Meaningful Family Engagement

This tip sheet was created in collaboration with Sue Robins, a New York Times published writer, conference speaker and mother of three. Her youngest son, Aaron has Down Syndrome. In her paid work life, she is the Family Advisor at Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children in Vancouver, BC.

Champions
#Top 5 Tips
for Professionals

Sue’s Website: suerobins.com

1. It’s All About the Details
   - Coordinate a time, date, and location that works for everyone
   - Prepare families so they know what to expect, be open to questions on details
   - Ensure introductions are made, confirm understanding of everyone’s role
   - Be available for follow up and debriefing after the meeting

2. Commit to Listening
   - Ensure you have dedicated enough time for the meeting
   - Actively listen with curiosity, your intent is to understand, learn and arrive at options together
   - Be aware of your own biases and what makes you uncomfortable. Reflect on these and how they might influence your responses and body language

3. Ask Us for Permission
   - Remember: Choice is a really big part of family centred care
   - One family may be open to sharing more information than another. Respect individual families by asking if they are comfortable sharing about a particular topic
   - Remind families it is okay not to share information that makes them uncomfortable

4. Honour the Vulnerability of the Family Story
   - Value and embrace the opportunity to listen to a family’s story
   - Sharing our stories makes us feel incredibly vulnerable. We worry about how people will respond or perceive us when we share
   - Acknowledge and empathize with our story - the successes and especially the challenges we may have experienced. Do not dismiss the challenges

5. Speak Our Language
   - Reflect on the jargon of your system - the acronyms and lingo and how often you use these in conversation and dialogue
   - Be prepared to explain your system language in a way that families can understand
   - Create an acronym/jargon cheat sheet for families