** Use positive, person-first language (for example, say “child with cerebral palsy” instead of “cerebral palsied child”). For further information, refer to FCS Sheet #9 - Using respectful behaviours and language.

#### During the meeting – Actions for effective outcomes

- **Keep the focus on the purpose of the meeting.** Identify who will be chairing the meeting. Promote discussion of differences of opinion as an opportunity to grow and to “produce a better product”.
- **Take time to determine how well everything is going.** Talk about what is going well and what is not going so well. Try to determine what should be maintained or halted, and brainstorm new strategies. Look at each success and each failure as an opportunity to improve what is happening with the child.
- **Take notes.** Assign a note-taker. Record when the appointment or meeting took place, and who was there. Also, record any regrets or absences. Ensure that notes cover: discussion topics, highlights, actions required (by when, by whom). Clarify when notes will be distributed, how and to whom.
- **Develop an action plan.** Determine what needs to be done and who will do it. Set timelines for actions.
- **Do a recap at the end of each appointment or meeting.** Review what decisions were made. Review the action plan. What tasks or actions need to be done? Who will do them? When will the remaining tasks and actions be done? What decisions still need to be made? Determine or confirm the next appointment or meeting time.

### How to Know When a Meeting Goes Well - A Checklist -

Reflect on an appointment or meeting you have attended. Use the following checklist to consider how well the meeting went.

- Each person’s needs are met.
- People feel respected and trusted.
- Each person feels understood. There is a shared understanding amongst all who participated in the appointment or meeting.
- There is an action plan for the future.
- Actions are completed and reflected on at the next appointment or meeting.
- Overall, each person feels good about the outcome.

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## Resources

Bishop, K.K., Woll, J., & Arango, P. (1993). *Family/professional collaboration for children with special health needs and their families*. Burlington, VT: Family/Professional Collaboration Project.

Law, M., Stewart, D., Burke-Gaffney, J., Szkut, T., Missiuna, C., Rosenbaum, P., King, G., & King, S. (2001). *Keeping it together: A practical resource for parents of children and youth with special needs*. Hamilton, ON: McMaster University, CanChild Centre for Childhood Disability Research.

Tuchman, L. M. (1996). Team dynamics and communication. In P. Rosin, A. Whitehead, L. Tuchman, G. Jesien, A. Begun, & L. Irwin (Eds.) *Partnerships in family-centered care: A guide to collaborative early intervention* (pp. 145-185). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

## 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](http://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