

# Building a Partnership With Your Child's Doctor

**A**s a parent, you know your child better than anyone. You know all the good things about him or her as well as what he or she needs. So you play a key role in finding a doctor to partner with and making sure that your child's medical and health needs are met.

## What should I look for in a doctor?

Here are some general qualities:

- **Clinical Skills/Knowledge.** Does he or she have the training or specialty interest important to your child's needs? A doctor with a special interest in child development, disability or special health care needs, or a specific diagnosis might be perfect for your child. You can verify certification for pediatricians at <http://www.abp.org> and family physicians at <http://www.theabfm.org/diplomate/find.aspx>. If you are not familiar with any letters behind your child's doctor's name, ask him or her to explain them.
- **Experience.** Has the doctor cared for other children with a diagnosis that is like your child's or for children with developmental delays or physical, behavioral or emotional disabilities?
- **Mutual Respect.** Is the doctor someone you trust with the health of your child? Does he or she have the right balance between technical skills, interpersonal skills and experience that you desire? Does he or she accept and treat you like a valuable part of your child's health care team? Are your family's beliefs, rituals, and customs recognized, valued, respected and incorporated into the plan of care?
- **Sense of Connection.** Is it easy to get along with the doctor? How does he or she relate to your child? Are you comfortable around him or her? Does the doctor speak your primary language or provide an interpreter to make sure you understand him or her and the plan of care?

## What can I do as a parent?

A good parent-doctor partnership will not just happen because you want it to. In fact, many times the best partnerships come when parents make it happen. Here are some things you can do:

- **Be a partner.** Decide what kind of partnership you want with your child's doctor. Let him or her know what role you want in making health decisions and how you want him or her to help coordinate care and services for your child. You should be able to ask questions, share your views, and feel like you and the doctor are part of the same team devoted to delivering the best care possible for your child.
- **Be a role model.** Show by example how you want to be treated and how you want your child to be treated.
- **Be understanding.** Doctors often have appointments back-to-back. If it seems like the doctor is in a hurry to see the next patient, you are probably right. If you need more time, let your doctor know and he or she should be willing to work this out even if it means making a longer appointment the next time.
- **Express gratitude.** Say thank you, in person, in a letter, or by e-mail. Let your doctor know what you like and that he or she is doing a good job.
- **Don't expect perfection.** Remember that doctors are human, too, and give him or her a chance to make things better if changes are needed.