

About family-centred practice

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What is family-centred practice?

Family-centred practice is the term used for a set of practices that early childhood intervention (ECI) practitioners use when working with families of children and young people with disabilities. This is an approach that avoids doing things to families or for families, but instead works with them and through them to support their child.

Family-centred practice creates a partnership between families and professionals in which knowledge and information is shared equally. Instead of professionals deciding what the child and their family needs, their role is to work with families and primary caregivers to help them decide what matters most.

Features of family-centred practice

Features of family-centred practice include:

- Recognising that families and primary caregivers are the experts on the child and family, while the professionals are experts on children and young people with disability in general and the impact that disabilities can have on development. The best results happen when these two sets of expertise are brought together.
- Making sure families decide what goals they want to work on and what outcomes they want to achieve. The professionals share their expert knowledge and support the families in determining what outcomes are most important for them. However, the families make the final decisions.
- Families also make the final decisions about what type of service they want, based on what works best for them. The strategies that are chosen to help the child must be acceptable to families and able to be used by them as part of their routine.
- Family-centred practice is a relationship-based way of working – it depends on the mutual respect and trust that develops between families and professionals. Both parties must learn to be open and honest with each other.
- This way of working builds on family strengths and resources. Professionals who work in this way acknowledge what families are doing well and help them use the resources that they have available to them to achieve the outcomes they want for their child and family.

- A focus of family-centred practice is to build the capabilities of families and primary caregivers. This means helping them learn new skills and strategies to meet their child with disability's needs, as well as promoting their belief in their ability to shape the lives of their child and family.
- It takes a whole-of-family approach, which addresses the needs of all family members and of the family as a whole, as well as the needs of the child with disability.
- Family-centred practice is an individualised approach in which all the support provided is tailored to meet the needs and circumstances of your child and family.

Why use family-centred practice?

There is good evidence that services that use family-centred practices are more effective at meeting the goals of families of children and young people with disability. Family-centred practice adds value to the ECI services that families receive by focusing on the issues that are most important to them and building their capabilities to meet the needs of their child and family.

- If professionals and families work together to identify family goals and priorities, then services are more likely to address the needs that are most important to families.
- If professionals and families work as partners to decide what action should be taken, then there is a better chance that the outcomes that the families want will be achieved.
- If professionals really listen to families and establish good working relationships with them, then families are more likely to listen to what the professionals have to say and to make better use of services to support their child with disability.
- If service providers support family decision-making, then families are more likely to develop the confidence, competence, and ability to make decisions about their child and family over their lifetime. Taking advantage of these services when they are available is important. Many families find less support services are available as children move out of the ECI age range.



Key points for NDIS participants and families

- Choose workers you can trust, who listen carefully, are respectful and non-judgmental about your values and lifestyle, and who understand what is important to you.
- Choose workers who treat you as a partner in your child's journey rather than considering themselves the experts, and who want to get to know your child and family.
- Choose workers who recognise what you are doing well and take every opportunity to help you gain skills to support your child's development.
- Choose workers who believe in you and your capacity to learn how to meet your child's needs.
- Choose workers who will teach you what you can do to promote your child's functional skills and ability to participate in family and community life.
- Choose workers who can show you how to build learning opportunities for your child into daily family routines, rather than expecting you to do exercises with your child that will add to your workload.
- Choose workers who can provide you with information about services, sources of support, and the nature and impact of your child's disability on their development.
- Choose workers who give you high expectations for the future for your child and help you understand what to expect and what the possibilities are.

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