

Building on Family Strengths

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We've all heard about the need to build on strengths of families. At the same time, we often hold beliefs, based on our particular expertise, that we are the ones who know best what families need.

Family-directed services are services that families determine are needed. To reach the point where we trust families enough to encourage them to decide for themselves what they need, it is important that we check our skills regularly. These are some questions to think about:



1. Do I really listen to families? Many families say that they have never felt listened to by providers who are involved in their lives. Being heard establishes trust and willingness to share. *What can I do to be sure that each person I work with feels that what he or she says is heard?*



2. Do I ask families what they want to do about the issues they are experiencing? It is the skills and strengths of families that will help them resolve their own issues. *What can I do to be sure that the families I work with are comfortable in expressing their opinions and proposing solutions? What can I do to support their decisions, even when I do not agree?*



3. Do I look for and spend time building on the strengths of families? None of us like to be told repeatedly about our failings, but most of us really appreciate others who tell us what they think we do well. *What can I do to help families understand their own strengths and abilities?*



4. Do I provide options rather than giving advice? Many families are tired of hearing about how to solve their problems, and are looking for creative choices, not advice? This is often true even when a family member asks for advice. *What can I do to help families understand that they can make their own choices about their own lives?*



5. Do I use language that is positive and hopeful? Both children and adults, who are treated “as if” they have the skills to solve their own issues, usually find ways to solve them. There is immense power in feeling competent and able. *What can I say to families that build on hope and optimism?*



6. Do I stay away from labels? Words that label – dysfunctional, disabled, disagreeable, disempowered – do not fix concerns or issues, and tend to further separate the provider from the family. *What can I do to help families reframe what they can do from a strengths perspective?*
(angry = concerned, argumentative = passionate)

