

What is the Family Support Advisory Committee?

Wisconsin law requires that every county appoint an advisory committee to help develop the program plan and monitor the Family Support program. In fact, the law says parents should be the majority members on this committee. Unfortunately, this is not the case in all counties.

Parents need to claim these leadership roles and ensure that families are getting what they need. In addition to program planning, committee members play many other important roles. They may review the services and supports available to children with disabilities, help identify needs in the county and develop new ways to meet those needs. Overall, this committee has the power to improve the resources available to families.

Why should I get involved?

The guiding premise of family support programs is to provide the individual supports that help keep families together and allow children to remain in their homes and participate in their communities.

If you are receiving Family Support assistance in Wisconsin, you are in the minority. There are now more families on the waiting list for services than there are children served. Also, families report the amount and type of support they're receiving is not adequate. There are limited choices and not enough flexibility to truly help our kids.

Your Family Support Advisory Committee...

- ◆ Is Guaranteed in State law.
- ◆ Should have a majority of parents as members.
- ◆ Is integral to the quality of services families receive.

With parent involvement and leadership, this can change. Parent participation in this process is not a privilege. It is a right and a key component to improving the quality of services for families.

Families not only see things through "fresh eyes", they help ensure the design of programs is really what families want and need. Effective family involvement makes a system more responsive, more cost-effective, more culturally sensitive and more coordinated.

How does the committee work?

The county program appoints members to the advisory committee. In

addition to a majority of parent members, the group must also include representatives from the county school districts and public health agencies. At least one of the members must be a person who provides community services to children with disabilities or families eligible for the program.

The committee should be ongoing and meet at least quarterly.

How do I get involved?

Just ask! Now that you know an advisory committee is required by law in your county, call the Human Services Department and make sure your county has an advisory committee. Ask how many parents are currently serving and whether you can be appointed. Attend the next meeting! Even if you're waiting for services, you can get involved. And if you can't attend meetings, find other ways (e-mail, contacting parent members) to share your ideas.

To find the Family Support Coordinators in your county, call Wisconsin First Step at 1-800-642-7837; TTY 1-800-282-1663. Or see a list of coordinators by county at;

http://www.dhfs.state.wi.us/bdds/fsp_dir.htm#top.

(Programs would like to customize this part of the document with their own information.)

Sources for this document include: *Essential Allies: Families as Advisors*, Elizabeth Jeppson and Josie Thomas; *Family Support Centers: A Program Manager's Toolkit*, Family Support America; *Family Support Program Guidelines and Procedures*, Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services.