



RELATIONSHIP- BASED PRACTICE IN EARLY INTERVENTION

A Model for Providing Early Intervention Services

"All learning takes place in the context of relationships and is critically affected by the quality of those relationships. For young children, the quality of their earliest relationships (attachments) with their parents and caregivers will affect their intellectual, social, and physical development. Children who experience the world as responsive to their needs and efforts, predictable, and supportive will have the emotional foundations that make them ready to learn." (Norman-Murch, 1996)

A relationship-based model for early intervention services reflects the current initiative to implement services that are family-centered and strengths-based. The primary goal is to facilitate optimal parent-child interactions by focusing on individualized parent-professional relationships as the practitioner mirrors the attributes and attitudes that need to be fostered between parent and child. Therefore, early interventionists using this approach should demonstrate more family-centered behaviors and attitudes and in turn, their families should feel more confident and comfortable in supporting their children's development.

The focus of the model is "responsive caregiving." Two key questions that are important to professionals using the relationship-based model when providing early intervention services are:

1. How do we support positive caregiver-child relationships?
2. What skills and strategies are important for early intervention personnel to possess?

In particular, five abilities are emphasized:

- A. The ability to observe ecologically
- B. The ability to form a therapeutic alliance with the family on behalf of the child
- C. The ability to be aware of your own values/attitudes and the impact of your interactions with a family
- D. The ability to be reflective and strengths-based
- E. The ability to contract and clarify

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A. The Ability To Observe Ecologically

- * Involves developing cross-cultural competence
- * Questions that personnel need to consider when providing early intervention services to children and families:
 - What is the family structure? The family composition? Who are the primary caregiver(s)?
 - What are the family's child-rearing practices? Family feeding practices? Family sleeping practices?
 - What are the family's perceptions and attitudes? Of a child's disability? Of health and healing? Of help-seeking and intervention?
 - What are the language and communication/interaction styles of the family members?
 - What are the languages of the family? What are the languages of the early intervention personnel?
 - Is an interpreter required?

B. The Ability To Form A Therapeutic Alliance

- * What questions encourage problem-solving?
 - Raise alternatives? Encourage evaluation? Encourage looking at the whole picture? Lead to clarification?
 - Encourage description? Encourage exploration? Identify issues? Encourage the use of information? Encourage planning?
- * How do I partner with families?
 - Gathering information: observing, listening
 - Giving information: commenting, re-framing
 - Discovering: facts, feelings, thoughts
 - Interpreting: talking through the child to interpret the child's behaviors
 - Experimenting/Wondering: what if?

C. The Ability To Be Aware Of Your Own Values/Attitudes

- * The awareness of the impact of your interactions
- * What is my cultural journey?
 - What are my beliefs, biases, and behaviors?
- * What are my boundaries?
 - What are the costs? The benefits? What is my motivation? What is my role? What is the work? What am I committing myself to?

D. The Ability To Be Reflective And Strengths-Based

- * Questions to consider in difficult situations:
 - What are my concerns about the family? Are my concerns the same as the family's?
 - Is this a family that I feel has a general match in values/beliefs with me?
 - How have I expressed my frustration with this family?
 - Has anything ever gone well with this family? If yes, what? Where? When?
 - What are the points that the family and I agree on?
 - What are the strengths and resources of this family?
 - What is the family's experience problem-solving in this area of concern?
 - How has the family traditionally solved problems?
 - How do I, or do I, solve problems similar to the ones faced by this family?
- * The use of experience-based discussion:
 - Explore and share the collective knowledge and experience of the group
 - Summarize the discussion and identify possible next steps

E. The Ability To Contract And Clarify

- * How do I partner with the family to meet the needs of the child?

*"It is important to remember that we are not in the home to meet the needs of the baby himself;
instead we are in the home to try to assure that the baby's needs are met." (Trout, 1987)*