



Facts Concepts Strategies Sheets

Becoming More Family-Centred

FCS Sheet #4

This FCS Sheet is #4 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 #5: 10 things you can do to be family-centred
- FCS Sheet #18: Are we really family-centred? Checklists for families, service providers and organizations

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

Does this sound familiar?

The organization where you work has decided to shift to a more family-centred model for providing services. They are holding workshops for all staff about this process. You are so busy, you question why these workshops are necessary - becoming more family-centred is easy. Your colleague, on the other hand, thinks making this shift is virtually impossible, with or without workshops. You wonder - is there any information that can help us know what to do in making this change?

Relevance

Family-centred service is an approach that requires continual reflection to make sure that the services are meeting families' needs. Many programs and organizations that provide services to children and their families are already doing things that are family-centred. While it is important that these family-centred activities are recognized, it is likely that there are additional strategies to make the service more family-centred. These strategies relate to the philosophies of family-centred service and are most effective when adopted throughout the organization. Although the process may take time and resources, the benefits will be worth the effort. For more information about the benefits of family-centred service, refer to FCS Sheet #3 – How does family-centred service make a difference?

Facts and Concepts

When moving toward a more family-centred model of practice, organizations and service providers must think about many aspects of the service being provided. They must also identify and address potential barriers in order to make a successful transition. **Barriers** that can arise when implementing family-centred service include:

- **An organization's structure.** An organization can fail to support family-centred service through its structure, policies, and/or culture. Service providers report this to be a significant barrier to implementing family-centred service (King et al., 2000).
- **Feelings of uncertainty.** Service providers may fear they lack the skills and/or resources to be family-centred. Families may be unfamiliar with a service that asks them what they want rather than telling them what they will receive.
- **Changing demands and expectations for families.** Families may feel that they are expected to take on roles for which they are not prepared or that service providers are not providing them with enough support.

These (and other) obstacles can often be overcome by putting policies into place that are consistent with the principles of family-centred service. Organizations need to support their staff and the families they serve. Service providers need to develop the skills to empower and collaborate with families. Families must feel respected and supported by the organization and the service providers with whom they work. The next section outlines strategies for organizations, service providers, and families that can help facilitate the transition to a more family-centred model of service delivery.

Strategies for Becoming More Family-Centred

The following strategies for becoming more family-centred are organized according to things that can be done by the organization, service providers, and families.

Things Organizations Can Do

Demonstrate a commitment to family-centred service

- Recognize what the organization and staff are already doing that is family-centred.
- Verbalize the organization's commitment to family-centred service in a mission or vision statement.
- Assign a staff member to make sure that family-centred service is encouraged in the organization.
- Develop policies that encourage family-centred service. This can be facilitated through parent representation on the Board of Directors and/or through open dialogue between the organization and parent groups.
- Include parents on job interview panels.
- Write staff job descriptions to include aspects of family-centred service. Review practices of family-centred service as part of staff performance appraisals.
- Communicate frequently with other family-centred organizations. This will allow for the sharing of successful strategies for implementing family-centred service.

Create an ideal cultural environment

- Have a system through which families can provide feedback. Place comment boxes in the main entrance and family waiting areas. Develop easy to complete comment cards for family feedback. Have a staff member whose role is to respond to family feedback.
- Communicate in a clear and positive manner. All materials (such as brochures and reports) should be written for families. If it is necessary to use technical terms or "jargon", provide definitions.
- Provide translation services for families who do not speak English fluently.
- Translate written information into languages that are commonly spoken by families served by the organization.
- Offer workshops and other learning activities on family-centred service on an ongoing basis. This should be offered for both staff and families.

Create an ideal physical environment

- Provide a physical environment that is accessible, welcoming and comfortable for families. Aspects of the environment to consider include accessible parking, a welcoming reception area, comfortable spaces for private family conversation and adequate space for the family in the treatment areas.

Provide services that are family-centred

- Make families' initial experiences with the organization positive. Implement simple referral processes to reduce the time that families wait for services. For more information and strategies, refer to FCS Sheet #17 - Family-centred strategies for wait lists.
- Provide a resource centre for parents to access information. Employ staff to develop and maintain the resource centre and to assist families.
- Make documentation more family-friendly. Expect service providers to record the goals and ideas of the parents and child. Have a specific section of the health record available for family input. Allow parents to access health records easily.
- Locate or develop resources that are commonly requested by families, such as general information about the causes and implications of disabilities, linkages to parent groups, services in the community, and government programs.
- Review the amount of time service providers need to carry out family-centred practices effectively. Adjust caseloads depending on the time commitment required.

Things Service Providers Can Do

- Take part in training sessions and learning activities to enhance skills in family-centred service (such as empowering families, negotiating, and communication).
- Use assessments that recognize the parent as the expert about the child.
- Organize multi-disciplinary assessments (when appropriate) to decrease the number of times the family needs to repeat information and to decrease their time commitment.
- Provide information to the parent in an understandable form. Suggest places where families can find additional resources (for example, a good book or bookstore, specific sites on the Internet, family organizations).
- Develop service plans with parents and present a full range of options for service.
- Identify a primary service provider for each family when services are being provided by a number of individuals. This will help ensure continuity of care across multiple areas.

Things Families Can Do

- See yourself as an equal member of your child's team. Participate actively in setting goals and developing a service plan for your child.
- Share your wants, needs, ideals and goals with those who work with your child.
- Network with other families involved with the organization. This may be through informal opportunities, (for example, meetings in the hallway) or more structured opportunities (such as information sessions, support groups, and parent-to-parent linking). Encourage other people in your family to be involved.
- Provide feedback on how your needs are being met by the organization. Suggest ways in which the organization or service provider could do things to better meet your needs - be specific.
- Seize opportunities to take active roles within the organization. Consider joining (or forming) a parent group. Request to be on the Board of Directors.

Summary

The strategies presented in this FCS Sheet show that families, service providers, and organizations all have roles in implementing family-centred service. When changes are being made to make a program or service more family-centred, ongoing efforts will be needed because bringing new ideas into one's practice typically takes time and experience.

Organizations and individuals who are interested in becoming more family-centred should recognize and celebrate all efforts that support this approach.

Resources

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

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

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