

Module: **Family-Centered Practices
for Infants and Toddlers With Visual Impairments**

Session 1: Building Reliable Alliances

Activity D: Family Panel

Instructor Guidelines

The purposes of this activity are for participants to

- meet real-life families who have a child with a visual impairment,
- listen to families discuss their interactions with early intervention professionals, and
- understand the concept of family-centered early intervention practices by sharing information about how early intervention professionals can work in partnership with families.

Time needed. 1 hour minimum

Prepanel planning. The course instructor should identify and invite members of three to five families with a child with a visual impairment to serve on the panel. Each family member should take about 10 minutes to share a little information about his/her child and family and address the questions below. Ten minutes is not enough time to discuss all of the issues, so ask that each panel member share the highlights or key points. Be sure to leave time for class participants to ask questions.

The format for each presenter is as follows:

- Share a little information about his or her child. Invite presenters to bring pictures or other things that illustrate a point.
- Have each panelist describe briefly anything that will help the child reach his/her potential or to share anything that has been particularly helpful to the family in the past, such as current resources, services, events, or activities.
- Ask each panelist to share what he or she thinks professionals should know and do in order to work effectively with families.

In advance of the panel, make sure all panelists feel secure and comfortable in this role. Ask if they have any questions. If possible, ask the panelists to meet you 15 to 20 minutes before the class starts for this discussion. Otherwise, try to talk with each panelist individually. Clarify time limits so no one dominates the time allotted.

Send a letter of confirmation to each panelist, including the format, time, and location of the panel along with a map or directions to the location of the panel presentation.

Sample Letter to Family Panel Members

Date

Name and Address of Parent

Dear Mr. or Ms. _____,

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate on the family panel for the *Family-Centered Practices for Infants and Toddlers With Visual Impairments* course. Sharing your stories with students makes for a much richer learning experience for them. Please know that we greatly appreciate the time that you devote to this activity. We realize that it is time away from your family or job.

The objective of this panel is to help participants understand the concept of family-centered early intervention practices and learn more about how early intervention professionals can work in partnership with families. We would like each parent to take between 5 and 10 minutes to share a little information about his or her child and family and address the questions below. We know that this is not ample time to discuss all of the issues but ask that you share the highlights and/or key points. We want to be sure to leave time for students to ask questions.

The format we will be following for each presenter is described below.

- Share a little information about your child or grandchild. If you would like to bring pictures or other things that illustrate a point, please do.
- Describe a little bit about anything that is happening in your child's (grandchild's) life to help him/her reach his/her potential or anything that is particularly helpful for you and your family at this point. Example: Services, people, or activities at home or within the community that you have found particularly helpful.
- Please share what you think professionals should know and do in order to work effectively with families.

Please arrive at _____(time) on _____(date) at _____(location and address). The panel will start at _____(time). You may park _____(location).

Again, thanks so much for agreeing to serve on this panel. We look forward to seeing you on _____(date and time). Please call me at _____ or email me at _____ if you have questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Sample Thank-You to Family Panel Members

Date

Name and Address of Panel Member

Dear _____,

Thank you so much for giving a “face” and some life to the realities of parenting a child with special needs and for sharing your early intervention experiences. You also helped paint a very realistic picture of our community-based system of care services that is imperfect and evolving.

In this class we are aware that families are children’s most important resource, so having a glimpse of the “real world” offers us the opportunity to learn to support families better. Thank you very much for taking time out of your busy life to share your expertise and provide a wonderful role model for our participants. We appreciate your efforts on our behalf very much.

Sincerely,
