

Insights

Family Partnership: Identifying the Right Parent Partners for Improvement Work

The end goal at NICHQ is to achieve better health outcomes for children. To achieve that, we engage parents and families as partners on the improvement journey, because we know that changing a system requires involving those that the system most affects.



The right parents make a huge difference for family partnership in QI.

“We know that parents have perspectives, insights and connections that stakeholders in public health can’t even imagine sometimes,” says Christy Blakely, MS, who is a parent partner, expert and faculty member for the NICHQ-led Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Collaborative Improvement and Innovation Network ([ECCS CoIIN](#)). “That’s why it is so important that parents be part of the improvement team.”

Blakely notes that parents are instrumental for bringing ideas to teams and promoting change and improvements within their own communities. This starts with identifying the right parents to partner with. It’s always great to start with families who are affected by the topic that your improvement initiative is focusing on, but listen to how parents talk about their experiences.

“Look for parents who are knowledgeable about rights and services, but also talk about the system as it affects all families and all children, not just their own,” says Blakely.

That system-wide view is important for everyone on an improvement team. While changes will be tested with one patient on a small scale, the end goal is to create better outcomes and resources for everyone across the system. Parent partners should share that frame of mind, striving for improvements that affect all children.

Beyond that mindset, the ideal parent partners will have some key skills. Blakely recommends finding parents who are:

- Effective at finding and organizing facts and evidence.
- Strong researchers for identifying resources and information.
- Competent with analyzing facts against various laws and policies.
- Able to communicate with their teams through email, webinars and other digital channels.

“Like all partners, parents provide real strategic insights to how improvements can move forward and address challenges that affect every family,” says Lindsay Rosenfeld, ScD, ScM, the project director for ECCS CoIIN. “The strongest parent partners are often the ones who are engaged with the subject matter outside of how it affects them personally and are active in seeking solutions.”

Once teams have parents onboard, they need to effectively engage them in order to truly capitalize on their perspectives. But, that’s another article.