



Tip Sheets

Sharing Concerns with Families

Observation and Documentation

If you are routinely observing and recording development on all children in your program, you may find at times that a child has red flags in their developmental progress and it is time to talk to his/her parents about your concerns. This is often the most challenging conversation that early childhood providers anticipate having with families. While it can be a difficult conversation, the following tips and strategies should help alleviate some of the tension and help ease the provider into setting up the appropriate situation for this important dialogue.

Preparing for a Conversation

Perhaps the most important step to take into consideration when sharing concerns with families, after your objective observation and recording of a child's development, is preparing for the conversation with the family.



To Begin

First, make some objective notes about the challenges you believe the child is having, in addition to your observation forms. This will help you stay on task as you are talking to the family. Be specific about what you have been observing and write it down. Next, request a specific time to talk to the family, preferably when you will both have time to spend talking and not feel rushed to get going. This should not take place at drop-off or pick-up time, if at all possible, unless the parent has time to stay longer and you have other staff who can attend to the children while you go to a conference room.

Think about any cultural differences that may exist and take those differences into consideration before the conversation.

- Are these differences impacting the development?
- What questions do you need to ask the family about their culture and the child's developmental needs?
- Are there cultural issues around which parent should be at the conference with you?

All these considerations will be very important to the success of the time you spend together.

As a next step, have the numbers readily available of the assessment resources in your community. It is one thing to tell a family where they should go for a referral;

giving them the actual numbers and even the name of the person they should talk to will make it even easier for them to follow-through with a difficult call.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, spend a few moments gathering your thoughts before the conversation with the family and calm your nerves. What you are doing is important for the child's welfare and try to keep that in mind.

Expressing Your Concerns

The next step is expressing your concerns in the actual conference with the family. There are several ways to help make this go a bit smoother for all concerned. It's very important that the setting be as private and comfortable as possible. Also, assure the family that the discussion you are having will remain confidential. This is very important as a family may have fears that if information gets out about their child, he/she will be treated differently or even expelled from the program. Your assurances will help allay some of their fears from the onset. As you begin to share information, provide your documentation with specific, nonjudgmental examples of what you have observed and recorded. Give the parents plenty of time to ask you questions. Be respectful at all times. It is difficult for a parent to hear that their child may have a developmental concern; understand their questions and comments in the context of fear and anxiety.



For more information on sharing concerns with families, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.

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