Providing Culturally Effective, Family-Centered Care

Pediatricians have long been an important first resource for parents who are worried about their children’s behavioral problems, and today psychosocial problems are the most common chronic condition leading to pediatric visits, eclipsing asthma and heart disease. Given the increase in pediatric visits centered on psychosocial issues, the need for the provision of culturally effective, family-centered care becomes more evident. Following are the 10 elements of culturally effective, family-centered pediatric mental health care adapted from the National Center of Medical Home Initiatives for Children with Special Needs1 Every Child Deserves a Medical Home training program:

Element 1: Recognize the family as the constant in the child's life. Health care providers may change over time.

- Inquire of the family whom they consider to be key family members.
- When convening meetings with the family, encourage them to bring those key family members.
- Ask families about their cultural beliefs and practices related to family, health, mental health, and well-being.
- Identify family routines.
- Recognize the expertise of families; listen to their ideas and opinions.
- Ask families what information they feel they need to know to care for their child.
- Invest time in sharing information with families to build or enhance their knowledge and skill related to mental health and emotional well-being of their child.
- Work together with the family to develop a care plan that matches the family’s culture, preferences, strengths, needs, concerns, and resources.
- Recognize the family as the chief decision maker; be available to assist in the decision-making process.

Element 2: Facilitate family and professional collaboration at all levels in health care.

- Take the time to build trust and forge relationships with families.
- Allow families to share their understanding about emotional well-being; remember that for many cultural groups, there is a stigma attached to mental illness.
- Listen to families and follow their lead.
- Be accessible to families; make sure that families feel comfortable enough to communicate concerns about their child's behavior or temperament with you.
- Build confidence in families, and tell them often what they do well.
- Remember that advocacy may be a new concept for some families; support families where they are in their process of becoming an advocate for their child.
- Offer families a range of options in keeping with their cultural beliefs and practices, resources, and energy; this can lead to win-win solutions.
- Ask families how you can assist them in their development as keepers of information or historians.
- Support families in their role as care coordinators; provide information and resource materials that are easily understood and family friendly.
- Invite families to work with you in designing, implementing, and evaluating a care plan that meets their cultural and linguistic preferences and needs of their child and family.

Element 3: Honor the diversity of families.

- Create an inviting atmosphere in your office by using artwork or artifacts that reflect the cultural diversity of the community you serve.
- Provide interpretation services for families that prefer or require language assistance.
- Ensure that forms and legally binding documents are available in the languages spoken by the families you serve; informational and educational materials should be available in multiple languages as appropriate.
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- Be open to learning about the culture of the families within the community that you serve; listen to your patients and ask questions.
- Be aware of your own values, beliefs, and biases and how they shape your actions and decisions.
- Be mindful of your nonverbal communication style; be aware of what you communicate nonverbally to families and vice versa.
- Ask families about their use of homeopathic or alternative practices to address mental health or emotional well-being.
- Be open-minded and nonjudgmental; this can help families to feel comfortable being more open with you.
- Respect family’s cultural values and beliefs, including interest in homeopathic or alternative remedies.
- Provide a safe environment for staff to discuss and explore issues related to diversity and cultural effectiveness; whenever possible, offer staff information and training on cultural effectiveness.
- Offer staff opportunities to conduct individualized culturally effective self-assessment processes as a way to increase their awareness, knowledge, and skills in cultural effectiveness.

**Element 4: Recognize family strengths.**

- Ask families about what they perceive to be their strengths as they relate to their child’s behavior, temperament, and emotional well-being.
- Identify family strengths in other areas including cultural and spiritual views, connection to natural networks of support, and community-based support systems.
- Consider using the following questions to stimulate conversation with families addressing their child’s behavior, temperament, or emotional well-being:
  - Do you have concerns about your child’s current behavior, temperament, or emotional well-being?
  - What are those concerns?
  - In your opinion, what are some of the things that bother your child?
  - What happens to make your child’s behavior, attitude, or mood change?
  - Are there special times in the day when you notice your child becoming upset?
  - How do you approach your child when he or she becomes upset or when behavior changes?
  - In your opinion, what has worked in the past? Is it working now?
  - How can I help you with the current situation?
- Be careful with asking questions that might be construed as blame.
- With the family, collaboratively design a care plan that maximizes the family’s strengths and resiliency.

**Element 5: Share complete and unbiased information.**

- Encourage families to write down questions and information before arriving for office visits.
- Speak clearly and explain terms that may be unfamiliar to the family or may not translate easily into another language.
- Make sure that families understand your suggestions for treatment options or referral services before they leave your office; provide them with written information or assist them with note taking when appropriate.
- Offer opinions, but be sure the family understands all options.
- Ask the family to repeat information or instructions given to ensure that they completely understand and are able to follow next steps.
- Invite questions and expressions of concern.
- Provide videotapes, audiotapes, or illustrations when possible to supplement verbal or written information for families that may have literacy concerns.
- Be available for follow-up discussions.
- Schedule adequate time to talk with families about mental health issues, especially when working in conjunction with a sign language or foreign language interpreter.
- Be aware of the complexities of working with an interpreter within a behavioral health setting; the interpreter in this setting must have specialized knowledge and skills.
Element 6: Promote family-to-family support and networking.

- Be sensitive to family needs, including the need for support; recognize that how support is given and received is culturally based.
- Validate the value of family-to-family support.
- Provide information about resources that are family friendly and culturally and linguistically competent.
- Be informed about community-based supports; recognize that some families may be more or less comfortable with being part of a support group.
- Understand that for some cultural groups, the traditional approaches of support groups may not meet their needs; some may prefer support groups that meet around sporting or crafting activities; others may prefer gender-specific support opportunities.
- Recognize the child's need for support; be prepared for varied levels of parental comfort with the idea of their child's participation in support groups for children.
- Recognize and be prepared to offer information to extended family members who may also benefit from some form of support.

Element 7: Incorporate developmental and behavioral needs.

- Ask questions about developmental and behavioral issues at each visit; be prepared for differing views and perceptions about behavior, child development, and milestone attainment.
- Listen for family concerns about stigma, past experiences with developmental or behavioral issues, and the use of complementary therapies.
- Be prepared to address stigma associated with behavioral or emotional well-being, and differences among family members about perceived needs and interest in help-seeking behaviors.
- Conduct developmental and behavioral surveillance and appropriate screenings.
- Assist families in understanding and supporting the developmental and behavioral needs of their children.
- Develop relationships with referral sources, including developmental specialists, behavioral health professionals, and agencies providing support services.

Element 8: Implement comprehensive policies and programs.

- Become informed about special education programs and services, and mental health and substance abuse services.
- Make certain that treatment is adapted and adjusted for the developmental stage of the child and the culture of the family.
- Encourage family advocacy; meet the family where it is in its process of becoming advocates; remember that advocacy is a cultural construct with which some families may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable.
- Encourage families to model self-advocacy skills for their child within their cultural context.
- Design office space to accommodate developmental needs of children.
- Plan for and support developmental transitions; be prepared to assist families to make accommodations for their child as he or she moves from one developmental stage to the next.

- Ask families for their preferences and needs for services and supports (a checklist can help).
- Inform families of behavioral or mental health programs and resources that are in keeping with their cultural beliefs, practices, preferences, and needs.
- Maintain a stock of brochures and applications for referral services and community resources that are available in the languages of the community you serve. Develop a resource library on behavioral and mental health topics for families and children.
- Consider the possibility of inviting families to become part of a parent advisory group to assist in designing and implementing care, services, and programs; ensure representation across the ethnic and cultural groups of your community.
Element 9: Design accessible health care systems that are flexible, culturally effective, and responsive to family needs.

- Be available (e.g., flexible hours, evening and weekend hours).
- Consider transportation needs and options for families who are seeking care.
- Eliminate financial barriers to the greatest extent possible (e.g., flexible payment options) and assist families to apply for services such as Medicaid, State Children’s Health Insurance Program, Supplemental Security Income, Title V, or public mental health programs.
- Remember that many families may be of mixed documentation status (i.e., parents may not be eligible for public health services, but their children, who in many cases are US citizens, are eligible) and therefore may be less inclined to apply for public health or mental health services.
- Use community-based care coordination services to help families gain access to needed community-based services.

Element 10: Family-professional collaboration.

- Acknowledge that the development of trust is an integral part of a collaborative relationship.
- Promote a relationship in which family members and professionals work together to ensure the best services for the child and family.
- Facilitate open communication so that families and professionals feel free to express their concerns about medical and psychosocial issues.
- Recognize that negotiation is essential in a collaborative relationship.
- Recognize and respect the knowledge, skills, and experience that families and professionals bring to the relationship.
- Identify and acknowledge differences of opinion among family members about the child’s needs and approaches to care.
- Create an atmosphere in which the cultural traditions, values, and diversity of families are acknowledged and honored.
- Demonstrate mutual respect for each others’ culture, values, traditions, opinions, and ideas.
- Recognize and adapt to the family’s level of readiness to address a problem, accept a type of treatment, or change a behavior.
- Express interest in collaborating with other health care providers who are involved in the child and family’s care.
- Communicate the expectation of a continuing relationship with the child and family when the child is referred for behavioral or subspecialty care.

Reference