



Early Childhood Intervention Competency Checklists

Nicole Roper
Carl J. Dunst

This *CASEtool* includes a description of the development and use of practitioner competency checklists for assessing the use of evidence-based early childhood intervention and family support program practices. Four checklists are included: *Everyday Child Learning Opportunities Checklist*, *Parenting Supports Checklist*, *Family and Community Resources and Supports Checklist*, and *Family-Centered Helping Practices Checklist*. The checklists are used by a supervisor or mentor to make observations of a practitioner working with a family, assess the use of evidence-based practices, and together with a practitioner, develop a plan to improve practitioner performance.

INTRODUCTION

This *CASEtool* includes a description of the development and use of the *Early Childhood Intervention Competency Checklists*. The checklists include practice indicators for assessing the extent to which practitioners are intervening with young children and their caregivers in ways consistent with an integrated model of early childhood intervention and family support (Dunst, 2004, 2005a, 2005b). The paper includes four sections: (1) an operational definition of early childhood intervention and family support, (2) an overview of the integrated framework that was used to develop the competency checklist indicators, (3) a description of the operational foundations of the checklists, and (4) an explanation of how the checklists are used to both assess practitioner performance and develop a plan for improving practices more consistent with the checklist indicators.

DEFINITION OF EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION AND FAMILY SUPPORT

The integrated framework guiding the development of the *CASEtool* checklists includes a broad-based, social systems definition of early childhood intervention and family support that considers both formal and informal experiences and opportunities as child, parent, and family interventions. Early childhood intervention and family support is defined as the *provision of support and resources to families of young children from members of informal and formal social network members that both directly and indirectly influence child, parent, and family functioning*. The kinds of supports and resources, and the experiences and opportunities afforded by social network members, are seen as the processes (practices, interventions, etc.) used to produce desired benefits. The

CASEtools is an electronic publication of the Center for the Advanced Study of Excellence in Early Childhood and Family Support Practices, Family, Infant and Preschool Program, J. Iverson Riddle Developmental Center, Morganton, NC. CASE is an applied research center focusing on the characteristics of evidence-based practices and methods for promoting utilization of practices informed by research.

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outcomes from afforded experiences and opportunities include, but are not limited to, a range of child, parent, and family capacity building consequences.

INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK

The integrated framework for practicing early childhood intervention and family support is shown in Figure 1. The model includes four major practice elements (children's learning opportunities, parenting supports, family/community resources, and family-centered practices) and three intersecting practice elements (everyday activity settings, parenting interactional styles, and participatory parenting opportunities). Interventions aimed at influencing learning and development using the different kinds of practices implemented in a family-centered manner (Dunst, 1995, 1997, 2002) are seen as the way of insuring that the *experiences and opportunities* afforded children, parents, and families have competency enhancing and capacity building consequences (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1994a; Wilson, Holbert, & Sexton, 2006).

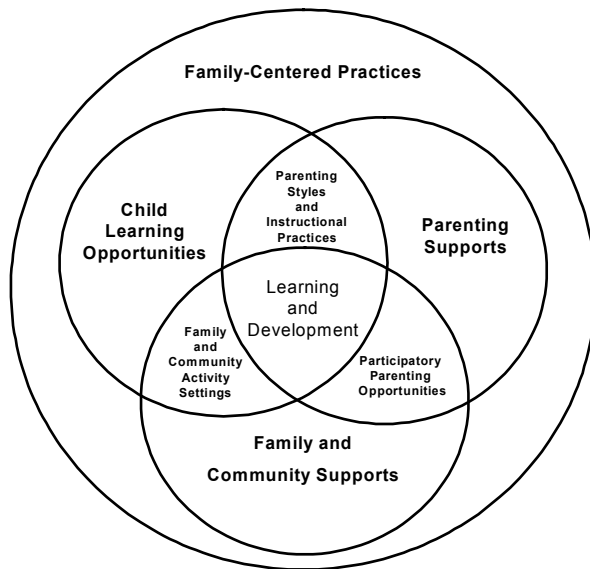


Figure 1. Key components of an evidence-based, ecological integrated framework of early childhood intervention and family support.

Child Learning Opportunities

Insuring that children experience development-enhancing learning opportunities is the main focus of the child learning component of the integrated framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). Development-enhancing child learning opportunities are ones that are interesting, engaging, and competency producing, and which result in a child's sense of mastery about his or her capabilities

(e.g., Dunst et al., 2001). These kinds of learning opportunities include activities that provide children contexts for interest and competence expression and that encourage exploration and the development of a sense of accomplishment. Additional information about these kinds of learning experiences are described in Raab (2005).

Parenting Supports

The purpose of interventions in the parenting supports component of the integrated framework is to reinforce existing parenting abilities, provide opportunities to acquire new parenting knowledge and skills, and strengthen parenting confidence and competence (e.g., Dunst, 2001). Parenting supports include the information, advice, guidance, etc. that both strengthen existing parenting knowledge and skills and promote acquisition of new competencies necessary for parents to carry out child rearing responsibilities and provide their child(ren) development-enhancing learning opportunities. The reader is referred to Wilson (2005) for sources of information on capacity building parenting supports.

Family and Community Supports

The focus of interventions in the family and community supports component of the integrated framework is to insure that parents have the supports and resources necessary for them to have the time and both physical and psychological energy to engage in child rearing responsibilities and parenting activities. Family and community supports include any number and type of intrafamily, informal, community, and formal resources needed by parents to engage in parenting and child-rearing activities (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1994b). We now know that the kinds of resources and supports parents find helpful, and how they are provided to parents, matters a great deal if the supports and resources are to have capacity building consequences (Dunst & Trivette, 2001; Mott, 2005). The reader is referred to Trivette et al. (1997) for a description of the key features of the approach used to provide and promote the provision of supports and resources consistent with the integrated framework.

Family-Centered Helpgiving

The focus of interventions in the family-centered helpgiving component of the integrated framework is the active engagement of parents and other family members in obtaining desired resources and achieving family-identified goals. Family-centered practices place families in central and pivotal roles in decisions and actions involving child, parent, and family/community resources that strengthen existing capabilities and promote child, parent and family competence (Dunst, 1995, 1997). Findings from our research has consistently shown that parents' active participation in procuring desired supports and resources is associated with a greater sense

of personal control (Dunst, Trivette, & Hamby, 2006a, 2006b; Trivette & Dunst, 1998) which in turn has positive consequences in a number of areas of parent, family, and child functioning. The reader is referred to Dunst (1997) for a detailed description of the key characteristics of family-centered helping practices.

FOUNDATIONS OF THE CHECKLISTS

The *Early Childhood Competency Checklists* were developed using the integrated framework described above for operationalizing practices mirroring converging research evidence about early childhood intervention and family support practices that have competency-enhancing consequences. The checklists include the: *Everyday Child Learning Opportunities Checklist*, *Parenting Supports Checklist*, *Family and Community Resources and Supports Checklist*, and *Family-Centered Helping Practices Checklist*. Copies of the checklists are included in the appendix.

The four checklists emphasize practitioners' ability to actively engage parents in the use of practices that have positive child, parent, and family benefits. The majority of the checklist items were selected from existing scales and checklists (Mott, 2006; Raab & Dunst, 2006; Raab, Roper, Dunst, Humphries, & Clark, 2002; Raab, Swanson, Roper, & Dunst, 2006; Wilson & Dunst, 2004; Wilson & Dunst, 2006). The items were reworded in terms of what a practitioner can do to support and strengthen parent capacity to provide their children development-enhancing child learning opportunities, obtain parenting supports, and procure family supports and resources.

The checklists are mainly designed as supervisory or mentor observation and assessment tools. The checklists are administered following a four step sequence: (1) Preplanning meeting between an observer and practitioner, (2) observation of a practitioner by a supervisor or mentor, (3) review and feedback of the checklist observations, and (4) the development of a joint plan to improve practitioner use of the checklist indicators.

Each checklist item is scored: 1 = *Yes*, practice is used (parent demonstrates the use of the indicators or provides actual examples of practices consistent with the indicators), 2 = *Not used* (missed opportunity to use the practices), and 3 = *No Opportunity* to observe or no examples of the practice provided. The checklists include space for making three separate observations and ratings of a practitioner's ability to promote a parent's use of the practices. Changes in the ratings across the three observations are used to determine if improvements were made as a result of using the checklist administration procedures.

Preplanning Meeting

Start by choosing the particular checklist and planning sheet that will be the focus of the assessment of prac-

itioner parent capacity building. A practitioner should plan together with a supervisor or mentor an observation of himself or herself on a home visit or during a group activity. The preplanning meeting should include a summary of what the practitioner is planning for the upcoming family interaction, including how the family will be actively engaged in the use of the checklist practices.

Observation

During the home or group activity, the observer should use the checklist to record examples of the indicators and/or missed opportunities to engage the parents in the use of the checklist practices. The rating scale (*Yes*, *Not Used*, *No Opportunity*) should be used for assessing practitioner use of each practice indicator. A rating of one (*Yes*) is only given if the parent or caregiver is actively demonstrating the practice or is describing actual examples of how they have used the practice.

Review and Feedback

A debriefing should occur as soon as possible following the observation. The observer should share the completed checklist with the practitioner. Both consistencies and inconsistencies should be noted, and the planning sheet on the back of each checklist should be used (if appropriate) to plan how the practitioner will address inconsistencies noted during the observation period and how the practitioner will promote parents' active use of the practices on future visits. The observer should use the same checklist and make at least three observations of the practitioner in order to assess changes in the practitioner's use of the targeted skills and abilities with a single family/caregiver.

Active Engagement Plan

The information obtained from the observation and on the checklist should be used to identify those practices that are in need of improvement (in terms of promoting parents' engagement in the practices) and for developing a plan for providing a practitioner the experiences and opportunities needed to increase parents' active use of the practices. The engagement plan should be reviewed periodically to assess progress toward improving targeted practices and for modifying or changing the plan as necessary.

CONCLUSION

This *CASEtool* included a description of the development and use of checklists for assessing early childhood practitioner use of practices for supporting and strengthening parents' abilities to provide their children development-enhancing learning opportunities, obtain parenting supports, and procure family supports and resources. The four checklists were designed so to include key practice indicators of an integrated model of early

childhood intervention and family support (Dunst, 2004, 2005a).

The integrated model places primary emphasis on practitioner use of intervention practices that have capacity-building characteristics and consequences (Dunst et al., 1994a; Wilson, 2005). Practitioner reflection on his or her practices is a necessary and ongoing activity as part of using evidence-based practices (Barnett, 1995; Wesley & Buysse, 2001). Therefore, the checklists should prove useful for assessing practitioner use of evidence-based capacity building practices and for both reinforcing use of desired practices and developing a plan for improving the use of practices not or infrequently used in interactions with families.

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AUTHORS

Nicole Roper, Ed.D. was Senior Research Associate, Center for the Advanced Study of Excellence in Early Childhood and Family Support Practices, J. Iverson Riddle Developmental Center, Morganton, North Carolina, at the time the CASEtool checklists were developed. She is currently Associate Research Scientist, Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute, Morganton, North Carolina. Carl J. Dunst, Ph.D. is Director, Center for the Advanced Study of Excellence in Early Childhood and Family Support Practices, J. Iverson Riddle Developmental Center, Morganton, North Carolina, and Research Scientist, Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute, Asheville, North Carolina.

Appendix A

Early Childhood Intervention Competency Checklists

Nicole Roper Carl J. Dunst

Practitioner Name _____ Date _____

Checklists Description

The *Early Childhood Intervention Competency Checklists* were developed using an integrated framework (Dunst, 2005) for operationalizing practices mirroring converging research evidence about early childhood intervention and family support practices that support and strengthen parenting competence and confidence. The four checklists emphasize practitioners' ability to actively engage parents in the use of practices that lead to optimal, positive child, parent, and family benefits. The checklists can be used for self-assessment purposes but were mainly designed as peer or supervisory observation and assessment tools to be used on multiple occasions. The checklists include the: *Everyday Child Learning Opportunities Checklist*, *Parenting Supports Checklist*, *Family and Community Resources and Supports Checklist*, and *Family-Centered Helping Practices Checklist*.

Using the Early Childhood Intervention Competency Checklists

Step 1: Print the particular checklist and planning sheet that will be the focus of the assessment of practitioner capacity building. Together with a peer or a supervisor, a practitioner should plan an observation of himself or herself on a home visit or during a group activity. The preplanning meeting should include a summary of what the practitioner is planning for the upcoming family interaction, including how the family will be actively engaged in the use of the practices.

Step 2: During the home or group activity, the observer should use the checklists to record examples of the indicators and/or missed opportunities to engage the parents in the use of the practices. The rating scale at the top of each checklist should be used for assessing each practice indicator. A rating of one is only achieved if the parent or caregiver is actively demonstrating the practice or is describing actual examples of how they have used the practice. Space is provided to make up to three sets of ratings.

Step 3: A debriefing should occur immediately following the observation. The observer should share the completed checklists with the practitioner. Consistencies should be highlighted and the planning sheet on the back of each checklist should be used (if appropriate) to plan how the practitioner will address inconsistencies noted during the observation period and how the practitioner will promote parents active use of the practices on future visits. The observer should use the same checklist and make at least three observations of the practitioner in order to capture a complete picture of the practitioner's skills and abilities with a single family/caregiver. Space is provided on the Active Engagement Plan to revise and update the steps taken to improve practitioner capacity.

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Dunst, C. J. (2005). Framework for practicing evidence-based early childhood intervention and family support. *CASEinPoint*, 1(1), 1-11. Available at http://www.fippcase.org/caseinpoint/caseinpoint_vol1_no1.pdf

Everyday Child Learning Opportunities Checklist

Nicole Roper

Carl J. Dunst

Practitioner _____

Context _____

Observer/Coach _____

Date(s) _____

This checklist includes key practice indicators for supporting and strengthening parents' use of everyday family and community activities as sources of interest-based child learning opportunities. The checklist is used by a supervisor or mentor together with a practitioner to assess the use of the practice indicators and to plan and implement strategies for promoting practitioner use of the practices. The reverse side of the checklist includes a planning sheet for improving practitioner's use of the practices.

RATING SCALE: 1=Yes, practice is used; parent demonstrates use of indicators or provides actual examples consistent with the indicators, 2=Not used, missed opportunities, and 3=No opportunities to observe.

	Practice	Rating	Comment/Example
Everyday Child Learning Opportunities Checklist	1	Practitioner actively engages parent in using everyday family and community activities as the contexts for child learning	1 2 3
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
	2	Practitioner actively engages parent in using everyday activities as the contexts for child interest expression and the development of new child competence	1 2 3
			1 2 3
			1 2 3
	3	Practitioner actively engages parent in using everyday child learning activities that are interest- and asset-based	1 2 3
			1 2 3
			1 2 3
	4	Practitioner actively engages parent in providing everyday activities including people, materials, and objects that invite and sustain competence production	1 2 3
1 2 3			
1 2 3			
5	Practitioner actively engages parent in providing everyday learning opportunities that are child-initiated and child-directed	1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
6	Practitioner actively engages parent in increasing the variety and frequency of their child's involvement in interest-based everyday learning activities	1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
7	Practitioner actively engages the parent in using everyday learning activities that provide opportunities for practicing existing abilities and learning new skills	1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
8	The practitioner actively engages the parent in using naturally occurring reinforcing consequences for the child's use of interactive competencies	1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
9	Practitioner actively engages the parents in using highly responsive and minimally directive interactive styles to support everyday child learning	1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
10	Practitioner prompts/supports parent reflection on the characteristics and consequences of interest-based everyday child learning opportunities	1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	

Everyday Child Learning Opportunities Checklist

Active Engagement Plan

Using the information obtained from the *Everyday Child Learning Opportunities Checklist*, identify those practices that are in need of improvement (promoting parents' engagement in the practices) and develop a plan for providing a practitioner the experiences and opportunities to increase parents' active use of the practices. For more information on everyday child learning opportunities see:

Raab, M., & Dunst, C. J. (2006). Checklists for promoting parent-mediated everyday child learning opportunities. *CASEtools*, 2(1), 1-9. Available at http://www.fippcase.org/casetools/casetools_vol2_no1.pdf

DATE:

What other knowledge and/or experiences do I need to change or improve my practice?

How will I actively engage parent(s) in the use of the practice on the next home visit?

DATE:

What other knowledge and/or experiences do I need to change or improve my practice?

How will I actively engage parent(s) in the use of the practice on the next home visit?

DATE:

What other knowledge and/or experiences do I need to change or improve my practice?

How will I actively engage parent(s) in the use of the practice on the next home visit?

Parenting Supports Checklists

Nicole Roper

Carl J. Dunst

Practitioner _____

Context _____

Observer/Coach _____

Date(s) _____

This checklist includes key practice indicators for supporting and strengthening parents' use of everyday family and community resources and supports for achieving desired outcomes. The checklist is used by a supervisor or mentor together with a practitioner to assess the use of the practice indicators and to plan and implement strategies for promoting practitioner use of the key indicators. The reverse side of the checklist includes a planning sheet for improving practitioner's use of the practices.

RATING SCALE: 1=Yes, practice is used; parent demonstrates use of indicators or provides actual examples consistent with the indicators, 2=Not used, missed opportunities, and 3=No opportunities to observe.

		Practice	Rating	Comment/Example
Parenting Supports Checklist	1	Practitioner recognizes and acknowledges existing parenting beliefs, knowledge, and skills as a part of providing parenting supports	1 2 3	
			1 2 3	
			1 2 3	
	2	Practitioner actively engages parent in the identification of information, advice, guidance, etc., needed for strengthening existing and learning new childrearing skills	1 2 3	
			1 2 3	
			1 2 3	
	3	Practitioner promotes parents use of complete, accurate, and unbiased information for supporting and strengthening parenting knowledge and skills	1 2 3	
			1 2 3	
			1 2 3	
	4	Practitioner promotes parents use of participatory parenting opportunities emphasizing active participation that supports existing parenting skills and promotes the acquisition of new parenting skills	1 2 3	
			1 2 3	
			1 2 3	
	5	A major focus of the practitioner practices is promoting parents' understanding and use of responsive and supportive parenting styles	1 2 3	
			1 2 3	
			1 2 3	
	6	Practitioner actively engages parent in reflections on the effectiveness of new parenting practices as well as the usefulness of participatory opportunities for strengthening parenting knowledge and skills	1 2 3	
			1 2 3	
			1 2 3	

Parenting Supports Checklist

Active Engagement Plan

Using the information obtained from the *Parenting Supports Checklist*, identify those practices that are in need of improvement (promoting parents engagement in the practices) and develop a plan for providing a practitioner the experiences and opportunities to increase parents' active use of the practices. For more information about parenting supports see:

Wilson, L. L. (2005). Characteristics and consequences of capacity-building parenting supports. *CASEmakers, 1*(4), 1-3. Available at http://www.fippcase.org/casemakers/casemakers_vol1_no4.pdf

DATE:

What other knowledge and/or experiences do I need to change or improve my practice?

How will I actively engage parent(s) in the use of the practice on the next home visit?

DATE:

What other knowledge and/or experiences do I need to change or improve my practice?

How will I actively engage parent(s) in the use of the practice on the next home visit?

DATE:

What other knowledge and/or experiences do I need to change or improve my practice?

How will I actively engage parent(s) in the use of the practice on the next home visit?

Family and Community Resources and Supports Checklist

Nicole Roper

Carl J. Dunst

Practitioner _____

Context _____

Observer/Coach _____

Date(s) _____

This checklist includes key practice indicators for supporting and strengthening parents' use of everyday family and community resources and supports for achieving desired outcomes. The checklist is used by a supervisor or mentor together with a practitioner to assess the use of the practice indicators and to plan and implement strategies for promoting practitioner use of the key indicators. The reverse side of the checklist includes a planning sheet for improving practitioner's use of the practices.

RATING SCALE: 1=Yes, practice is used; parent demonstrates use of indicators or provides actual examples consistent with the indicators, 2=Not used, missed opportunities, and 3=No opportunities to observe.

	Practice	Rating	Comment/Example
Family and Community Resources and Supports Checklist	1	Practitioner actively engages parent in identifying different possible supports and resources that match family needs and interests	1 2 3
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
	2	Practitioner actively engages parent in the identification of supports and resources needed to carry out parenting responsibilities	1 2 3
			1 2 3
			1 2 3
	3	Practitioner actively engages parent in considering formal and informal social supports options for achieving desired outcomes	1 2 3
			1 2 3
			1 2 3
	4	Practitioner actively engages parent in identifying and using community resources as supports for achieving desired outcomes	1 2 3
1 2 3			
1 2 3			
5	Practitioner actively engages parent in evaluating the financial and psychological costs and benefits of different support options as part of selecting desired supports	1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
6	Practitioner actively engages parent in developing a plan for mobilizing desired supports and resources	1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
7	Practitioner actively engages parenting in assigning self and others responsibilities for obtaining resources	1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
8	Practitioner promotes use of existing parent and family abilities for obtaining desired resources	1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
9	Practitioner uses participatory opportunities with the parents to actively involve them in learning new skills for purposes of mobilization or provision of desired resources	1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
10	Practitioner actively engages parent in the evaluation of resource and support procurement to determine their usefulness for achieving desired outcomes	1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	

Family and Community Resources and Supports Checklist

Active Engagement Plan

Using the information obtained from administering the *Family and Community Resources and Supports Checklist*, identify those practices that are in need of improvement (promoting parents engagement in the practices) and develop a plan for providing a practitioner the experiences and opportunities to increase parents' active use of the practices. For more indepth information on resource-based practices see:

Mott, D. W. (2006). Checklists for measuring adherence to resource-based intervention practices. *CASEtools*, 2(3), 1-8. Available at http://www.fippcase.org/casetools/casetools_vol2_no3.pdf

DATE:

What other knowledge and/or experiences do I need to change or improve my practice?

How will I actively engage parent(s) in the use of the practice on the next home visit?

DATE:

What other knowledge and/or experiences do I need to change or improve my practice?

How will I actively engage parent(s) in the use of the practice on the next home visit?

DATE:

What other knowledge and/or experiences do I need to change or improve my practice?

How will I actively engage parent(s) in the use of the practice on the next home visit?

Family-Centered Helpgiving Practices Checklist

Nicole Roper

Carl J. Dunst

Practitioner _____

Context _____

Observer/Coach _____

Date(s) _____

This checklist includes key practice indicators for supporting and strengthening parents' use of everyday family and community resources and supports for achieving desired outcomes. The checklist is used by a supervisor or mentor together with a practitioner to assess the use of the practice indicators and to plan and implement strategies for promoting practitioner use of the key indicators. The reverse side of the checklist includes a planning sheet for improving practitioner's use of the practices.

RATING SCALE: 1=Yes, practice is used consistently, 2=Not used consistently, missed opportunities, and 3=No opportunities to observe.

	Practice	Rating	Comment/Example
Family-Centered Helpgiving Practices Checklist	1	Practitioner is responsive to the parents' interests, concerns, and needs	1 2 3
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
	2	Practitioner reflects on parents' concerns and asks for clarification	1 2 3
			1 2 3
			1 2 3
	3	Practitioner demonstrates warm and caring attitude and behavior toward parents	1 2 3
			1 2 3
			1 2 3
	4	Practitioner explicitly focuses on and acknowledges parent and family strengths	1 2 3
			1 2 3
			1 2 3
5	Practitioner uses parent and family strengths as the basis for identifying desired outcomes	1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
6	Practitioner is nonjudgmental in terms of personal, family, or cultural differences and preferences	1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
7	Practitioner and parent discuss choices for meeting needs and the implications of different options	1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
8	Practitioner supports parent choice and decision making about options	1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
9	Practitioner uses parents' strengths for deciding course of action to achieve desired outcomes	1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
10	Practitioner actively involves parent in carrying out any identified course of action	1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
11	Practitioner demonstrates flexibility and responsiveness to family situation	1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
12	Parent and practitioner reflect on and evaluate achievements and accomplishments	1 2 3	
		1 2 3	
		1 2 3	

Family-Centered Helpgiving Practices Checklist

Quality Improvement Plan

Using the information obtained from the *Family-Centered Helpgiving Checklist*, identify those practices that are considered in need of improvement (for promoting parents use of the practices) and develop a plan for providing a practitioner the experiences and opportunities to increase the use of the practices. For more information about family-centered practices see:

Wilson, L. L., & Dunst, C. J. (2006). Checklist for assessing adherence to family-centered practices. *CASEtools, 1*(1), 1-6. Available at http://www.fippcase.org/casetools/casetools_vol1_no1.pdf

DATE:

What other knowledge and/or experiences do I need to improve or change?

Plan for using new knowledge/skills on next home visit...

DATE:

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