Challenging Conversations

Please sit in the first 5 rows
Challenging Conversations:
Delivering the news to families about a diagnosis of a child’s developmental disability

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Learning objectives
Audience experience with “delivering the news”

QuickPolls
Case “vignettes” of challenging conversations

- “red flags”
Communicating about “red flags”

- Parent: Abby
- Child: Adam, age 3 weeks
- History:
  - Did not pass newborn hearing screening
- Findings:
  - Not passing hearing re-screening at Audiology clinic
Communicating about “red flags”

- Parent: Brent
- Child: Becky, age 2 years
- Findings:
  - Pediatrician has completed a developmental checklist at the 2-year well-child visit:
    - Not achieving age-appropriate developmental milestones
What is challenging about a “red flags” conversation?
Case “vignettes” of challenging conversations

• Initial diagnosis
Communicating about a new diagnosis

- Parent: Abby
- Child: Adam, age 6 weeks
- History: did not pass newborn hearing screening and rescreening
- Findings: bilateral moderate permanent hearing loss
Communicating about a new diagnosis

- Parent: Brent
- Child: Becky, age 6 years 2 months
- Findings:
  - Interdisciplinary team diagnosis: intellectual disability
The family perspective

- What do families need/want?
  - Time to discuss in private
  - Clear summary of child’s diagnosis in parent-friendly terminology
  - Personalized level of detail of evidence
  - Partnership in decision-making
  - Conversations over time

- Emotional responses of families:
  - relief
  - Shock
  - Overwhelmed/confused
  - sadness
  - resistance
  - anger
The professional’s perspective:

What is challenging about the conversation?

- Being prepared for the conversation
- Providing information in a clear, supportive, neutral tone
- Listening
- Delivering the news using parent-friendly terminology:
  - What do we know?: A broad overview of the diagnosis
  - How do we know?: The findings that support the diagnosis
  - How will this impact the child’s development?
  - Where do we go from here?: Recommendations and treatment options
Delivering the news:
self-affirmations for the professional

- I will make the information comprehensible to your family.
- I know you may have questions and I have time to answer them without being defensive.
- I will make myself aware of cultural differences between myself and your family and seek to communicate in ways that bridge those differences.
- I honor your right to be overwhelmed by this new information without being overwhelmed myself by your expression of your feelings.
- I honor that you are the expert about your child and I am an expert in this area of developmental disabilities; we will partner together in this process.
What are professional’s effective communication characteristics you have observed?
Communication missteps

- Defensive professional
- Professional minimizes the diagnosis
- Professional describing treatment as a “fix”
How can professionals avoid missteps?

- Understand the anger/resistance, and don’t be reactive.
  - “This is frustrating for you....” “This is not what you expected...”
- Meet them where they’re at.
  - “This doesn’t seem to fit for you.”
- Acknowledgement, not reassurance in response to shock/sadness.
  - “This is a lot of new information”....
What professional missteps have you observed?
The conversations continue......