

## Santa Clara University

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SPED 236  
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### Family Systems and Resources

**Course Description:** This course is designed to provide students with the skills required to work effectively with the families of children and youth with disabilities and with the network of service providers and community agencies with which these families interact. Focus will be on understanding family coping processes, development of communication and problem solving skills, active listening, utilization of parent interview techniques in family assessment and methods for assessing educational and developmental service delivery systems. There will be a very strong emphasis on the development of cultural competence as candidates learn to understand family systems and family life stages, transition challenges, the importance of collaborative parent-professional relationships, parent advocacy, and development of cooperative intervention programs.

**California Commission on Teacher Credentialing Level I Standards addressed:**  
Core Standards 10, 13, 16, M/M: 22 ECE 21, 23, 27, 28, 29, 30 & 31; ELL 7A, 13.

**Required Text:** Berry, J. and Hardman, M. (1998). *Lifetime Perspectives on the Family and Disabilities*. Old Tappan, NJ: Allyn and Bacon.

**Recommended Resource:** Turnbull, A., Turnbull, R., Erwin, E. & Soodak, L. (2006). *Families, professionals and exceptionality*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Merill.

#### Competencies:

1. Each student will demonstrate knowledge/understanding of basic family systems, the family's role in the development of children with special needs, family-professional collaboration and characteristics of families with special challenges such as: teen parents, parents with developmental disabilities, substance abusing families, and parenting children with autism spectrum disorders.
2. Each student will demonstrate the ability to employ culturally sensitive strategies that recognize and strengthen family capabilities, elicit families' priorities, and assess family systems.
3. Each student will demonstrate understanding of communication and problem solving practices that provide families with a supportive, professional, non-judgmental, collaborative relationship.
4. Each student will demonstrate the ability to perform the role of service coordinator in advocating for families and assisting families in gaining access to the full range of program and service options available in the community. Students will be informed of parental rights and offered techniques for facilitating these rights.

5. Each student will develop a collaborative, individualized family service plan based on family priorities and concerns which is designed to enhance parental competence, confidence, self-esteem and build on existing family informal and formal supports while maintaining confidentiality and respect for each family's privacy.

**Course Requirements:**

1. Reading and Class Participation: Class members are required to independently read all assigned materials and to prepare for discussion of readings before coming to class. Active participation in every class is expected (10% of grade.)
2. Mini-case study: With a small group of colleagues, class members will prepare a 2-3 page paper that analyzes one of several studies reflecting a diversity of cultures to be distributed in class. Students will be expected to: (10% of grade.)
  - a) Identify the family's values, identify society's values and summarize the ways in which these may be compatible or are in conflict.
  - b) Assess the family's strengths and concerns along with its coping strategies, interaction patterns, functions, life cycle, etc.
  - c) Describe initial strategies to utilize in developing a collaborative relationship and build family support based on the above data. It must be clear that the plan is unique to the family studied. As part of a group, students will be expected to give an oral presentation of this case study lasting approximately 20 minutes.
3. Midterm: Students will complete successfully a mid-term exam that will focus on the theory of family systems (30% of grade).
4. Mini-research report: Class member will complete a 5 page research paper on a particular area of interest related to current family challenges. Topic suggestions are included on pages 3-4 of this syllabus. Students will be expected to make a 10 minute oral presentation and distribute copies of their paper to fellow classmates. APA reference style is a MUST (20% of grade).
5. Family Study: Class members are required to develop a parent-professional partnership that demonstrates the ability to employ culturally sensitive communication strategies that provide families with a supportive, professional, non-judgmental collaborative relationship. Students will be required to: (30% of grade)
  - a) Assume the role of a "service coordinator" in collaboratively working with a family utilizing the family systems approach in assessing family strengths and concerns and in assisting families to effectively utilize community resources.
  - b) Following the Final Case Study outline provided in class, prepare a thorough written report of the findings with a length of six to eight typed, double spaced pages.

c) Construct the paper so that the first half deals with family structure, interactions, functions and life cycle. The second half should deal with family strengths and needs and should make suggestions on how to develop/build a collaborative parent-professional relationship. Specific suggestions for how and where a family can access the resources to begin to meet their needs and how they can capitalize on their strengths must be included.

d) Students are expected to prepare a report for the family that is sensitively written and culturally appropriate while maintaining confidentiality. This report along with a separate letter of thank you will be given to the family after being reviewed by the instructors.

e) Individualized Family Service Plan: As part of this family study, each class member will design a family service plan that includes a needs assessment and corresponding collaboration plan based on the family's stated and observed concerns, the roles of intervention staff and families, and expected outcomes. The plan will be designed using "recommended practices" for collaborative family involvement and will demonstrate knowledge of theoretical bases of family participation and attention to the family system. The IFSP plan will accompany the family study described above. A format will be distributed in class.

f) **NOTE:** Strict rules of confidentiality must be maintained in all discussion about or assignments involving families. No family names are to be used in the report. Initials or codes of identification should be used. Of course, the family must be given a clear explanation of the purpose and nature of this assignment and must be in full agreement. The signed consent to participate form must be included with the family study.

**Possible mini-research topics:**

1. Unique characteristics and needs of families with one of the following characteristics: parents who abuse substances, parents who are developmentally delayed, teen parents and families who are homeless or in extreme poverty.
2. Appropriate strategies for interpreting and discussing technical information with families.
3. Appropriate strategies for assisting families through transitions.
4. Techniques for recognizing when to make referrals for suspected child abuse.
5. Strategies for helping families to develop advocacy skills.
6. Collaborating with parents when English is not the first language; use of interpreters.
7. Specific factors to keep in mind when making home visitations. How is home visiting different from school-based work with families?

8. Recognizing the stress experienced by families of children with ASD and how professionals might assist families to cope effectively with their challenges.
9. Specific strategies for working with culturally and linguistically diverse families.
10. Effects of culture on child rearing practices.
11. Strategies to encourage appropriate family involvement in early intervention or later educational services.
12. Helping families use the web. What's junk and what is useful?
13. What is resiliency in families? How can we use strength-based instead of deficit-based intervention?

**Class Schedule:**

|                        |   |                                 |
|------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| Session 1:<br>Sept. 24 | Introductions/Course requirements/overview<br>History and changing roles of families,<br>demographics, family-centered services | Chapter 1, pgs 166-169          |
| Session 2:<br>Oct. 1   | Family feeling states and challenges,<br>cultural interpretations of disabilities   | Pgs. 49-52, 154-156<br>handouts |
| Session 3:<br>Oct. 8   | Mini-research reports due/presentations   |                                 |
| Session 4:<br>Oct. 15  | Family systems  | Chapters 2 & 3                  |
| Session 5:<br>Oct. 22  | Active listening, roadblocks, interpreters<br>Mini-case study presentations   | Chapter 6                       |
| Session 6:<br>Oct. 29  | Stress and coping styles<br>Conflict resolution, problem solving  | Chapters 4 & 5                  |
| Session 7:<br>Nov. 5   | Age specific challenges<br>Midterm  | Chapter 7 or 8 or 9             |
| Session 8:<br>Nov. 12  | Family assessment<br>Individualized Family Service Plan   | Pgs. 169-172<br>Handouts        |
| Session 9:<br>Nov. 19  | Home-school partnerships<br>Visit to Family Resource Center   | Pgs. 197-206                    |
| Session 10:<br>Dec. 3  | Presentations of Case Studies   |                                 |
| Session 11:<br>Dec. 10 | Written Case Study due (no class)   |                                 |

**Disability Accommodations**

To request academic accommodations for a disability, students must contact Disability Resources located in the Drahnmann Center in Benson, Room 214 (554-4111, TTY 554-5445). Please also contact the instructor directly after contacting Disability Resources

