

# PARENTS AS PARTNERS #4

## WHEN WE DISAGREE - DEVELOPING A SHARED UNDERSTANDING

### *You are a Partner In Your Child's Healthcare* **YOU KNOW YOUR CHILD BEST**

Your experience  
and knowledge  
of your child



the experience  
and knowledge  
of the healthcare  
professionals



the best decisions  
about your  
child's health

*As a partner in your  
child's healthcare, you  
are encouraged to  
participate in decisions  
about your child.*

At times, this may involve differences of opinion and challenges in communication. The way you deal with these situations is important for building and maintaining a strong relationship with your healthcare team. The key pieces of a collaborative relationship are honesty, respect, trust and appreciation (see Tip Sheet 1).

*"I try to remember  
that my body  
language can say as  
much as my words."*

### **Set The Tone**

You can encourage positive communication by acknowledging any difference of opinion or conflict. State your desire to move forward.

*We seem to have a difference of opinion. Can we clarify options and create a plan to move forward?*

### **Keep an Open Mind**

You may not have all the information. There may be possibilities you have not considered. Be willing to reconsider your position after you have gathered information and considered all the options.

### **ASK FOR HELP FROM OTHERS**

You may be tired, emotional, or uncomfortable with conflict. Consider asking someone to help you work through a difference of opinion you have with a healthcare professional. You could ask a trusted family member, friend, Elder, or another professional such as a social worker or chaplain.

*"When my child was in ICU, I was overwhelmed and exhausted. I found it difficult to participate in decision making. I talked with a social worker and she was able to support me and help me express my concerns."*

*"My child's doctor and I did not agree on the need for a referral for my son. She wanted me to wait and I wanted to get it done right away. As we discussed it further we came to understand the reasons for each of our positions. My doctor was concerned she wouldn't be able to follow through because she was leaving her position while I was concerned about the long wait to get in. We decided she would put in the referral and I would make sure my son's new doctor followed up on it. Exploring the reasons behind each of our positions helped us to resolve our difference of opinion."*

## Respectful Ways To Ask For Clarity:

*Help me to understand why...  
So if I understand you correctly,  
you are saying...*

*"Making important decisions for your child can be very emotional; especially when the whole team does not agree! I have found that when I have an emotional reaction, it is often because of my fear and worry. Taking a moment to breathe deeply and calm myself helps to turn my focus back to the needs of my child. I know that my healthcare team has the best interests of my child in mind and that together, we can create a plan that everyone can agree on."*

## Working Towards a Shared Understanding

When you have a difference of opinion, the following steps will help you work together to come up with a solution:

1. *Plan ahead. Consider what you will say and what questions you need to ask. Set up a time to talk.*
2. *Start the conversation by indicating your desire to understand the other person's point of view and to work together in the best interests of your child.*
3. *Listen to the other person without interrupting. Allow them to explain their position.*
4. *Ask open ended, probing questions to clarify and get the information you need.*
5. *If necessary, explore the reasons behind each of your positions. Ask "why" questions to get a better understanding.*
6. *State your understanding of each position.*
7. *Discuss possible solutions and form an agreement on next steps.*
8. *Restate the agreement you have made.*

## If you can't reach a shared understanding...

- ☐ Ask to speak with a manager to help resolve the difference.
- ☐ Get a second opinion.
- ☐ Seek out a different professional for your child's care.
- ☐ Express your concern to the AHS Patient Relations Department.
- ☐ Consult a Clinical Ethicist at your hospital if it is a medical ethics decision.

*When I have lost control I apologize for any inappropriate words or actions and acknowledge my emotional response – "I'm sorry, it is difficult for me to separate my emotions from this situation."*

Created by parents who have years of experience partnering with their child's healthcare team. For more information visit the website of the Family and Community Resource Centre at the Alberta Children's Hospital.

<http://frc.albertahealthservices.ca>

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