

## ***Ethics & Boundaries and Home Visiting***

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### How Does the Natural Environment Affect Intervention?

- Advantages
- Challenges

### The Responsibility of the Early Interventionist

- Maintain professional boundaries while providing relationship-based intervention
- Building partnerships and trust with caregivers
- Empathy – showing compassion vs. Sympathy
- Procedural Safeguards

### Consider the Intake Process

- Often this is the first face to face contact with the family
- A great deal of information is disclosed by the family including family history and in some cases financial information
- This is the starting point for creating professional boundaries

## Ethical Considerations - Intake

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- Cultural awareness/sensitivity
- Procedural safeguards, parental rights, consent forms (Indicator 4/ DHS 90.12)
- Skills needed to build relationships & rapport : mutual respect, trust, empathy, shared power, reciprocal communication, shared vision

(Lea, 2006)

## Barriers to Building Relationships with Families

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- Family's perception of the purpose of the home visits
- Family has not had positive experiences with other professionals in the past
- Parent's fear about child being seen as different from peers & view professional as constant reminder of child's disability
- Other life factors
- Adolescent parents have unique challenges

(Lea, 2006)

## Setting Boundaries

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- Clarify roles and expectations from the beginning (agency and the interventionist's responsibility)
- Keep in mind Birth to 3 Guiding Principles and Philosophy  
<http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/birthto3/GuidPrinc.pdf>
- Be aware of own personal values, beliefs, and emotions, take time to discuss in supervision
- Be aware of own desire to be liked by a family

(Allen & Tracy, 2008)

## Disclosing Personal Information

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**Benefits:** When a professional discloses to a parent

- Reciprocity
- Trust-building
- Parents won't feel all alone in their journey
- May help parents process their own feelings about their child or their situation

(Reamer, 2003)

## Disclosing Personal Information

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**Dangers:** When a professional discloses to a parent

- Role-reversal, parents feel responsible for helping the professional
- Could make parents uncomfortable
- Could confuse parents about boundaries
- Focus should be on the family and child, it's their time

(Reamer, 2003)

## Some Boundary Questions to Consider in Your Agency

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1. How do I know when it is ok to share something personal about myself with a family?
2. When I'm asking questions about the family's life and routines, how do I remain respectful of the family's privacy and their right to determine when to share information? What information do I have the right to know?
3. What if the family invites me to dinner or to a family event? Is it ever ok to attend?
4. What if the family and I have a good connection and want to make plans to spend more time together? Can I support the family by forming a friendship?

(Allen & Tracy, 2008)

## More Boundary Questions to Consider

(Allen & Tracy, 2008)

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5. What if I disagree with how the parents choose to discipline their child?
6. What if the family is doing something in the home that makes me uncomfortable (ex. smoking cigarettes) Should I say something? How do I bring it up politely/respectfully?
7. Should I give a client my personal cell phone number or home phone number?
8. When is it ok to give a hug, or put my arm around a client?
9. What if I feel my co-worker is crossing a boundary?

## Cultural Awareness and Boundaries

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- What are some cultural considerations I need to think about
  - when greeting the family and entering their home?
  - when providing IFSP strategies and activities?
  - when food or drink is offered to me?
  - when medical concerns arise?

*How can I learn more about a family's culture through a **Routines-Based Interview** or **IFSP**?*

## Conflict of Interest & Risks of Crossing Boundaries

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- Harm to family
- Loss of professional license
- Loss of membership in professional association
- Legal problems
- Damage to agency's reputation in the community
- Personal safety could be compromised

(Kagle & Giebelhausen, 1994)

## Ethical Considerations for IFSP Development & Transition Planning

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### IFSP Development

- Meshing family priorities, needs, values with professional judgment
- Are we listening to the family?
- Is the plan developing based on what the family has identified as their needs?
- What if the parents have differing views about their child and about how the plan should be written?
- Consider family resources: IFSP services and implications for the family's private insurance coverage, fee for services, access to waivers etc.

### Transition Planning

- What happens when the child is turning 3 and the family does not want to refer to the LEA but the rest of the team has concerns and feels a referral is appropriate?
- What does termination from Birth to 3 mean for my relationship with the family? Can I contact them in the future?
- Be aware of boundaries when the family refers a younger child after an older child has been through the program. What might be the implications?

## Managing Conflicts and Dilemmas

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Example: I am the family's service coordinator and I want to be helpful to a mother who is struggling to raise her four young children. During the visit, mom asks me to watch the children while she goes to a job interview for a few hours. I suspect mom will become frustrated if I tell her 'no.'

How should I handle this situation?

## Managing Conflicts and Dilemmas

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- Be aware of potential conflicts of interest with families and avoid them before they occur
- It is our responsibility to let families know when we see a potential or actual conflict of interest

(Allen & Tracy, 2008 Jacobson, 2002)

## Managing Conflicts and Dilemmas

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1. Remain calm
  2. Rely on concrete observable facts
  3. You don't have to know all the answers on the spot, seek out your supervisor as soon as possible
  4. Rely on your foundation in strength-based work and identify family strengths even when the situation is stressful
  5. In addition to supervision, seek input from colleagues, professional literature and research, consult professional associations (NASW, NAEYC)
  6. Create a plan for moving forward that is sensitive to those involved
  7. Team might decide to make a change to the service provider
  8. Document all conversations and actions for liability purposes
  9. Monitor the action plan and adapt as needed
- (Boland-Prom & Anderson 2005, Rosin, et al 1993)

## Working through Crises or the Unexpected - Questions to ask Yourself

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- What is the nature of the crisis?
- Is the family asking me for help?
- Do I feel competent addressing this issue?
- Who should I go to if this is not something I am comfortable taking on?
- What can I learn from this experience to help me feel more competent in the future?

(Rosin, et al, 1993)

## Problem-Solving with the Family

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- Identify the problem/dilemma/crisis
  - Ask how the family feels about the situation
  - Ask what the family sees as an ideal outcome
  - Identify all the stakeholders and the primary target of the intervention
  - Identify key individuals to consult with such as supervisors, medical experts, legal professionals
  - Develop a plan sensitive to those involved, include making appropriate community referrals
  - Inform stakeholders (parents, grandparents, childcare provider etc.) of action steps
  - Put the plan into action
  - Document decisions and decision-making process
  - Check in with the family to determine if the plan is working or if changes need to be made
- (Boland-Prom & Anderson, 1993 Rosin, et al 1993)

## Things to Know about Supervision

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- Regular supervision is critical even for the most experienced professionals
- Working in the natural environment can sometimes feel isolating for professionals
- Supervisors should do their best to be available for co-visits and for debriefing with individuals on staff

## Agency Infrastructure and Support

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- Is reflective practice and supervision a priority for our staff and our agency?
- How can we continue to build this in to the work we are doing?
- Does my agency offer regular opportunities for on-going discussion about ethics and boundaries as well as learning opportunities from colleagues about their experiences in the field?

## Helpful Websites

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National Association of Social Workers

<http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp>

National Association for the Education of Young Children

<http://www.naeyc.org/about/mission.asp>

National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center

<http://www.nectac.org/topics/inclusion/default.asp>

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