

# PFA Tips

## Family Partnerships with Healthcare Professionals

**F**amily Professional Partnerships can be defined as an interdependent relationship between both the provider and the family that is built on trust, honesty and shared responsibility. For the child's health care, evidence has shown that a strong provider/family relationship will improve the client's health outcomes and both provider and family satisfaction. Our hope is to move in the direction that family engagement and family/provider education will establish a system where clients, families and health professionals are working in an active partnership at various levels across the health care system to improve health and health care.

### Why are Family Professional Partnerships Important in Health Care

Effective partnerships between families and professionals are the foundation of family-centered care. Effective family professional partnerships will allow for both parties to engage in cooperation and responsibility for the achievement of a mutual established goal. Families and providers who work together in the best interest of the child and family will allow the person with special health care needs to assume an equal partnership role as they grow and develop. Family professional partnerships are built on trust and allow everyone to respect the skills and expertise each individual brings to the discussion.

### How Can Families Partner to Improve Care for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs?

#### Partnering with your Child's Provider

As your child's most consistent caregiver, you know your child with special health care needs in ways that no one else can, and you have the most vested interest in ensuring that your child's health care needs are met. Your perspective on when something is wrong or how a treatment or medication is working is essential to the providers who treat your child. Communication and information sharing

must be open and objective so all parties can make decisions together leading to improved health outcomes.

#### Partnering with Health Plans

The financing of health care for many children with special health care needs is provided by managed care plans, which by definition, control access to services and programs. Many children with special health care needs are served by both private health insurance and public programs such as Medicaid. Just as you do with your child's provider, you can help health insurance plans to understand what works well and what doesn't work well with their programs and policies. Many health insurance providers work with family advisors to learn more about the populations they serve.

#### Partnering with Title V

There is a federally-funded Title V Program in each state that provides services to enhance the health of women and children, including children/youth with special healthcare needs. State Title V programs are required to partner with families to ensure that family perspectives help guide these programs. Families in these partnership roles are critical to helping our government understand the health care needs of our children.



#### Partnering with Programs and Agencies

Many stakeholder groups contribute to the setting of policies that affect children and youth with special health care needs. Families can partner with these programs and agencies to ensure they have an understanding of families' health care needs.

#### Partnering with Other Family Leaders

In advocating for their children, many parents have learned the importance and value of speaking out for larger systems change. Advocacy groups, whether disability-specific or broader (such as Family Voices <https://familyvoices.org/>), arose because a few individuals wanted a better life for their children and believed they could make a difference. By joining your voice with others, your message and potential impact is stronger.

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## What are the Qualities of a Family Professional Partnership?

**Respect:** The family and provider regard each other with esteem and demonstrate that esteem through both their actions and communications.

**Communication:** The quality of communication is positive, understandable and respectful among all members of the partnership. The quantity of communication is also at a level to enable efficient and effective coordination and understanding among all members.

**Commitment:** The family and provider share a sense of assurance about each other's devotion and loyalty to the child and family, and each other's belief in the importance of the goals being pursued on behalf of the child and family.

**Equality:** The family and provider feel a sense of equity in decision making and service implementation, and actively work to ensure that all other members of the partnership feel equally powerful in their ability to influence outcomes for children and families.

**Skills:** The family and provider perceives that each on the team demonstrates competence, including the service providers' ability to fulfill their roles and to demonstrate "recommended practice" approaches to working with children and families.

**Trust:** The family and provider share a sense of assurance about the reliability or dependability of the character, ability, strength or trust of the other members of the partnership.

### References:

*Dimensions of family and professional partnerships: Constructive guidelines for collaboration* by Blue-Banning, M., Summers, J., Frankland, H. C., Nelson, L., & Beegle, G., *Exceptional Children*, Volume 70, No. 2, 2004, 167-184

Family Voices, Inc.: *National Center for Family/Professional Partnerships 1-16-2015*

## Additional Resources

Family Voices

<https://familyvoices.org/>

Pathfinders for Autism Online Provider Database

<http://pathfindersforautism.org/providers-services/>

PFA Tips - Healthcare

<https://pathfindersforautism.org/articles/healthcare/>

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