

What If You Decide to Change Doctors or Health Providers?

Most parents are pleased with their child's doctor, but sometimes things just don't feel right. This may be a difference in style or other difficulties between you and the providers that can be worked out over time or you may need to change providers.

Here are some questions to ask yourself before deciding:

- ♥ Does the way the office is run work for you?
- ♥ Is the doctor available when you need him or her?
- ♥ Are you often confused about recommendations and why certain treatments are prescribed?
- ♥ Do you feel like your concerns are not taken seriously? Does this make you question and doubt your instincts, or your doctor's/health providers?

Trust yourself. If you have not been successful in building a helpful partnership, seek out another that better fits your needs. When leaving a provider try to do it in a positive way. Your input may help the provider work with other families in the future.

Write a letter explaining your decision to leave and thank them for the attention they have given your family. Include a request to have all records transferred to your new provider.

♦ Adapted from material compiled by Family Voices of North Dakota, Family to Family Health Information and Education Center. www.fvnd.org



*Providing Information for
Families having Children with
Special Healthcare Needs*



Communicating and Developing Good Relationships with Your Child's Health Care Providers

NH Family Voices

Family To Family Health Information and Education Center

New Hampshire Family Voices (NHFV) provides information and support to families of children /youth with special health care needs and the professionals who serve them via: individualized assistance, training, conferences, resource guides, newsletters, workshops, lending library, and website. NHFV provides and facilitates the voice of families through partnerships and collaboration,

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Inform

Make sure that your doctor or health provider is on the mailing lists of all your child's programs and any family support organizations that you may be involved with. This will assist in being a resource for other families as well.

Bring reports that you especially want to discuss to appointments. Be a link between the your child's doctor, specialty health providers, early intervention/school program and other service providers your child may have. Share questions and concerns back and forth.

Invite

Ask if he or she would consider attending an IFSP, IEP or other team meeting if the need arises. Ask about best times and places. Your doctor or health provider might be willing to attend meetings on days not scheduled for patients, in the early morning, or at the end of the work day. Holding a team meeting at your doctor's office may make it easier for him to be involved.



Practicing Good Communication with Your Doctor or Health Provider

A two-way conversation

Think of communicating with your doctor and health provider as having a friendly, respectful conversation. That means it is two-way and both of you should bring your questions, concerns, successes, and hopes to the conversation.

Get clear about how to communicate

Ask your doctor or health provider how to best communicate about your child's care. Is there a good time during the day to call? Does she or he prefer that you first talk to the office nurse if you have questions between appointments? Are there ever situations when the doctor or health provider would want you to follow another procedure in contacting him or her? Does your doctor or health provider welcome communication via email? How about fax?

Feel okay about needing advice between appointments

If you have a concern between appointments and feel that you need or want an answer from your child's doctor or health provider, ask the nurse to have him or her call you. Explain that you are more worried than usual, for reasons you may not be able to explain, and that you would really appreciate talking directly to him or her.

Reflecting

Were you able to discuss your most important questions or issues? If not, is this okay with you or is there a plan for how you will get the information you need? Did you feel like a partner in your child's health care team?

Communicating and Developing Good Relationships with Your Child's Health Care Providers

When we, as parents of a child with special health care needs, are faced with finding providers that have the understanding, expertise, or skills that our children need, the task can feel very challenging. Referrals from others can be helpful and a good place to start. When considering your relationship with the providers you have or new ones you are meeting, you, as the parent, play a key role in helping providers know and understand your child's strengths and needs, and what services would be helpful. As a parent, you know your child better than anyone and the partnerships you form with those providing services will offer the best outcomes for your child and your family.

There are many steps you can take to create the type of partnership and relationship that you want with your child's doctor or health care provider. This booklet was developed to pass on suggestions, tips and encouragement from those parents who have traveled this same road.





Choosing a Doctor or Health Provider

Suggestions of general qualities to look for:

Clinical skills and knowledge

Does he or she have the training and specialty interests important to your child's needs? A doctor with a special interest in child development, chronic health conditions, or a specific diagnosis may make a good match for you and your child.

Experience

Has the doctor or health provider cared for other children who have a similar diagnosis as your child or for children with developmental delays or disabilities in general? This kind of experience will help your doctor or health provider to be more aware of resources and possible services for your child and family.

Mutual respect and a sense of connection

Is he or she approachable? Does he or she make you feel comfortable? Do you like the interactions with your child?

Are you comfortable in your conversations with them? Do you trust this person with the health of your child? A doctor or health provider may be better in one area than another. Choosing a doctor may mean choosing a balance between technical skills, interpersonal skills, and experience. You decide what you and your child's priorities are for the present. You may find that what you need changes over time.

Let the doctor get to know your whole child

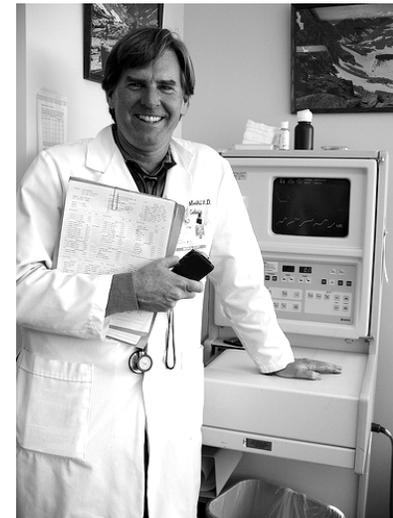
Talk about the good things as well as your concerns. Share pictures and stories so he or she can appreciate and get to know your child.

Express gratitude

Say thank you, in person or in writing. Let your doctor or health provider know what is helpful and that he or she is doing a good job. You may be surprised how little they actually hear words of gratitude and appreciation.

Don't expect perfection

Every relationship has tense moments or bumpy times and so will this one. Be willing to make changes, if needed. Recognize that doctors and health providers are human, too, and give him or her the chance to make things better. If you are mostly pleased with your child's doctor, then it is worth working through the rough times.



Creating a Relationship with your Doctor or Health Provider

Many parents feel uncomfortable talking with doctors, afraid of asking "stupid" questions, or of seeming impolite by questioning something the doctor has suggested. Most parents find that speaking up gets easier with practice.

Be a partner

Decide what type of partnership you want with your child's doctor or health provider. How do you want him or her to be involved in coordinating care and services for your child? What role do you want in making medical and health decisions?

Whatever type of partnership you have, you should feel comfortable asking questions, sharing your insights, and feel like you and the doctor or health provider are part of a team. In turn, you should be open to the doctor's or health provider's questions and insights, and accept him or her as part of your child's team.

Be a role model

Show by example how you want to be treated and how you want your child to be treated. If you want to be listened to, then be a good listener, too. If you want your doctor or health provider to be delighted with your child, then show your delight in your child.

Be understanding

Doctors and health providers often must have appointments back-to-back, every 15 minutes or even sooner. If it seems like the doctor is in a hurry to move on to the next appointment, you may be right. If you need more time, let him/her know and she should be willing to work this out. Often this can be done when making the appointment for your child.

Preparing for a Visit

Before you take your child to a doctor or other health professional, think about specific questions you have. Writing your questions down may help you stick to the important issues and avoid distractions during the visit.

Bring medication records and any other records of your child's health, especially those from other doctors or providers your child has seen. Creating a Care Notebook may help you keep track of the information. Offer your records to the nurse or physician to confirm that they have accurate information in their chart.

Your child's doctor or health provider may be an expert in his/her field, but remember that you are the expert on your child. You are your child's voice, or advocate and you can help the doctor understand your child and develop the best treatment plan.

Learning to communicate effectively with your child's health care providers will help you become an active partner in important care decisions and ultimately benefit your child's health.

This involves much more than listening to what the doctor has to say. It also involves learning as much as you can about your child's condition, and asking the doctor to explain anything you don't understand.



Getting the Most Out of an Appointment

Scheduling

- ◆ Schedule the doctor or health provider's visit for the first appointment of the day or right after lunch if you would like to cut down on waiting time.
- ◆ If you have questions or concerns that may take more time than usual, ask the office staff to schedule a longer appointment. Your doctor or health provider and staff will appreciate the advance notice and you will feel less frustrated about not having enough time.

Preparing

- ◆ Think about what you would like to get out of the appointment ahead of time.
- ◆ Make a list of your questions, concerns, and other information you would like to share. It is okay to bring up things that don't seem related to health but still matter to you and your child.
- ◆ Ask the doctor or health provider if he or she would like a copy of your questions and concerns ahead of time. Emailing, faxing, or dropping your list off before the appointment might give more time for the doctor or health provider to prepare more complete responses to your questions.

Participating

- ◆ Share your list of questions and concerns at the start of the appointment. The doctor or health provider likely has his own list for what he needs to accomplish during this visit. Together you might need to decide what you discuss during this appointment and what you discuss at a later time.

Update

- ◆ During well child visits or other appointments, tell your doctor about the progress your child is making in early intervention/school or other service programs your child receives.
- ◆ You shouldn't always assume that reports from the specialist, or therapist are making it to your primary care doctor. Ask your doctor if these reports are being received and if he has any questions. Ask any questions and share any concerns you have about the services.
- ◆ Another fun and memorable way to update the doctor or health provider is to send an occasional picture of your child with a note highlighting his or her progress.

Other Tips

Things can move so quickly during appointments that it can be hard to remember all that is said. Here are some ideas to help with remembering:

- ★ Take notes. Use the same notebook to write down your questions and the answers at each appointment. This will make it easier to keep track of all the information over time.
- ★ Bring someone along who can help listen and take notes and be there to support you, if needed.
- ★ If your doctor or health provider gives you information that is difficult or hard to understand, ask if you can call him later to go over your questions.