

Developing Strategies

1. The focus here is to help everyone on the team begin thinking “out of the box.” There are lots of ways of inspiring brain storming. Here’s some suggestions:
 - a. Make the first task numerical: “To make sure we’ve covered all the bases, lets see if we can each come up with five different ways of addressing this need.”
 - b. Make the second task metaphorical: “Mrs. Jones, you’ve often described life with Bob as a circus. Let’s use that idea. Imagine that it really is a circus, how would this need look in the context of a circus? What would a well-run circus do to meet that need? How does that translate back into what we’re trying to do.”
 - c. Push the team to keep listing ideas as long as they can without judging them. Reassure the members that once we’re sure we’ve gotten every possible idea out on the table, we’ll examine them all carefully to see which really respond most effectively to the need.
 - d. The process of coming up with new ideas is called divergent thinking. This kind of thinking spreads out into wider and wider territory to come up with the most creative solutions. The process of selecting an idea and applying it to the problem is called convergent thinking. It starts with an abstract idea and then focuses it down into specific action. At some point the team will get as divergent as its going to go and begin to want to converge on one or two of the proposals on the table. Your job as facilitator is to get a feel for when the right time to allow the process to converge has been reached.
2. After you’ve gotten a long enough list of possible interventions, supports and services, its time for another vote. Just as people prioritized needs, they also should prioritize strategies. What’s the best way to meet this need?
3. One caveat on this voting process is to make sure that the strategy being selected is well matched with the child and family. The way to do this is to say to the team, “You folks

have done a great job of thinking up some really creative ideas. Now we need to pick the ones that are likely to be most responsive to what Bob and Mrs. Jones need. Before we vote, take a look at the strengths we posted at our first meeting. Now look back at our various proposals. I want you to vote for the ones you think make the best use of those strengths.”

4. When a basic strategy has been selected, the next question is “What will it take to put this into action? Who has to do what and when to make it happen?” This is the convergent process. You may find that some folks on the team are better at converging than diverging, good teams have some of each type.
5. Especially when you are developing a plan around a child and family where there is a situation of significant physical risk, it is essential to include a strong crisis component in the plan. Planning around past crises can be tricky. On the one hand we are supposed to build on strengths. On the other, unless we take earlier catastrophes into account, we may be making things worse instead of better.
6. It may help to keep the issue objective. “Bob, I know that fight you had with your mother was a year ago, and you’ve grown a lot since then. Also your insulin was way off at the time. But as a team, we have to deal with the judge. What can we put into place to ease her mind? We have to take care of these ‘just in case’ details if this is going to be a comprehensive plan. It sounds like one strength we can use for this strategy is your ability to sense more quickly when your blood sugar is dropping. Now, what can we put around that?”
7. At the end of this step you will have one or more basic plans of action under each of the domains where the child and family have big needs. Again, make sure you have buy-in from the team. “What does everyone think? If we are able to put these plans into action, are we going to be on the road to helping Bob and Mrs. Jones meet their goals? Bob? Mrs. Jones. Can anyone see something that’s missing?”