

# Seven Essentials for Family Professional Partnerships in Early Intervention

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## Topics

reviewed by [Jen Stacy](#) — January 22, 2018

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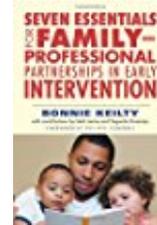
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In *Seven Essentials for Family-Professional Partnerships in Early Intervention*, Bonnie Keilty explores the intricacy of the relationship-building process between early intervention (EI) professionals and the families they work with. EIs are called upon as a part of a team of specialists to work with families of young children with a range of medical and/or developmental concerns so as to foster progress toward developmental goals. Keilty positions family members as experts within this team, drawing on research from the family systems intervention approach that suggests families more fully engage in the goal-achievement process when collaborative relationships and participatory practices serve as the foundation of the family-professional partnership (FPP). Recognizing that the work of developing meaningful relationships between EIs and families is both essential and complex, this book looks at *how* to create and sustain relationships that enhance the FPP. In line with Auerbach's (1995) suggestion that the movement towards familial partnerships that invoke an additive approach and that draw on families' funds of knowledge must be intentional, Keilty's book provides a framework for EI practitioners to shift away from approaching families through a deficit lens and move towards relationships that resituate families as authentic partners in early interventions.

Written with an eye to both academics and practitioners, Keilty's seven concepts offer a fertile space for EIs to become informed about the relationship-building process and to contemplate how this process may realistically unfold. From the first chapter on, she asks readers to reconsider notions of expertise and asserts that families must be recognized as experts in parenting their child. Each concept, then, analyzes ways that the EI can first learn from the family by listening to their concerns, observing their natural practices, and discussing the goals they have for their child. Then, the EI makes recommendations that are in stride with the family's practices and emerge from a natural, positive partnership. The seven concepts that Keilty suggests will foster this approach to FPP are: 1) differentiate ways of knowing and professional decisions; 2) appreciate family priorities, values, and culture; 3) build family engagement; 4) recognize the power of partnership members; 5) openly and honestly collaborate and communicate, and demonstrate confidence; 6) view each partnership member as an equal member of the team; and 7) dig deeper to truly understand.

The author thoroughly examines one concept per chapter in a consistent



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## About the Author

manner. She introduces each topic as it is situated in the broader field of EI, integrating a robust review of relevant literature. The specific practices that she suggests stem from this literature and are presented in terminology that practitioners will relate to and understand. She often includes common practices or misunderstandings from the field that go against these notions (such as the expectation of the EI to immediately offer a list of interventions or misjudging parents as in denial of a diagnosis) and then juxtaposes them with the literature and suggestions. At the end of each chapter, a short case study illustrates how the concept can play out in real life. A parent is featured explaining their experiences with an EI: they illustrate the relationship-building process as well as how the EI supported them in setting developmental goals for their child and integrating agreed-upon interventions. This is followed by the EI detailing the strategies they used when working with the families, illuminating the behind-the-scenes professional thought process and decision-making. Keilty, pulling from these examples, writes a clear summary of the chapter's main ideas and encourages readers to answer reflection questions about their practices.

*Seven Essentials for Family-Professional Partnerships in Early Intervention* serves as a well-informed practical guide to taking the first step towards an additive approach to FPPs. While it offers space for deep reflection on literature and suggestions, it falls short on its promise to illuminate and navigate the complexity that EIs experience when working with families. While Keilty includes short cases in efforts to illuminate the convoluted process of creating and sustaining a FPP, these examples illustrate a generally straightforward path to a healthy partnership with parents who are receptive to collaborating with the EI. Keilty does not thoroughly explain how the cases were chosen or if formal research was conducted, raising concerns of methodology and conclusions. Are the featured families representative of typical families working with EIs? What was the selection process for these families? Under what circumstances were the stories gathered and analyzed? Without this information, it is difficult to decipher the extent to which these cases are realistic or ideal. In most, the parent depicts the EI positively and as someone who has brought relief to their families. However, in the review of the literature, Keilty suggests that this is an uncommon perspective and that EIs must be prepared to navigate the opposite. While the case studies illustrate promising FPPs for which practitioners could strive, they do not support Keilty's objective of illuminating the navigation of complex social spaces.

In a similar vein, the author points out that many of the struggles EIs will encounter will be based on differences in cultural practices. To exemplify this, however, the featured participants allude to a surface-level, nearly stereotypical understanding of culture. For example, one EI navigated the gendered expectations that an Arab American family held for their young son while another worked with an Indian mother who integrated traditional massages and breathing exercises with her child. These explanations offer a simplistic understanding of cultural differences, promote stereotypical notions of ethnicity and culture, and, ultimately, do not capture the complex process of intercultural relations.

In summary, Keilty provides readers with a foundation to move towards an additive practice that values authentic relationships with families. Its synthesis of literature alone is informative and robust, while the seven essential concepts guide professions in reflective practices. The case studies, while idealistic and limited to receptive families, do provide

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experiences of  
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teacher  
education  
students who  
are also  
parents.

readers examples to ponder and to juxtapose with their own experiences. Readers should navigate the examples of cultural differences with caution, recognizing that most intercultural differences between EIs and families are more nuanced than presented here. *Seven Essentials for Family-Professional Partnerships in Early Intervention* will support practitioners in envisioning ideal FPPs as they strive to improve the early intervention experience for all stakeholders.

#### *Reference*

Auerbach, E. (1995). Deconstructing the discourse of strengths in family literacy. *Journal of Reading Behavior, 27*, 643–661.