



Culture In Context

Parenting A Child With A Complex Disability

Complex disabilities are impacted by many components of culture. Every culture understands disability differently, and understanding those beliefs is essential to providing quality support to a family. Providers should also remember that every family culture is unique and that every member of the family contributes to the specific family culture. Here are some cultural considerations that are important when working with a family of a child with a significant disability.

1. **Community:** Children with disabilities often encounter some barriers to accessing their community, and family isolation is common after a child with significant needs is born. Consider how you can support the family in accessing equipment, educating friends and family members, and using respite providers and other resources that allow the family to engage with others in their community. Supporting church members, neighbors, extended family, and friends in learning how to care for and include a child with complex needs is an important way that early interventionists can support the family in connecting with community.
2. **Participation:** Some cultural milestones and experiences can be more difficult to access for children with disabilities. Early interventionists can ask the family about events that are important to them and provide support in brainstorming way to access or modify these experiences so that all children can participate. Supporting the family in prioritizing participation early is an important way to think about a child's abilities and strengths rather than focusing on deficits and missed opportunities.

3. Focus on Strengths: The way that early interventionists talk to and about a child with complex disabilities can influence the way the family thinks about their child and the future. We should avoid too much discussion on evaluation results, deficits, and needs. Instead, focus your conversation on child strengths, ways to have fun together, and opportunities for learning new things. Early intervention providers can also help the family think about a long-term view of child inclusion and support access to resources to promote meaningful inclusion as the child grows.