

Principles of Family Support Practice

1. Staff and families work together in relationships based on equality and respect.
2. Staff enhances families' capacity to support the growth and development of all family members — adults, youth, and children.
3. Families are resources to their own members, to other families, to programs, and to communities.
4. Programs affirm and strengthen families' cultural, racial, and linguistic identities and enhance their ability to function in a multicultural society.
5. Programs are embedded in their communities and contribute to the community-building process.
6. Programs advocate with families for services and systems that are fair, responsive, and accountable to the families served.
7. Practitioners work with families to mobilize formal and informal resources to support family development.
8. Programs are flexible and continually responsive to emerging family and community issues.
9. Principles of family support are modeled in all program activities, including planning, governance, and administration.

From Family Resource Coalition of America; *Guidelines for Family Support Practice* (1996).

Premises of Family Support

- 1. Primary responsibility for the development and well-being of children lies within the family, and all segments of society must support families as they rear their children.** The systems and institutions upon which families rely must effectively respond to their needs if families are to establish and maintain environments that promote growth and development. Achieving this requires a society that is committed to making the well being of children and families a priority and to supporting that commitment by allocating and providing necessary resources.
- 2. Assuring the well being of all families is the cornerstone of a healthy society, and requires universal access to support programs and services.** A national commitment to promoting the healthy development of families acknowledges that every family, regardless of race, ethnic background, or economic status, needs and deserves a support system. Since no family can be self-sufficient, the concept of reaching families before problems arise is not realized unless all families are reached. To do so requires public mandate to make family support accessible and available, on a voluntary basis, to all.
- 3. Children and families exist as part of an ecological system.** An ecological approach assumes that child and family development is embedded within broader aspects of the environment, including a community with cultural, ethnic, and socio-economic characteristics that are affected by the values and policies of the larger society. This perspective assumes that children and families are influenced by interactions with people, programs, and agencies as well as by values and policies that may help or hinder families' ability to promote their members' growth and development. The ecological context in which families operate is a critical consideration in a programs' efforts to support families.
- 4. Child-rearing patterns are influenced by parents' understanding of child development and of their children's unique characteristics, personal sense of competence, and cultural and community traditions and mores.** There are multiple determinants of parents' child-rearing beliefs and practices and each influence is connected to other influences. For example, a parent's view of her or his child's disposition is related to the parent's cultural background and knowledge of child development and to characteristics of the child. Since the early years set a foundation for the child's development, patterns of parent-child interaction are significant from the start. The unique history of the parent-child relationship is important to consider in a programs' efforts.
- 5. Enabling families to build on their own strengths and capacities promotes the healthy development of children.** Family support programs promote the development of competencies and capacities that enable families and their members to have control over important aspects of their lives and to relate to their children more effectively. By building on strengths, rather than treating deficits, programs assist parents in dealing with difficult life circumstances as well as in achieving their goals, and in doing so, enhance parents' capacity to promote their children's healthy development.
- 6. The development processes that make up parenthood and family life create needs that are unique at each stage in the life span.** Parents grow and change in response to changing circumstances and to the challenges of nurturing a child's development. The tasks of parenthood and family life are ongoing and complex, requiring physical, emotional, and intellectual resources. Many tasks of parenting are unique to the needs of a child's developmental stage, others are unique to the parent's point in her or his life cycle. Parents have been influenced by their own childhood experiences and their own particular psychological characteristics, and are affected by their past and present family interactions.
- 7. Families are empowered when they have access to information and other resources and take action to improve the well being of children, families, and communities.** Equitable access to resources in the community — including up-to-date information and high-quality services that address health, educational, and other basic needs — enables families to develop and foster optimal environments for all members.