

Tips for Successful Family Partnerships During the Health Care Experience

1. **Empower** - Try to neutralize the inherent power dynamics. Empower each child and family by discussing with them their own strengths and acknowledging their own resources they can use to build confidence and make informed decisions about their health. Screen for and address the stress and trauma experienced by families and caregivers and consider how these challenges contribute to the child's wellbeing and the family's capacity. Affirm the difficulty of past experiences and commend them for their resilience. Respect racial, gender, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity and how these attributes influence the way families experience and perceive care.
2. **Implement** - Practice partnership and shared decision-making. Demonstrate openness and transparency and provide access to information in understandable language so families can learn and participate more effectively in their care. Family participation in developing the treatment plan typically leads to better adherence, trust, and true care coordination. Schedule time to communicate with families when it is convenient for them to discuss their care and consider using available tools like secure email and text messaging.
3. **Communicate** - Take time to ask what is important to the child and family with open-ended questions, and really listen to what they say, preferably seated or eye-to-eye, as culturally appropriate. Appearing rushed or hurried has a negative effect on the patient experience. Engage patient and family advisors in developing clear and useful patient communications, considering cultural differences, socioeconomics, gender, literacy level, primary language, or ability. Develop creative ways to solicit meaningful feedback from patients and families and co-design solutions for identified issues.
4. **Support Family Leadership** – Meaningfully collaborate with and develop a range of ways for families to assess and advise on patient and family-centered care, workflows, barriers, and services in the medical home. Encourage and facilitate participation at all levels of health care in patient/family advisory councils, focus groups, and family-to-family and peer support. Invite and prepare families to participate in state or local advocacy efforts related to child health. Consider compensating families for their travel, child care, time, and participation.
5. **Connect** - Recognize the importance of high-quality, community-based services. Work with families and other child serving systems and providers to develop a list of resources, create connections and make referrals. Collaborate with families to identify gaps in community supports and work to create new pathways to resources that are missing in the community.