

INTRODUCTION

Hi and welcome to the Cerebral Palsy Foundation's ParentWise Podcast series. I'm Robyn Cummins.

Finding out that your child has a disability is one of the most stressful and traumatic situations that a parent might have to face. In this podcast, psychologist Joan Bratel shares some ideas about how parents can most effectively get good outcomes for their child.

SETTING A GOAL

Hi. I'm Joan Bratel. Over the years I've worked with many families to help them get the best treatment and service outcomes for their children.

Today I'm going to talk about some helpful strategies I've seen for getting the best outcomes for both parents and children.

If you could paint a picture of what you hope for your child and family, what would it look like?

What things would it need to include for you and your child to feel more confident and in control of your situation?

What signs of success would tell you that you're on the right track and making progress towards what you want for your child and family?

What resources, services and people do you need to help you and your child make progress towards achieving your hopes or goals?

These are the sorts of questions that are useful to consider when preparing for a meeting about some aspect of your child's future.

CHANGING FOCUS

We all want the best for our children, whether they have a disability or not.

Many times, when parents or young adults come to a family team meeting, a school meeting or a doctor's appointment they talk about only the problems that are worrying them and this can be very overwhelming for everyone and can lead to recriminations and conversations about who is to blame.

Rather than making the problem the main focus of discussion, it is also important to start a process of thinking about how you would like the situation to be different or what needs to happen for the situation to improve.

Part of doing this effectively involves doing your homework, so to speak, before coming to a meeting. This may mean talking to people who can be helpful or give you good advice such as friends, family, professionals or family advocates.

One mother I worked with wrote a letter listing all the things she hoped to achieve from a team meeting at her child's school and when she arrived she gave a copy of the letter to everybody. The contents of the letter then became the focus of what they talked about.

Another parent asked a family advocate to accompany her to meetings to help her get her concerns heard and to help work out some good solutions for her family and her child.

Doing your homework may also include having some understanding of the political and service systems which you are trying to access.

For example, government funding may be for a specific service or age group, while some government and non government organisations may only support a particular disability type or offer time-limited service.

SMALL STEPS

So far we've talked about identifying what you want to focus on in your meeting and having some idea about what options and services are available before the meeting starts.

The third piece of the puzzle is identifying the small, manageable steps that will help you and your child reach your goals and then how you can put them into action.

There's an old Buddhist saying that crossing the Himalayan Mountains takes one step at a time.

While it's tempting to set ourselves big goals, this approach can be unrealistic and frustrating. It's much more motivating and inspiring to start off with the smaller steps that are manageable for you and your child and that meet your child's individual needs (such as their age and developmental level).

You also need to keep in mind whether what you want is realistic for the rest of your family.

For example one family I worked with wanted to be able to go out for a meal as a family rather than to leave their young son who had cerebral palsy at home with a carer. This required the therapy team looking at the child's seating, swallowing and social skills. Staff at the restaurant were very understanding and helpful and, together, the family all went out for dinner.

Testing out the 'reality' of your goals by putting small steps into action also help you to find out what works and what doesn't. Often in that testing process you end up finding an unexpected solution that works really well and can be very inspiring.

So, to finish up....

By building a picture of what you want for you child and family, getting helpful advice about what small steps can be taken to achieving your hopes and goals and then trying them out can build confidence, a feeling of success and a sense of control over your situation.

CLOSE

Thanks for listening. We hope you've found these strategies and ideas useful.

You can download or listen to more episodes in the ParentWise Podcast series at the Cerebral Palsy Foundation's website - www.cpfoundation.com.au