

Tips for Providing Services in Natural Environments

- ❖ Natural environments can be anywhere a child lives, learns and plays. Open your mind to the learning possibilities inherent in many naturally occurring situations and activities.
- ❖ Remember that you are a guest in the family's home, the daycare, etc., and conduct yourself accordingly.
- ❖ Consider the needs of all who are the potential learners in the child's environment (e.g., mom, dad, grandmom, babysitter, daycare provider, brother, sister, etc.) as well as the child's needs.
- ❖ Be flexible and consider options – get a feel for the environment, culture, lifestyle, etc., and respect each family's individual differences.
- ❖ Services should initiate from the family/child needs, not from the professional's evaluation data.
- ❖ Children learn best during naturally occurring situations rather than from imposed structured situations – try to train families to take advantage of natural opportunities during functional daily routines to apply therapeutic strategies. Recommendations should not interfere with natural routines but should enhance them.
- ❖ Don't assume that skills learned by a young child in one environment will easily generalize to another environment.
- ❖ Follow the child's lead during activities to encourage optimal learning. Your plans should be a guide, not rigid and dogmatic.
- ❖ Think of yourself more as a teacher and family coach than as a provider of direct service to the child.
- ❖ Use a lot of demonstration and hand-over-hand modeling of activities with the adult learners to ensure that they are comfortable repeating activities with the child.
- ❖ Help families get the technology supports they need to make the most of the natural environment (e.g., adaptive positioning equipment, adapted toys, communication devices, etc.) and be sure they know how to use them.
- ❖ Listen to what families/caregivers are telling you and encourage sharing of information and questioning. If you are not sure you are being understood, give examples and ask the individual to restate it to you in some format.
- ❖ Work together as a team with family members, educators, and others providing services to the family – share information and don't be afraid to give up some territory to another as long as you have ensured they have the skills needed to perform without you.

- ❖ Learning should be fun for all involved – keep a sense of humor and revisit the child in you as you work with families.

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More resources can be found on the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center's website: www.nectac.org

Key Principles and Practices for Providing Early Intervention Services in Natural Environments:

<http://www.nectac.org/topics/natenv/natenv.asp>