Checklists for Implementing a Primary-Coach Approach to Teaming

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This *CASE*tool includes a description of the development and use of *Checklists for Implementing a Primary-Coach Approach to Teaming.* The checklists are based on an approach to teaming using a multidisciplinary, geographically-based team, where one member is selected as the primary service provider or primary coach, receives support from other team members, and provides direct support to the parents and other care providers using coaching and natural learning environment practices to strengthen parenting competence and confidence in promoting child learning and development. A geographically-based team is a group of early intervention practitioners consisting of minimally an early childhood educator or special educator, occupational therapist, physical therapist, speech-language pathologist, and service coordinator(s) responsible for all referrals to an early intervention program within a predetermined area defined by a specific geographical boundary. The checklists can be used by a program to help plan for and implement the key characteristics of the approach, by team leadership and supervisors for determining the extent to which the program implements the approach, and by practitioners to conduct self-assessments to examine their use of the practices. The *Program Planning* section can be used to develop plans for changing practices and identifying the supports needed to implement practices consistent with the indicators, as well as for program evaluation purposes to monitor adherence in the use of the practices and document improvements over time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this *CASE*tool is to describe the development and use of the *Checklists for Implementing a Primary-Coach Approach to Teaming.* The checklists include practice indicators of key characteristics of a primary-coach approach to teaming (Shelden & Rush, 2007) based on research evidence on the characteristics of practices associated with effective teaming (Bell, 2004; Flowers, Mertens, & Mulhall, 1999), adult learning (Bransford et al., 2000), and child learning and development (Dunst et al., 2001; Dunst, Herter, & Shields, 2000; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). A program or practitioner who understands, uses, and masters the checklist prac-

tices is implementing evidence-based teaming practices. The reader is referred to Shelden and Rush (2007) for additional information about the approach to intervention constituting the focus of the content of the checklists.

This paper includes an overview of primary-coach approach to teaming practices, a description of the *Checklists for Implementing a Primary-Coach Approach to Teaming*, and guidelines for administering and using the checklists for supporting implementation of the practices. The checklists are included in the Appendix.

PRIMARY-COACH APPROACH TO TEAMING PRACTICES

In order to implement evidence-based natural learning environment practices that build the capacity of family members and care providers to promote child learning and development with the least intrusion on family life *and* in accordance with Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA Amendments of 1997), the use of a primary service provider (a.k.a. primary coach) has been identified as a recommended practice that can result in positive outcomes for young children and their families (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2008a, 2008b; Pilkington, 2006; Sandall, Hemmeter, Smith, & McLean, 2005; Vanderhoff, 2004; Woods, 2008; Workgroup on Principles and Practices in Natural Environments, November, 2007). Additionally, the use of teams comprised of individuals with a variety of expertise and knowledge in the field of early childhood has been an essential component of educational legislation (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments, 20 U.S.C. § 1431(a)(4), 1997), recommended practice (Sandall et al., 2005), and the theoretical and research literature (Antoniadis & Videlock, 1991; Briggs, 1997; Nash, 1990; Woodruff & McGonigel, 1988). Further, use of a primary service provider/primary coach minimizes the negative consequences of having multiple and or changing practitioners (Dunst, Brookfield, & Epstein, 1998; Law et al., 2001; Sloper, 2004; Sloper, Mukherjee, Beresford, Lightfoot, & Norris, 1999; Sloper & Turner, 1992).

Operational Definition of a Primary-Coach Approach to Teaming

The operational definition of a primary-coach approach to teaming is the use of a multidisciplinary, geographically-based team, where one member is selected as the primary coach, receives coaching support from other team members, and provides direct support to the parents and other care providers using coaching and natural learning environment practices to strengthen parenting competence and confidence in promoting child learning and development. A geographically-based team is a group of early intervention practitioners consisting of minimally an early childhood educator or special educator, occupational therapist, physical therapist, speech-language pathologist, and service coordinator(s) responsible for all referrals to an early intervention program within a predetermined area defined by zip code or other geographical boundary.

Implementation Conditions

Five implementation conditions are necessary to effectively operationalize a primary-coach approach to teaming. First, all therapists and educators on the team must be available to serve as a primary coach, due to the nature of teamwork and the mandates of Part C, IDEA. Second, all team members attend regular team meetings for the purpose of colleague-to-colleague coaching and support. Coaching topics at team meetings are varied and include specific information for supporting team members in their role as a primary coach to the families in the program. Individual team members bring discipline and person-specific knowledge that other team members may not have, but could use to support families. Third, the primary coach is selected from among other team members according to desired outcomes of the family, the relationship between the primary coach and the family and other care providers, and the knowledge and availability of the coach and family. Fourth, joint visits are essential when implementing a primary-coach approach to teaming. A joint visit is defined as a visit in which another team member accompanies the primary coach for the purpose of supporting him or her, the child's care providers, and the child in a timely and effective manner. Joint visits by other team members must occur with the primary coach at the same place and time whenever possible. Fifth, the primary coach for a family should rarely change in order to establish and maintain an ongoing working relationship between the primary coach and the care provider(s). The primary coach can change if the family does not like his/her manner or style, the family specifically requests a change, or the primary coach continually needs another team member to accompany him or her on joint visits because of lack of knowledge and skill.

Primary-Coach Approach to Teaming Checklists

The checklists were developed using the characteristics and implementation conditions of the primary-coach approach to teaming. The indicators were based upon a review of relevant research and were revised following feedback from practitioners and other professionals considered proficient in the use of the practices. Each indicator is worded so as to reflect different aspects of four practice areas of a primary-coach approach to teaming. The four sets of indicators include the following elements of a primary-coach approach to teaming:

• *Preparing for a Team-Based Approach.* This checklist includes practice indicators for establishing geographically-based teams.

• *Using a Primary Coach.* This checklist includes indicators for selecting a primary coach for a specific child

and family as well as documenting the presence of coaching by the primary coach with family members, care providers, and other team members.

• *Coordinating Joint Visits.* This checklist includes indicators for implementing joint visits between the primary coach and other team members with the family or other care providers.

• *Conducting Team Meetings.* This checklist includes indicators for conducting effective team meetings. The reader is referred to Rush and Shelden (2008) for additional information regarding effective team meetings when using a primary-coach approach to teaming.

COMPLETING THE CHECKLISTS

The four checklists constitute practice standards that operationalize evidence-based indicators promoting the implementation of a primary-coach approach to teaming. For each indicator, the user (e.g., program, supervisor, or practitioner) is asked to indicate whether (Yes/No) the practices used are present or absent. Space is provided for noting examples of practices that can be examined in terms of their presence or absence, but also their consistency or inconsistency with the practice standards. The checklists also include a section for the program or practitioners to develop a plan for making desired improvements in their practices. The checklists can be used for a number of different purposes:

• A program can use the checklist to plan for and implement the key characteristics of evidence-based teaming practices in early childhood intervention.

• Team leadership and supervisors can use the checklists as observational tools for determining the extent to which the program implements a primary-coach approach to teaming. They can be used to provide feedback and guidance about which practices are consistent or inconsistent with the practice indicators, and what the team members can do to improve their practices. The team leadership and/or supervisor can use the *Program Planning* section with the team to develop strategies for changing practices to better mirror the practice indicators.

• A practitioner can use the checklists to conduct a self-assessment to examine his/her use of primary-coach approach to teaming practices. A self-assessment could be accomplished by the practitioner reflecting on his/her practices as a team member, and determining whether the practices are consistent or inconsistent with each practice indicator. The *Program Planning* section can be used to develop plans for changing practices and identifying the supports needed to make practices consistent with the practice indicators.

• The checklists can be used for program evaluation purposes by monitoring consistency in the use of the practices and improvements over time.

CONCLUSION

The *Checklists for Implementing a Primary-Coach Approach to Teaming* include four sets of indicators describing effective teaming practices that support implementation of coaching and natural learning environment practices. The checklists are useful as benchmarks and standards for determining the extent to which current teaming practices mirror research-based teaming practices that promote the use of coaching in natural learning environment practices. They also provide a basis for programs and practitioners to increase their knowledge and understanding of the practices, and develop plans for improvement or refinement of their practices.

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Checklists for Implementing a Primary-Coach Approach to Teaming

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Team or Practitioner Name _____   **Date** _____

Checklist Descriptions

These checklists include practice indicators of the key characteristics of a primary-coach approach to teaming in early childhood intervention. A primary-coach approach to teaming is the use of a multidisciplinary team where one member is selected as the primary coach, receives coaching from other team members, and uses coaching with parents and other primary care providers to support and strengthen parenting competent and confidence in promoting child learning and development and obtaining desired supports and resources.

The four checklists describe different areas of primary-coach teaming practices: (a) preparing for a team-based approach, (b) using a primary coach, (c) coordinating joint visits, and (d) conducting team meetings. Each section contains indicators of a specific area of primary- coach approach to teaming practices. For each indicator, determine whether or not the program is adhering to the aspect of the practice described. Space is also available for notes or examples of adherence.

Use of the Checklists

The four checklists include 30 indicators that are the foundation for implementing a primary-coach approach to teaming. The checklists can be used for a number of different purposes:

• They can be used to help a program learn and master the key characteristics of evidence-based teaming practices in early childhood intervention.

• Team leadership and supervisors can use the checklists as observational tools for determining the extent to which the program implements a primary-coach approach to teaming. They can be used to provide feedback and guidance about which practices are consistent or inconsistent with the practice indicators, and what the team members can do to improve their practices. The team leadership and/or supervisor can use the Program Planning section with the team to develop plans for changing practices to better mirror the practice indicators.

• A practitioner can use the checklists to conduct a self-assessment to examine his/her use of primary-coach approach to teaming practices. A self-assessment could be accomplished by the practitioner reflecting on his/her practices as a team member, and determining whether the practices are consistent or inconsistent with each practice indicator.

• The Program Planning section can be used to develop plans for changing practices and identifying the supports needed to make practices consistent with the practice indicators. They can be used for program evaluation purposes by monitoring consistency in the use of the practices and improvements over time.

	Are practices characterized by the following?	Yes	No	Examples/Notes
Preparing for a Team-Based Approach	Program leadership determines the number and specific location of families served by the local program.	Y	N	
	Program leadership determines the fewest number of teams necessary to cover the program area based on the premise that a team of four, full-time practitioners can serve approximately 100-125 families when drive time does not exceed 30-45 minutes for a one-way trip.	Y	N	
	Program leadership identifies the geographic area that each team will cover based on family distribution within a given catchment area, geographic region (i.e., county), zip code, portion of a school district, etc.	Y	N	
	Program leadership ensures that each team minimally consists of an early childhood educator and/or early childhood special educator, occupational therapist, physical therapist, and speech-language pathologist.	Y	N	
	Program leadership ensures that the role of service coordination is fulfilled either by one of the disciplines listed above (i.e., blended model) or by an individual solely responsible for service coordination (i.e., dedicated model).	Y	N	
	Custodial family members are always members of their child's team.	Y	N	
	Program leadership assigns available practitioners to teams beginning with those who are employed or contracted with the program for the greatest amount of time.	Y	N	
	Teams have an identified team leader.	Y	N	
	Program leadership assigns each new referral to the team responsible for the geographic area in which the child resides.	Y	N	

	Are practices characterized by the following?	Yes	No	Examples/Notes
Using a Primary Coach	All therapists and educators on the team are available to serve as a primary coach.	Y	N	
	One team member is selected to serve as the primary coach to the family and other care providers.	Y	N	
	The primary coach is selected based on desired outcomes of the family, rapport/relationship between coach and parent or other primary care provider, specialized knowledge, and/or availability of the coach and family.	Y	N	
	The primary coach assigned to a family uses a coaching interaction style to build the capacity of the parents and other care providers to support child learning as well as to identify and obtain needed resources and supports.	Y	N	
	The primary coach receives coaching support from other team members through ongoing formal (planned) and informal interactions.	Y	N	
	The primary coach for a family changes as infrequently as possible (i.e., rarely changes).	Y	N	

Coordinating Joint Visits	**Are practices characterized by the following?**	**Yes**	**No**	**Examples/Notes**
	Team members support the primary coach through joint visits.	Y	N	
	The primary coach and other team members conduct joint visits at the same place and time.	Y	N	
	The primary coach predetermines with the parents and/or other care providers questions, expected outcomes, and specific actions to be taken during the joint visit.	Y	N	
	The primary coach and other team member define their roles for the joint visit based on questions, expected outcomes, and specific actions to be taken as related to the priorities of the primary coach and parent.	Y	N	
	The primary coach debriefs the joint visit with the parents and/or other care providers to evaluate the usefulness of the joint visit and determine next steps.	Y	N	
	The primary coach and other team member debrief the joint visit to evaluate the usefulness of the joint visit and determine next steps.	Y	N	

Conducting Team Meetings	**Are practices characterized by the following?**	**Yes**	**No**	**Examples/Notes**
	The team leader ensures that the purpose of the team meeting is to share information among team members as families move through the early intervention process and for primary coaches to receive coaching from their team members.	Y	N	
	All team members attend the weekly team meeting.	Y	N	
	All team members are present for the entire team meeting.	Y	N	
	The primary coach informs the parents of the dates and times of team meetings when their name is on the agenda and invites them to attend if they desire.	Y	N	
	The primary coach invites the parents to send questions or updates to the team meetings via the primary coach and ensures timely feedback.	Y	N	
	The team leader ensures that the team meeting is led by a competent and consistent facilitator. The team meeting facilitator may or may not be someone other than the formal team leader.	Y	N	
	The team meeting facilitator develops a meeting agenda with time limits that has been pre-published.	Y	N	
	The team has clearly defined roles of the facilitator and other meeting participants.	Y	N	
	Program leadership compensates team members for team meeting time.	Y	N	

Program Planning

Based on analysis of the primary-coach approach to teaming practice indicators, prepare a plan for making changes and/or ensuring sustainability. Describe the specific action steps that will be taken and identify the particular experiences and opportunities that will be used to make the needed programmatic changes.

Preparing for a Team-Based Approach

Needed change:

Action Steps (i.e., What will be done; by when):

Using a Primary Coach

Needed change:

Action Steps (i.e., What will be done; by when):

Coordinating Joint Visits

Needed change:

Action Steps (i.e., What will be done; by when):

Conducting Team Meetings

Needed change:

Action Steps (i.e., What will be done; by when):