

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

Session 1: Building Reliable Alliances

Activity H: Vignette

Instructor Guidelines

The purpose of this activity is for participants to apply the ideas in the readings, discussions, and activities to a real life situation.

Time needed. 35 minutes

Materials. Flipcharts, marker pens

Directions

1. Ask participants to read the vignette and to write down their responses to the question, "What contributed to the family's decision to discontinue services?"
2. Divide the class into small groups of four to six individuals and ask them to discuss their responses in their small group. Ask that each group identify a group facilitator and group recorder. The recorder writes down responses on flipchart paper for everyone to see. The facilitator makes sure that each person has a chance to talk in a round-robin fashion without interruption. Once all opinions have been shared, the facilitator asks the group to discuss the various options and decide, either through consensus or by voting, on their conclusion for why the family discontinued services.
3. The facilitator reports his or her group's opinion to the larger group. After all opinions have been reported, the instructor shares the information provided in the Instructor Notes below and makes the point that we bring our assumptions and biases into intervention situations.

Vignette

A family arrived from El Salvador with an 18-month-old son who is visually impaired and developmentally delayed. The family lived in a one-room, dirt-floored garage in Los Angeles. The garage had one overhead light bulb, but no running water or cooking facilities. They have very little furniture, bedding, or clothing. They arrived only with what they could carry.

The family learned about a local early intervention program through the church they joined. The family speaks only Spanish. With the help of a translator from the church, they completed the process and paperwork to enroll their son in an early intervention program. They had never seen a program like this before. In El Salvador, they had

received no special services for their son. They were especially pleased to meet other parents of children with visual impairments and to learn what their new country had to offer their son.

The son was enrolled in the program, and initially the mother, father, and child came to each biweekly, center-based session. The teacher made weekly home visits. As a result of the home visits, the staff of the early intervention program became very concerned about the family's living conditions. They began bringing the family such things as furniture, clothes, bedding, and extra food. They also began to explore how to get the family onto a priority list for publicly funded housing. They were committed to helping this family have a better physical existence.

Gradually, the father began to come less frequently to the biweekly session. Within 3 months, the mother and child were also not on the bus when it arrived at the program. The family continued to be present for their scheduled weekly home visit. After about 4 months, the child's teacher went out to make a home visit at the regularly scheduled time and no one was home. She continued to stop by the house for the next 2 weeks when she was visiting other families in the area. She persisted because she had a sense that the family's decision to discontinue the program was not related to receiving services for their son.

Instructor Notes

What do you think contributed to the family's decision to discontinue services?

Initially, the family accepted the items willingly, particularly if they were for their son. However, they indicated to the teacher during the follow-up visits, that over time they were not comfortable with what the staff was doing. Father felt like people were telling him he was not doing a good enough job for his wife and son. Mother felt like their success in coming to this country and getting themselves established was not being recognized. They said they ended up feeling "not good enough." They left the program rather than face that judgment every time they saw the staff. They knew they were good enough and that they had been successful. They were doing a good job with their son. The garage they lived in was theirs. It was the nicest place they had ever lived. In the desire to help, the early interventionists lost sight of the fact that this was their life and their family. They lost sight of the need for self-respect and self-direction. They forgot to ask the family what they wanted and how they felt about what they were doing. The staff forgot that their relationship with a family is a process of establishing trust and equality, not just a giving of services and material things. Family services must be culturally, linguistically, and experientially sensitive.

Adapted from Vincent, L.J. (1992). Families and early intervention: Diversity and competence. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 16(5), 166-172.