Assisting Families to Identify their Concerns, Priorities, and Resources

Information provided by family members about their concerns, priorities, and resources related to their child's development should be collected in a personal discussion during a planning conversation. Early intervention providers should understand a family empowerment approach so that they are able to view the family and child as the primary unit of service, and support family decision-making (Wyngarten, 2000). Asking open-ended questions provides opportunities for a family to talk about how early intervention services and supports can assist them in parenting their child, and help the child participate in family life and community activities.

A family-directed assessment of their priorities, resources, and concerns related to parenting a child with special needs is an ongoing process. As a relationship with a new baby develops over time, parents gain insight and experience about what they want for their child. As a child grows and develops, or as family circumstances vary, their priorities, resources, and concerns may change. Events or markers that may prompt a family to alter their perspective include:

- birthday celebrations
- developmental milestones such as when a child typically learns to sit up, talk, and use the toilet
- family trips and vacations to a new environment with unfamiliar people and surroundings
- moving to a different home with a new physical layout
- a child's six-month and annual IFSP review
- a child's upcoming transition from early intervention

Discussions should also include understanding a family's daily routines and activity settings, and the settings and activities in which they would like their child to participate. Examples of open-ended questions to prompt families to consider their daily and desired activities include:

- What are your family's hopes for your child?
- What is your child interested in? What does your child like?
- Who does your child spend time with during the day?
- Where does your child spend time throughout the week?
- What kinds of things does your family do that you would like your child to be part of?
- What questions do you have about how your child is doing, or what you would like your child to do?