

Appendix B

Guiding Principles

Guiding principles outline what we believe to be important. They provide a framework for our decision-making. The Governor's appointed Birth to 3 Program Interagency Coordinating Council adopted the following guiding principles in December 1988.

Children's optimal development depends on their being viewed first as children and second as children with a problem or disability. All children have the same basic needs for acceptance, affection, nurturing and security. The system should encourage the integration of children with disabilities with children who do not have disabilities. The developmental, social, emotional and physical needs of all children must be considered in the delivery of any service. We must always ask ourselves, are we considering the whole child or just one facet of the child?

Children's greatest resource is their family. Children are best served within the context of family.

Young children's needs are closely tied to the needs of their family. Both must be met to adequately serve the child. The nurturing, love, and commitment of a family cannot be replaced by any array of services. The best way to support children and meet their needs is to support and build upon the individual strengths of their family. The Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) focuses on how the system can support the 'whole' family and its cultural values, strengths, and needs.

Parents are partners in any activity that serves their children. Parents or primary caregivers have a unique understanding of their children's needs. They are the primary teachers of their children. They have the special bond of kinship and commitment that no professional will ever have. They must be given the opportunity and encouragement to be a part of the decision-making process and empowered so that they are a partner in the services developed for their child.

Just as children are best supported within the context of family, the family is best supported within the context of the community. Families depend on the positive relationships they make through the formal and informal networks in the community. Community resources should be open and able to respond to all families. Successful supportive services value the integrity of the family, its unique needs and cultural heritage, and provide a link to traditional community resources.

Professionals are most effective when they can work as a team member with parents and others. This requires flexibility and openness, joint training experiences, shared views of infant and family development, and commitment to team cooperation. The abilities of a variety of individuals, both paid and volunteer, to teach, assist, and develop relationships which help families must be recognized and promoted.

Collaboration is the best way to provide comprehensive services. No single agency is able to provide all services to all children and families. Cooperation and shared responsibility are necessary components of a service system that is able to meet the varied needs of children and families. Just as agencies must establish partnerships at the local level, the state must assume a role as a partner with local communities to enhance our mutual ability to serve young children with disabling conditions and their families.

Early intervention enhances the development of children. Early intervention is appropriate for children and families. It is often cost efficient and effective for society and the taxpayer. The goals of early intervention are to: Enhance the capacity of families to meet the special needs of their child; maximize the potential for independent living; and reduce costs to our society.