

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

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**Session 1: Building Reliable Alliances**

**Study Questions and Answers for Recommended Reading E: Foster & Phillips**

Foster, M.A., & Phillips, W. (1992). Family systems theory as a framework for problem solving in pediatric physical therapy. *Pediatric Physical Therapy*, 4(2), 70-73.

1. Describe the two shifts in early intervention and what led to them.
  - **Shift from a child-centered model of treatment where professionals were the primary change agents to a model that reflected the important roles parents play as educational and therapeutic participants. This shift was a direct application of the finding that parent involvement in early intervention programs for disadvantaged children had a positive impact on child outcome.**
  - **The second shift views parents and families as active agents of change and is based on the assumption that the family's functioning and the child's functioning are connected and interdependent, and that understanding both child and family are essential to good treatment.**
2. What is systems theory? Describe two theoretical and conceptual developments in the social and health sciences that have been influential in the shift toward a systems perspective.
  - **Systems theory is the theoretical perspective that focuses on the family as a unit of study.**
  - **Bronfenbrenner's social ecological model is based on the theory that individual child development is influenced by the relationship between the developing human being and the setting and contexts in which the child functions. The child influences the environment and the environment contributes to the development of the child.**
  - **Family cycle perspective considers the temporal dimension and notes that family development has predictability, that the stages in families typically are tied to age of children and nodal events such as marriage and death. Symptoms and problems which individuals experience are better understood when family life cycle is taken into account.**

3. The authors state that family systems theory is “as much a way of thinking as it is a set of concepts or specific techniques.” What does this quote mean?

**Family systems theory provides a framework for looking at families and their challenges. It gives practitioners a wider lens through which to see families, their reactions and interactions. It is only when the practitioner tries to understand problems within the context of each unique, individual family and tries to craft solutions that fit the family (rather than make the family adapt to the solution) that he or she will be most effective. Exploring options with a family based on their unique characteristics rather than imposing options on a family results from understanding and implementing family systems theory.**

4. In the first case story a difficulty at mealtime arises that is ultimately traced to the grandmother. The therapist addresses the problem by including the grandmother. What might have happened if the therapist had taken another approach and tried to work around the grandmother or exclude her from the picture?

**The parents might have determined that the grandmother was more important to the family than the therapist and basically rendered the therapist ineffective. The family and child would have suffered.**

5. The mother in the second case story didn’t actively support the therapist’s interventions because they were painful to the child, and she didn’t want “to do that to” her child. The therapist could easily be frustrated by this situation and begin to judge the mother. Describe two strategies the interventionist can use with the mother in this situation.

- **Help the mother explore her own childhood experiences with limit setting.**
- **Validate her actions and concerns as a very loving mother and then frame the intervention in terms of concern and love.**
- **Work with her to explore why the intervention is difficult for her and what she feels the consequences of her actions (or lack of) might be.**

6. List three of the characteristics of family systems theory that highlight its positive nature.

- **Competence and health are emphasized rather than pathology and dysfunction.**
- **Problems, as much as possible, are conceptualized as snags or difficulties rather than evidence of underlying individual pathology.**
- **Language that emphasizes inherent strength is used rather than words that point out weakness.**