

NATURAL AUTHORITY OF FAMILIES

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With great regularity, people with disabilities and their families will find themselves having to deal with professionals, bureaucrats and others in roles of authority.

Not uncommonly the authority figure tends to overshadow the authority of "small people". It helps sometimes to remember that families have a natural authority of their own which can go a long way to reducing this imbalance of power.

Families need to appreciate this natural authority and be willing to act on it. What follows is a brief description of some of the common sources of authority that families can call on when they are acting in the interests of a family member.

♥ The general public recognizes that families have the authority to be fully involved because they have greater responsibility for the well-being of their family members.

♥ Families know their family member the most fully and over the longest period of time. Therefore they have the authority that arises from long term observation, insight and personal relationships.

♥ Families typically care about or love their relatives more than would be true of others, however committed the others may be. Not only do families usually care more but they are also expected to care more.

♥ Families have to live with the long term consequences of service failures to a greater extent than any other party, except the person themselves.

♥ Families are granted considerable presence in the decision-making processes affecting their family members.

♥ The family is an authoritative witness to the performance of professionals and systems and may have special insight into events that take place.

♥ Family members bring to their role a wide range of talents and experiences which can give them additional authority on many matters. For example, a parent might also be an educator.

♥ Families are often best positioned to see how everything, in its entirety, adds up in a person's life. For this reason they can often see the incongruencies of different interventions.

♥ Family members are often free of the vested interests which call into question the credibility of other parties. Frequently family members are granted a degree of independence which highlights their credibility and purity of motive.