

SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATING WITH FAMILIES

✓ **Listening Skills**

Focusing and following what a family member has to say (hearing the main idea)

✓ **Reflecting Feelings**

The ability to accurately and sensitively identify and reflect a family member's feelings (Sometimes asking questions to be sure that you understand what the family member means and how the family member feels)

✓ **Reflecting Content**

The ability to restate the content of a family member's message briefly and concisely (Use of "I" statements)

✓ **Effective Questioning**

Structuring questions in a way that promotes and understanding of the family (assessment) and decision making (goal setting) (Use open ended questions so as to not direct a family member's response)

Top Ten Lessons PARENTS Would Like Professionals to Know

1. Please don't use unexplained terms or acronyms. (An *acronym* is the use of the first letter of each word of a term that has several words, like "CP" for Cerebral Palsy)
2. Don't make decisions in isolation. Please consider the emotional, financial and time constraints we face, the other treatments we receive and the activities with which we are involved.
3. Please keep the feeling of control in our hands. Allow us the opportunity to consider options without judgment or pressure. Don't determine what is helpful without me.
4. Don't give me borrowed moments of time. When we have scheduled meetings, please give us your undivided attention. Sit down with us in a private place, don't accept phone calls, and give us a chance to talk with you. Please return my phone call- even if it is through a colleague to tell me you will get back to me.
5. Consider the ways I might cope with my child's problems. Do not make judgments but show me courtesy and respect. Please don't label me as non-compliant. Look behind the reasons I am not able to do what you think I should do.
6. Don't ask me to sign anything without thoroughly explaining what the form contains and giving me time to consult with my family. Please protect my confidentiality and anonymity. Do not talk about other families in my presence.
7. Allow me to keep searching for an answer. Allow me to suspend my search.
8. Make it safe for me to show you or tell you that sometimes I wish I could escape, that sometimes I am angry at myself, my child, my mate, my life, the world, God, or anybody else who doesn't feel what I do.
9. Please don't tell me that my child's handicap is a "gift". While I may come to understand the ways my family will grow, it is still a loss. Please allow me to tell you what my dreams and wishes were for my child- and please give me time to build new ones.
10. Make me feel like I know my child best. Ask my advice, opinion, thoughts and feelings. Let me teach you a thing or two!

Gerard Costa, Ph.D. (March, 1998)