



Strengthening Early Childhood Systems: Power Dynamic Strategies



The Early Childhood Developmental Health Systems (ECDHS): Evidence to Impact Center helps local and state systems advance the health and well-being of young children. ECDHS strategies are guided by the [Water of Systems Change](#) framework, in which **power dynamics** describe how decision-making authority and influence are shared among people and organizations; they shape how resources, information, and decisions flow through a system—either limiting access or supporting collective well-being.¹

State and local systems leaders, providers^{i,2}, and other partners can adopt the following evidence- and expert-informed power dynamic strategies to support early childhood developmental health.

Systems Change Conditions

The Water of Systems Change framework identifies six conditions that work together to support authentic and lasting systems change, including:

- Policies
- Practices
- Resource Flows
- Relationships & Connections
- **Power Dynamics**
- Mental Models

ⁱ Providers include all those who work with young children and their families, including health care, education, social service, and other community-based organizations.

Elevate the real-life experiences of families and communities in systems decisions and processes.

Collaborate with families and community members to co-design system strategies. Partner with families throughout all stages of development, implementation, and quality improvement to better meet their needs and increase community uptake.³ Appoint community members as project leaders and establish community outreach teams to improve decision-making, inform project planning, and align clinical and community partners.⁴

Use a governance model that enables community members to have influence over the initiative's direction, approach, and outcomes. Include family representatives on committees, workgroups, and task forces at the state and local levels. Establish transparent decision-making processes with clear rationale to build trust, strengthen community involvement, and allow modifications.³

Prepare families to serve as leaders or advisors. Support family integration into decision-making processes by providing training on facilitation techniques, quality improvement methods, and content knowledge (e.g., components of the medical home, role of the family advisor).⁵ Offer ongoing support and resources to ensure families can participate meaningfully.⁶

Make family-driven care a priority by building strong partnerships between families and providers.

Employ a care coordinator or patient navigator (i.e., non-clinical support team member) who can relate to families. Hiring family partners with lived experience—such as raising a child with social, emotional, or behavioral difficulties—can positively influence patient outcomes and engagement.^{5,7} For example, Family Centered Health Navigators are community members who use their experience to support other families in navigating services.

Work with families to create shared care and support plans. Assign a staff member or family partner to work with families to develop plans that integrate assessments, identify family strengths and needs, establish goals, and facilitate sharing among providers with family consent. Use tools, such as shared action plans or Safe Care plans, to identify family-centered goals, track progress across care teams, and include team member contact information.⁸



Build provider and program capacity to partner with families.

Train providers across sectors to center families in care. For example, educate providers on how to co-develop and maintain a shared care plan, including family roles. Conduct webinars, convene in person, and provide educational materials to build family engagement skills.⁵

Provide ongoing reflective supervision. Support staff who work with families (e.g., family partner team member, navigator) to further refine their skills in engaging families as partners.⁷

Develop processes and materials that are easy to understand. Work with partners [to use plain language](#) instead of jargon so people from different backgrounds can understand and participate in discussions and planning.

References

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