

*Module:* **Visual Conditions and Functional Vision:  
Early Intervention Issues**

---

**Session 1: Working With Families and  
Eye Care Professionals**

**Activity B: Family, Educational, and Medical Panel**

**Instructor Guidelines**

The purposes of this assignment are to

- allow participants to learn from family members, educational professionals, and medical professionals; and
- increase awareness of the roles and responsibilities of different team members and the strategies they use to communicate effectively.

**Time needed.** 1 ½ hours minimum

**Prepanel planning**

The core panel should include a parent, a TVI, and an eye care specialist. Additional panel members could include other family members, additional eye care specialists, a physical therapist, an occupational therapist, a speech language pathologist, or a case manager. The instructor should identify and invite individuals to serve on the panel. Panelists should be provided with a list of questions to guide their thinking in preparation for the panel presentation (see below). Instructors may want to consider choosing panel members from different early intervention teams.

Each panel member should spend approximately 10 to 15 minutes sharing information based on his or her particular questions. This is probably not enough time to discuss all of the issues, so ask each panel member to share highlights and key points. Be sure to leave time for participants to ask questions.

**Parents**

- Tell us about your child and family.
- Share a little about your experiences at the eye doctor's office and about your child's eye examinations.
- How did you first learn of your child's visual diagnosis? In what ways were you supported by a TVI or other professionals? What helped you understand

and accept the diagnosis? In hindsight, is there anything that would have helped you better understand or accept the diagnosis?

- How do you facilitate effective communication with other team members?
- Discuss strategies that facilitate your ability to communicate effectively with other team members.
- Are there any barriers that impede your ability to communicate effectively with other team members?
- Do you feel comfortable asking questions of team members? What causes you to feel comfortable or uncomfortable?
- How do you prepare for your child's visit to the eye care specialist (eye doctor)? To other medical specialists?

#### Educators and therapists

- Tell us about your professional role.
- Discuss strategies that facilitate your ability to communicate effectively with other team members.
- Are there any barriers that impede your ability to communicate effectively with other team members?
- Do you feel comfortable asking questions of the team members? What causes you to feel comfortable or uncomfortable?
- How do you prepare a family for a visit to the eye care specialist? To other medical specialists?
- What do you do to help a family to understand their child's visual diagnosis?
- If you attend eye examinations with families, describe your role.

#### Medical professionals

- Tell us about your professional role.
- How do you facilitate effective communication with families and educational professionals (including early interventionists)?
- Are there any barriers that impede your ability to communicate effectively with families and educational professionals?
- Do you feel comfortable asking questions of families and other team members? What causes you to feel comfortable or uncomfortable?
- How do you recommend that families prepare for a visit to your office?
- Have you received information from TVIs before a family's visit? If so, was it helpful? How could it be more helpful?

In advance of the panel presentation, make every effort to ensure that all panelists feel secure and comfortable. If possible, ask the panelists to meet you 15-20 minutes before the class starts so that you can provide last minute guidance and answer any questions. Otherwise, try to talk with each panelist

individually just before the panel begins. 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 panel along with a map and/or directions to the location of the panel presentation (see sample confirmation letter).

**Panel format**

The instructor introduces the panel as a whole and then lets each panelist give a specific introduction as part of his or her presentation. Participants are asked to take notes and make a list of questions they want to ask panelists at the end of the panel presentation. Each panelist has 10-15 minutes to address the questions they have been given in advance.

**Postpanel follow-up**

After panelists leave, allow participants to discuss the experience. There may be questions about panelists' remarks, or they may have comments they were uncomfortable sharing in front of the panelists.

Send a thank-you note to panelists (see sample thank-you letter).

### Sample confirmation letter

[Date]

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for agreeing to participate on the panel for the *Visual Conditions and Functional Vision Assessment* course. Sharing your stories with students makes for a much richer learning experience for them. Please know that we appreciate the time that you devote to this activity. We realize that it is time away from your family and/or your job.

The objective of this panel is to help participants understand the importance of communication among families, educational professionals, and medical professionals. I would like each participant to take about 10-15 minutes to share a little information about themselves and to address the questions below. I know that 10-15 minutes is not ample time to discuss all of the issues, but I ask that you share the highlights and key points. I want to be sure to leave time for students to ask questions.

Below are the questions I'm asking the panelists to be prepared to discuss. Please select those that are appropriate for you.

#### Parents

- Tell us about your child and family.
- Share a little about your experiences at the eye doctor's office and about your child's eye examinations.
- How did you first learn of your child's visual diagnosis? In what ways were you supported by a TVI or other professionals? What helped you understand and accept the diagnosis? In hindsight, is there anything that would have helped you better understand or accept the diagnosis?
- How do you facilitate effective communication with other team members?
- Discuss strategies that facilitate your ability to communicate effectively with other team members.
- Are there any barriers that impede your ability to communicate effectively with other team members?
- Do you feel comfortable asking questions of team members? What causes you to feel comfortable or uncomfortable?
- How do you prepare for your child's visit to the eye care specialist (eye doctor)? To other medical specialists?

Educators and therapists

- Tell us about your professional role.
- Discuss strategies that facilitate your ability to communicate effectively with other team members.
- Are there any barriers that impede your ability to communicate effectively with other team members?
- Do you feel comfortable asking questions of the team members? What causes you to feel comfortable or uncomfortable?
- How do you prepare a family for a visit to the eye care specialist? To other medical specialists?
- What do you do to help a family to understand and accept their child's visual diagnosis?
- If you attend eye examinations with families, describe your role.

Medical professionals

- Tell us about your professional role.
- How do you facilitate effective communication with families and educational professionals (including early interventionists)?
- Are there any barriers that impede your ability to communicate effectively with families and educational professionals?
- Do you feel comfortable asking questions of families and other team members? What causes you to feel comfortable or uncomfortable?
- How do you recommend that families prepare for a visit to your office?
- Have you received information from TVIs before a family's visit? If so, was it helpful? How could it be more helpful?

Class will start at \_\_\_\_\_ [time] on \_\_\_\_\_ [date] in the \_\_\_\_\_ [location]. The panel will start at \_\_\_\_\_ [time]. If possible, could you be there by \_\_\_\_\_ [time]? A map to our location has been enclosed. Please park \_\_\_\_\_ [location and directions if necessary].

Again, thanks so much for agreeing to serve on this panel. The class and I look forward to seeing you on the \_\_\_\_\_ [date] at \_\_\_\_\_ [time]. Please call me at \_\_\_\_\_ or email me at \_\_\_\_\_ if you have questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

## Sample thank-you letter

[Date]

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you so much for participating as a panel member on \_\_\_\_\_[date] for the *Visual Conditions and Functional Vision Assessment* course. Your participation was helpful to the participants in increasing their understanding of the importance of communication between families, educational professionals, and medical professionals.

Thank you very much for taking time to share your expertise and for being a wonderful role model for the students. The class and I greatly appreciate it.

Sincerely,