

Working with Professionals

As a parent, you know your child best.

You live with your child. You know what the daily routine is. You know what your child has been through. You know what your child can do and what he cannot do.

The best relationships with professionals can be described as respectful, trusting, and open.

These qualities help to build a partnership between you and the professional. Share ideas and information about what is appropriate for you and your child. Discuss what the options are for your child's care, medical treatments, and therapy.

Talk about issues.

Discuss what is happening in the life of your child and your household. Listen carefully to what the professional has to say. Confidently share your thoughts with the professionals.

Discuss what will work for your family.

As choices are discussed with the professionals that work with your child, think about how these will affect your family. Think about how these ideas will fit into your daily routine. Can you carry out the ideas that are suggested?

Become comfortable negotiating a professional's recommendations for home treatment or other interventions.

Look at the limits you have - time, money, and skill. Let the professional know what your limits are.



- Describe how much time you have to work with your child. Ask what you can do to make the best use of that time.
- Discuss your financial situation. Can the professional suggest programs and financial resources that could help you cover the expenses of the treatment plan?
- If you need to be trained to do some of the therapy, how could you be trained?

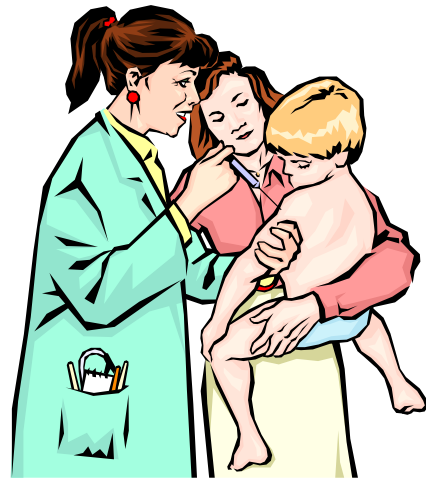
Recognize that the professional works with many families who share your experience.

While you are an expert about your child, the professional is an expert who has special knowledge about the physical health of your child and how to help your child develop new skills. There are times when you will have to

trust the judgment of the professional.

you mean by that? We don't understand."

You and the professionals working with your child and family are partners in making decisions to better the quality of life for your child.



Ask other parents for suggestions.

If you are looking for a specialist, ask other parents what doctor, dentist, speech therapist, or surgeon they would suggest.

"Shop around" for a doctor or therapist to work with you. This will help you to feel that you have explored the possibilities.

Look for professionals who:

- relate well to you and your child.
- are comfortable discussing the concerns you have about your child.
- discuss your concerns openly.
- help you create strategies that work for your family.

This relationship can take time and effort to develop.

As you work with professionals, be a responsible "patient family."

- Ask questions if you do not understand the words the professional uses. Say, "What do

- Write down the information the professional gives you during an appointment. Keep a notebook that you take to appointments to record this information.
- Keep a notebook about your child. Include the child's medical history, test results, and observations about behavior or symptoms that will help the professional understand your child. A loose-leaf notebook works well because you can add pages where you need them.
- If you do not agree with a professional's recommendations, say so. Be as specific as you can about why you do not agree.
- Learn as much as you can about your child's disability.

Find us on the web at <http://ag.udel.edu/extension/fam/>

Updated with the help of Brooksie Pruden, Extension Assistant, and La'Shawn Waters, student in the Department of Individual and Family Studies, University of Delaware. This material is adapted from *The Unplanned Journey: When You Learn That Your Child Has A Disability*, by Carole Brown, Samara Goodman, and Lisa Kupper. The article was published in the NICHCYNews Digest, Vol. III, Number 1.

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