

# Transcript: Families Attending Conferences: Tips from PA Family Leaders in Early Intervention

Instrumental Music 0:00

Toni Miguel 0:05

From EITA this is Toni Miguel presenting Families Attending Conferences: Tips from Pennsylvania Family Leaders in Early Intervention. In this podcast I speak with two Pennsylvania families of children with disabilities who have grown into leadership roles, informing the work done through the Office of Child Development and Early Learning. Naomi Galman and Sadia Batool talk about their experiences in attending local, regional, and state conferences. And share tips for families considering attending future conferences. Early Intervention and Family Support services are enhanced when families are engaged with the professionals delivering those services. Listen now to learn how your experience as a family member is a valued and necessary voice for Pennsylvania Early Intervention.

Instrumental Music 0:53

Toni Miguel 0:59

I'm here today with Sadia Batool and Naomi Galman. Thank you both for taking the time to share your expertise on attending conferences. So, we're going to start by just telling us about yourself and your self. Sadia.

Sadia Batool 1:15

Thank you so much, Toni for having me. My name is Sadia Batool. And I'm from Lancaster County. I'm a mother to a wonderful seven year old daughter who is currently in elementary school. She is a successful Early Intervention graduate. Our Early Intervention experience was incredible. Not only was my daughter provided with the supports and services that she needed, but I was also provided with several opportunities to learn and educate myself as a parent of a child with autism. So with the help of Early Intervention, professionals both at the local and at the state level for my daughter successfully graduated Early Intervention, and is now doing amazing in elementary school, Naomi.

Toni Miguel 1:54

Naomi

Naomi Galman 1:55

Hello, I'm Naomi Galman, and I live out here in Beaver, Pennsylvania. I have three daughters, and what brought us to Early Intervention was my middle child, she is now eight, and also in elementary school. And then my daughter who's seven underneath her, also went through the Early Intervention program. My middle child's diagnosed with autism and some global developmental delays, and successfully completed the EI program from the Birth to Three through the preschool program. And I'm gonna piggyback off of Sadia and say that the experiences that were offered to me as a parent to become empowered and to become the advocate for our kid was really profound. And we were just so fortunate to have been able to get plugged into all the opportunities that have something you provided us.

Toni Miguel 2:36

Great, thank you both so much. So we're talking today about conferences. And I know both of you have been to many conferences, can you just talk about briefly what your conference experiences been? How many times maybe you've gone, or if they've been national, regional, state, local conferences.

Toni Miguel 2:54

Naomi, you want to start this one?

Naomi Gallman 2:56

Sure, I've been to well over a dozen conferences. Some of them were national, and some of them were local. And my very first conference was up in Erie, and then I was able to, with support of OCDEL program, expand to be able to travel and get childcare reimbursement. So that was really helpful. And I was able to go to other conferences in Harrisburg, Lancaster, Scranton, and Philadelphia, and also up in State College several times.

Toni Miguel 3:25

Awesome. Sadia, how about you?

Sadia Batool 3:27

I've been, similarly to Naomi, I've been, you know, to a dozen of conferences. And I would say that, you know, very early on, when my daughter was diagnosed with autism, I was fortunate to connect with Parents as Partners in Professional Development, or more commonly known as P3D. And that was really a great forum to provide me with information about upcoming conferences and events, both nationally and locally. And with the help of that information, I was able to attend a lot of conferences. Recently, as a co-chair of the State Interagency Coordinating Council, I've had the opportunity to attend some national conferences. So you know, that has been a great experience as well.

Toni Miguel 4:05

So you both are conference veterans and experts. So we're really happy that you're able to share that experience with some of our new families coming to our EI state conference. In your experience, how do you have a successful conference experience? What have you learned? Can you maybe remember back to your first conference and what made it successful for you? Sadia, do you want to start us?

Sadia Batool 4:28

Thank you, Toni. I would start by my first conference, this was just when my daughter was recently diagnosed. And we were provided a scholarship through our local IU, IU 13 to go to the National Autism Conference. At that time, I was in a time where there was a lot of uncertainty about how to navigate the system of Early Intervention, how to do the placement of services, and I really didn't have a lot of people that I knew, like the other families. So, I was really looking forward to getting more information, connecting with other families. And I think what was transforming for me was this one family session where I first time saw somebody presenting, and that was actually Naomi talking about her daughter, and it was just so inspiring and motivating to see where they started from and where they were at that point of time. So not only was I inspired as a parent to do, you know, similar for my daughter, but I was also inspired to be like Naomi, and you know, share my experience and from there on, you know, it has just been an amazing journey to attend all these conferences, bring that information not only for your own family, but also to be able to share with others. And what makes a conference really good is the preparation that goes into each, you know, preparing, you know, at home for making sure that you know, things are taken care of while you're away for the conference or attending it virtually. So I would say, yes, some of that is really helpful.

Toni Miguel 5:50

Great and Naomi, how about you, what's been your successes?

Naomi Galman 5:56

I just echo everything that Sadia says. Hearing the stories of other family members really inspires and sparks something inside of you that recharges you and energizes you and gives you some vision, you know, for what you'd like for your own journey. I remember my first conference, I sort of did things opposite of Sadia, where I was a part of our local LICC. And through that was invited to a family engagement conference. I attended that. And I remember listening to a speaker and she was talking about parent teacher teams, and how like, there needs to be partnership between teachers and therapists and families. And, it like, it set fire to my soul. I can't explain it other than that, and I went back home, and I took not just the information, and I said, I want this as the relationship for my kids, providers and us. But then I thought other families need to know about this. And it's sort of like you gather information from I mean, from this conference, but from other ones, and it really sets fire to you and ignites such a great Spark. And then you can bring that information and share it to other people. It's really great. So I think some of having a good conference experience is being able to take advantage of some of the things that are available, like the pre meetings beforehand where they get feedback from families. And then the feedback meetings afterwards. Many conferences, offer parent sessions where we can give information. And sometimes conferences have a learning curve. And you have to figure out what sessions are right for you. I have been in sessions where I thought, Ooh, I didn't make a good choice to be here because it was a little bit too clinical, and it wasn't geared for families' ears, it was geared for somebody with a different type of degree, who is doing very specific work. And so I think there's some trial and error with that. Many conferences now, and I've seen the evolution of this, have been really mindful about making sure that families know what's available to them, and what would be best geared for them. That is really, really, helpful. So picking the right sessions, and information that's applicable to your family and then information to bring back to others makes a great conference.

Toni Miguel 8:04

Thank you. So you've touched already a lot on this, but are there any other tips you would give to families, especially in our virtual conference coming up, but other conferences that they might attend in the future as well. Sadia, if you want to start?

Sadia Batool 8:19

Sure, one of the things, especially with virtual conferences, and you know, your child is doing home school or you know, or having virtual learnings, you really have to make sure that some of

those things, you know, are taken care of so that you can fully focus. Sometimes the conference might not have recorded sessions and that's the only opportunity, you know, that you have to attend it live. So one of the things I do is to make sure that my husband's schedule matches the schedule of the conference. So that's one of the things you know, if for some reason my daughter is staying back home from school, he's able to take care of her while I'm focusing on the session. Another thing, sometimes, you know, you might attend conference as couples. So tag teaming, if there are two sessions at one time that you you're really interested and they're not offering recorded sessions. So maybe one session is attended by, you know, your partner and the other is attended by you. And then you can obviously share that information. Another tip, I would say, is most of the conferences have these family support committees and they provide a lot of good information on what sessions you would like to attend. So that's one of the things that has helped me in all the conferences that I've attended. And lastly, I would say sometimes the presenters, they recur at different conferences, and you connect with them as an audience. So I look for them sometimes if they are presenting on different topics in another conference. I feel like this is the person that I really connected to at a previous conference, especially if their sessions are engaging and interactive. So I look for presenter information as well to help me pick the right session.

Toni Miguel 9:51

Great. And Naomi, what tips would you give for families?

Naomi Galman 9:55

I touched on this before, but I think choosing your right sessions would be really valuable, making sure that the content of the sessions... When you get your session information, and you're choosing which workshops you'd like to do, or what breakouts you'd like to participate in, there's little descriptions. And I really dig deep into those and think about them when I'm making my decision. And I agree with you, if you find a presenter that you connect with, or a team of people that were impactful at a former conference, I always veer towards that. I agree with Sadia. I think connecting with families, not just builds your own network, but I'll say this, my best friends in this whole world, and people that understand my journey as a mom of a child with autism or with different disabilities, I connect most with other families who understand that journey. And so, meeting with them, whether it's through a session, whether it's in a private chat message sometimes in the session, or in a breakout room, if it's a virtual platform, doesn't just build my network but also strengthens my support system. I have met so many amazing families. And every time we gather, we sort of recharge each other we do idea sharing, and really just building my own protective factor for our family. Being with other families is really powerful.

Toni Miguel 11:13

And Naomi, I remember you had also talked about how important it is to speak out and attend those family gatherings.

Naomi Galman 11:22

Yeah, I think when there's opportunities to give feedback or to reconvene after you've done a conference, or done different sessions, the impact of reconvening can be really powerful. I remember after a leadership conference, and Sadia was a part of this conversation too, we all kind of re-gathered back together and there was some idea sharing, "This is how our session went", and "This is what our experience was." And then we had feedback for change. And we thought maybe next time, this would be a more useful approach for families. And you know what was really amazing? From that sparked the conversation to make that change. It was so cool, that we were families gathering and just talking about it. And then from that conversation with our feedback and our perspective, we were able to impact change to make something even better. And I just thought that was so powerful. And it really gives parents a platform for professional development and for change, and for all the things that make programs and conferences and sessions really meaningful. And we were able to make change in that. And I thought that was really awesome,

Toni Miguel 12:36

Sadia at any last words that you'd like to add?

Sadia Batool 12:39

I mean, Naomi said it all really well. But I would just say build connections, conferences are a great platform to learn about new resources, your new opportunities to get involved. But one of the things that I also do is to connect with both professionals and families. That also helps to build that trust. Because I've seen a lot of passion and dedication from the professionals, especially at these leadership conferences. We have got to get connected with some of the professional leaders in the field of early childhood education systems. And that, just you know, inspires you so much. And you see that individuals that are there at the administration level are making these decisions, really have a passion and dedication to support Pennsylvania children and their families. At conferences, sometimes first, when I started, I would hesitate to reach out to someone, but just sitting next to somebody, maybe like when they're having lunch, because it's just like a big family reunion, that acted as an icebreaker. So just reach out and connect with

everyone that's at the conference. They're all there to you know, connect and help each other to learn and grow.

Toni Miguel 13:45

Great, well, thank you so much again, Sadia and Naomi for your participation, for sharing your expertise. I know many families will appreciate having heard your experience, and maybe look for you at future conferences. So thank you again,

Sadia Batool 14:02

Thank you for the opportunity.

Naomi Galman 14:05

Thank you

Instrumental Music 14:06

Toni Miguel 14:11

Thank you to our family leaders, Sadia and Naomi, for sharing their personal experiences attending conferences. If you would like to learn about opportunities to get involved, click on the link in this podcast description for the Parents as Partners in Professional Development sign up form. Future conference opportunities will also be updated in this podcast description. Thanks for listening and hope to see you at the next conference.

Instrumental Music 14:37