

# **New Assessment:** Early Childhood Resources

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## **Tips for Writing Family-Centered Reports**

**Describe the child.** Help the reader see the child as a person with a personality, likes and dislikes. Parents hate to see their children defined by their disabilities.

**Be aware of the mental picture your words create.** How would you feel if your family was described with those words? Use respectful language. Say something positive. Think about your employee performance appraisal. How would you feel if the review neglected your strengths and accomplishments and focused on the areas where you needed improvement? Include some of the things a child CAN do. Note some things the family is doing right. Parents often feel guilty and need assurance that they are good parents. All families and all children have strengths if you look for them.

**Include only family information that is relevant.** For example, the presence or absence of a parent may be relevant to the child's disability; the parents' marital status is not. Avoid making judgements.

**Use words you knew before you studied education.** Jargon can mean different things in different professions. The parent may not understand what is being written about the child and hesitate to ask for clarification for fear of appearing ignorant. Some parents view jargon as "being uppity" which can interfere with parent professional partnerships. When jargon is unavoidable, include an explanation. Do not assume the parent knows what fine motor vs. gross motor and expressive vs. receptive speech are.

**Medical reports are a painful review of history for the parent.** It may be less painful if you discuss the reasons such reports are necessary with the parents beforehand.

**Include parent report.** Ask if the child's performance seemed typical. If not, give an explanation in your report. If the parent tells you the child has a skill which the child does not display during the assessment, include that in your report. For example, "Katherine did not identify colors; however, Mrs. Brittain reports that Katherine can select the proper crayon when asked for a particular color at home." If the child is working on a skill such as toileting but has not yet mastered it, say the child is working towards the skill rather than the child lacks it.

## **Family-Centered Report Writing**

Read the following examples and consider the implications of presenting essentially the same information in different ways:

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**Example A:** Mary lives with both parents. Her father is frequently absent from the home. Her mother is unemployed.

**Example B:** Mary lives with both parents. Mr. Smith's work requires that he travel. Mrs. Smith stays home to care for Mary.

\*\*"Tips for Family-Centered Report Writing" and "Examples A and B" are reprinted with permission from Elisabeth J. (Hansi) Brittain.

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**Suggest Activity:**

Take a "traditionally written" report and review it from the standpoint of "Tips for Writing".

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