

## **Routines-Based Early Intervention with Diverse Families**

Early intervention services provided via home visits with a variety of families with different strengths and needs is not new. The Getting Ready Approach (GR) can be implemented once the family's background, experiences, and beliefs are identified and respected. The research conducted using the Getting Ready Approach has included families who speak different languages, who come from diverse cultural groups, have different styles of parenting, and have different learning strengths and needs (Knoche, L. L., Edwards, C. P., Sheridan, S. M., Kupzyk, K. A., Marvin, C. A., Cline, K. D., & Clarke, B. L. (2012). A key component across various family life experiences and perspectives was the development of relationships, both parent-child and parent-professional, as the means of promoting positive and equitable child outcomes. The Getting Ready strategies used intentionally to carry out the collaborative framework of the home visit and other contacts makes the use of this Approach ideal for early intervention services provided with a variety of family characteristics.

**Selection of Practice Opportunities.** The early intervention team uses the Routines Based Interview (RBI) to gain information about each family's individual culture, lifestyle and priorities. Early intervention providers and services coordinators must remain open and flexible enough to appreciate various preferences for family routines. This is the beauty of the RBI in that using open and clear communication will give the early intervention team a sense of the family's unique everyday learning opportunities, and how the child participates. The GR Approach then builds on the descriptions of family routines with actual observations and mutual development of how the IFSP outcomes can be addressed by the family and the provider and/or services coordinator. For example, in some cultures, children are not expected to feed themselves until they are closer to age five. If the early intervention provider and/or services coordinator collects information during the RBI in a nonjudgmental and objective manner, this style of parenting would be respected during ongoing home visits, as the opportunities for practice are co-determined.

**Interpreters.** The need for an interpreter can also be perceived as a difficulty or obstacle in providing early intervention services. The early intervention provider or services coordinator should ensure that the interpreter who translates for the family during home visits and other contacts has been provided with information in advance about how the GR Approach works, i.e. that the provider or services coordinator seeks to build a relationship with the parent first and foremost. The interpreter needs to know that specific communication strategies are key, particularly the use of open-ended questions, clarifying, paraphrasing, etc. such that the parent and the provider or services coordinator can come to mutual decisions throughout the visit. This requires the interpreter to understand that everything the provider or services coordinator

says to the parent, must be interpreted as is, and the same is true for what the parent says back to the provider or services coordinator. In some cases, there may be differences in the translation such that the interpreter would need to clarify either with the provider or services coordinator, or the parent to ensure that the conversation is accurate. This can be accomplished with transparency if everyone involved is aware of this possibility.

**Learning Difficulties.** Families who appear to have difficulty learning, who may respond slowly to questions, or who have trouble remembering events or activities with multiple steps or a complicated sequence, can participate in the GR Approach once the provider or services coordinator has interacted with and learned about the family during initial contacts. The needs of these families should not be an issue for professionals with a background in special education. Once again, the RBI offers a starting point, as the interviewers begin to get a sense of how to best communicate with the family. In addition, gathering information about and then using everyday learning opportunities is a must in terms of identifying priorities, setting goals and practicing support and strategies for the adult with learning difficulties, who is likely to struggle with generalizing from a decontextualized situation outside of their regular routines. Specific supports and strategies for the family may include more practice, more reinforcement, breaking things down into simple steps, using fewer words, supplementing with visual aids, and providing more frequent visits and between-visit-communication at times when a new skill is needed, either for the child or the parent.

One of the **Seven Key Principles of Providing Services in Natural Environments** (*OSEP TA Community of Practice: Part C Settings. 2008, March*) clearly states that professionals working in early intervention are to recognize and be responsive to the fact that all families have unique and individualized traditions, values, and learning styles/preferences. If the professional provides intervention in a “one size fits all” manner based on his/her own personal beliefs and biases, services will not be successful and progress will be limited. If families are treated as equal partners in the relationship with early intervention provider and services coordinators, successful child outcomes will be achieved.

**References:** Knoche, L. L., Edwards, C. P., Sheridan, S. M., Kupzyk, K. A., Marvin, C. A., Cline, K. D., & Clarke, B. L. (2012). Getting Ready: Results of a randomized trial of a relationship-focused intervention on parent engagement in rural Early Head Start. *Infant Mental Health Journal, 33*, 439–458.

Workgroup on Principles and Practices in Natural Environments, *OSEP TA Community of Practice: Part C Settings*. (2008, March). Seven key principles: Looks like / doesn't look like. Retrieved from: [http://www.ectacenter.org/~pdfs/topics/families/Principles\\_LooksLike\\_DoesntLookLike8-19-22.pdf](http://www.ectacenter.org/~pdfs/topics/families/Principles_LooksLike_DoesntLookLike8-19-22.pdf)