

How to Make Language Family-Centered

Behavioral descriptions vs. one-word descriptions - Provide behavioral descriptions and possible "normal" explanations instead of single-word labels:

"When Joe's father says no, Joe sometimes asks his mother" vs.
"Joe is manipulative."

Sometimes true vs. always true - Change "truths" to partial truths and perceptions; avoid globalizations such as "never" and "always:"

"Joe's parents say he is sometimes disrespectful." vs. *"Joe is disrespectful."*

Normal vs. pathological - Use the family's own language instead of medical/psychological jargon:

"Mary says that she at times feels `down and out.'" vs. *"Mary is depressed."*

Goal vs. problem - Change problem statements into goal statements:

"Family members say that they would like to get along better." vs.
"The family's interactions are characterized by conflict."

Logical vs. bad/disabled - Give logical possible explanations for behaviors instead of explanations that may identify disability/pathology or imply harmful intent:

"Joe states that he feels safe in his room." vs. *"Joe hides out in his room."*

Future vs. past - Use time qualifiers such as "yet" and "when" to indicate that the past does not dictate the future:

"The family hasn't discovered the best way to handle this issue yet." vs.
"The family has been experiencing this problem for years."

Tentative vs. certain - Express ideas as possibilities or "wonderings," and avoid using "should" or "needs to:"

"It seems that firm limits might make Joe's life more predictable and help him control his disappointment." vs. *"Joe's parents need to set firm limits."*