



# Myths about Family-Centred Service

FCS  
Sheet  
#2

This FCS Sheet is #2 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 #1: What is family-centred service?
- FCS Sheet #3: How does family-centred service make a difference?

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

*“An apple a day keeps the doctor away.”*

*“If you swallow chewing gum, it will take seven years to digest.”*

*“Cracking your knuckles will cause arthritis.”*

*(Health Myths - Loyola University Health System website – [www.luhs.org](http://www.luhs.org))*

Many of us have heard statements such as these and may have wondered whether they were true. Although each of these statements may have an element of truth, they are actually untruths or **myths** that have been passed down through generations. As myths exist in many areas of our life, it is essential that we carefully consider things that we hear and read.

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## Relevance

Family-centred service is a way to provide services to children and their families that is becoming more popular. With more people talking about and using family-centred approaches, different ideas about family-centred service have developed. Some of these new ideas add to what we know about family-centred service. However, some of the ideas are myths that limit its use. It is important that we talk about these myths to understand how family-centred service can work best for children and families.

## Facts and Concepts

### What is a myth?

- Myths are widely held popular stories or beliefs.
- Myths are often distorted versions of the truth.
- Some myths develop from explanations of an issue that are too simple.
- Myths also come from old “truths” that have been proven to be wrong.

### What kinds of myths exist about family-centred service?

We have developed an understanding of the myths that exist about family-centred service from our contact with parents and service providers, and from research that has been conducted in children’s rehabilitation centres (see Greenburg, 1994).

### The three most common general myths are:

- Family-centred service is a fad.
- Programs and services are already family-centred.
- There are problems in carrying out family-centred service that are too big to be solved.

### The following are more specific myths of what some people think “family-centred service” is:

- Families always get what they want. Service providers may have to go against what they believe professionally to satisfy a family’s request.
- Families must be responsible for making decisions or doing things that they would rather have service providers do.

### Why do we believe the above statements are myths?

The table on page 5 provides information to support family-centred “facts”.

## Strategies for Dispelling Myths in Family-Centred Service

### **Understand what family-centred service really means.**

You can find more information about family-centred service throughout this series. A good topic to start with is the first FCS Sheet in this series titled “What is family-centred service?”

### **Be aware of your unspoken beliefs and concerns about family-centred service.**

- Think about the information presented in this article. What are the things that you agree with or disagree with? Why do you have these beliefs?
- Talk about your beliefs openly with people you trust. This kind of discussion can help you develop an awareness of your own assumptions about family-centred service. Knowing why you think the way you do will be useful when working with others to come up with solutions to some of the more complex family-centred issues if they arise.

### **Talk to others about what family-centred service means to them.**

It is important to know where other people are coming from and the beliefs they hold.

## Summary

The myths discussed in this FCS Sheet are common untruths about what it means to be family-centred. These myths are some of the reasons why people do not fully use a family-centred approach. By learning more about family-centred service and talking about it with others, you can help to dispel the myths. You can positively influence others in their attempts to understand the benefits of using a family-centred philosophy when providing service to children.

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## Resources

Bailey Jr., D.B., Buyesse, V., Edmondson, R., & Smith, T.M. (1992). Creating family-centered services in early intervention: Perceptions of professionals in four states. *Exceptional Children*, February, 298-309.

Brandt, P. (1993). Negotiation and problem-solving strategies: Collaboration between families and professionals. *Infants and Young Children*, 5 (4), 78-84.

Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (1975). Belief, attitude, intention and behavior: *An introduction to theory and research*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Greenberg, J. (1994). Working with parents: Making successful collaboration a reality. *Rehabilitation Digest*, December, 7-8.

King, G., Law, M., King, S., & Rosenbaum, P. (1996). Parents' and service providers' perceptions of the family-centredness of children's rehabilitation services. *Physical & Occupational Therapy in Pediatrics*, 18 (1), 21-40.

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.

Rosenbaum, P., King, S., Law, M., King, G., & Evans, J. (1998). Family-centred service: A conceptual framework and research review. *Physical & Occupational Therapy in Pediatrics*, 18 (1), 1-20.

# Family-Centred Service

Myth	Dispelling the Myth	In Fact...
<p><i>Family-Centred Service is a fad.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ideas behind family-centred service have been around for a long time.</li> <li>• Advocacy groups have long supported and encouraged family-centred beliefs.</li> <li>• Many organizations that provide services to children now officially use a family-centred philosophy to guide how they provide services to families.</li> <li>• People who use any service want to have a say in how that service is provided.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family-centred service is a newer, but well-respected approach to providing service to children and their families. Its effectiveness is supported by research evidence.</li> <li>• For more information, refer to FCS Sheet #3 – How does family-centred service make a difference?</li> </ul>
<p><i>Programs and services are already family-centred.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research conducted in Ontario has found that children’s rehabilitation services are generally highly family-centred (King et al., 1996). However, this study identified some areas of family-centred service delivery (for example, provision of general information to families) that need to be improved .</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To make sure that family-centred services are carried out effectively, services need to be reviewed and updated regularly based on input from families who use them.</li> <li>• For more information, refer to FCS Sheet #4 – Becoming more family-centred.</li> </ul>
<p><i>There are problems involved with carrying out family-centred service that are too big to be solved.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenges involved with using a family-centred approach to service have been identified, including limited time and funding for programs (King et al., 2000). However, such problems are not impossible to solve.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family-centred service can be successfully implemented with the support of the organization and creative efforts from all team members.</li> <li>• For more information, refer to FCS Sheet #4 – Becoming more family-centred.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Family-centred service means families always get what they want. Service providers may have to go against what they believe professionally to satisfy a family’s request.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In family-centred approaches, it is important that the family’s goals and wishes are known and, whenever possible, addressed. The family makes the final decision about services.</li> <li>• Service providers have a responsibility to respect and accept the family’s decision, even if it may not be the one the service provider would have made.</li> <li>• That said, there are limits to what service providers and organizations can offer. Further, service providers do not have to do what the family requests if it is unsafe or unethical.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families and service providers work together to reach mutually agreeable solutions based on everyone’s needs, resources, and limitations.</li> <li>• For more information, refer to FCS Sheet #10 – Working together: From providing information to working in partnership.</li> </ul>
<p><i>Family-centred service means families must be responsible for making decisions or doing things that they would rather have service providers do.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In family-centred service, families decide how they would like to be involved.</li> <li>• Families can increase or decrease their involvement at any time.</li> <li>• Families are not pressured to take on more than they feel they can handle.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each family should receive support and encouragement to be as involved in services as they want to be.</li> <li>• For more information, refer to FCS Sheet #10 – Working together: From providing information to working in partnership and FCS Sheet #13 – Setting goals together.</li> </ul>

## 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