



A Model of Family Peer Support  
Developed by Family Peer Advocates of New York

*IN THE LOVING MEMORY OF CAROL HARDESTY, WE CELEBRATE A REMARKABLE INDIVIDUAL WHO DEDICATED HER LIFE TO MAKING A POSITIVE IMPACT ON FAMILIES IN NEED. IN 2002, AFTER A DISTINGUISHED CAREER WITH THE WESTCHESTER COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES, AND LATER THE COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH, CAROL BECAME THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FAMILY TIES OF WESTCHESTER. UNDER CAROL'S LEADERSHIP, FAMILY TIES WAS TRANSFORMED FROM A GRASSROOTS COALITION OF PARENTS TO THE REGION'S ONLY INDEPENDENT FAMILY PEER SUPPORT ORGANIZATION. CAROL SAW THE POWER OF FAMILIES SUPPORTING FAMILIES EARLY IN HER CAREER AND OFTEN DESCRIBED OUR WORK AS A "SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT". WITH UNWAVERING DEDICATION CAROL TOUCHED THE LIVES OF COUNTLESS FAMILIES, LEAVING AN INDELIBLE MARK ON OUR HEARTS AND CONSCIENCE.*

*AS WE REMEMBER HER INFECTIOUS WARM SPIRIT, LET US HONOR HER LEGACY BY CONTINUING TO UPLIFT AND SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER JUST AS SHE DID. HER LIGHT WILL FOREVER GUIDE US AS WE CARRY FORWARD HER MISSION OF ADVOCACY AND COMPASSION. REST IN PEACE, DEAR FRIEND KNOWING THAT YOUR IMPACT ON THIS WORLD WILL NOT BE FORGOTTEN.*

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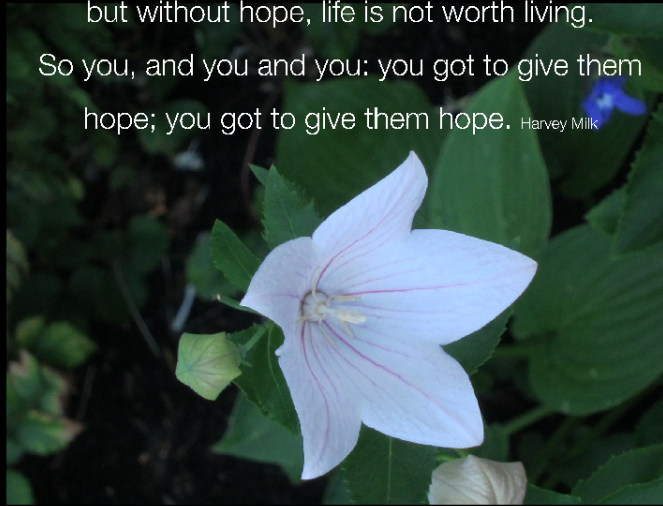
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I know you can't live on hope alone;  
but without hope, life is not worth living.  
So you, and you and you: you got to give them  
hope; you got to give them hope. Harvey Milk



## *A Model of Family Peer Support*

### *VISION*

*There will be a world where families who want support raising their children are valued and respected as partners in their unique journeys and will have the opportunity to thrive.*



## Introduction

This document was created and edited entirely by Family Peer Support Providers in an effort to capture the essence of authentic Family Peer Support and not give way to a medical model. It is intended to be a guide in the practice of Family Peer Support programming. The target audience is those who are responsible for developing, supervising, managing, operating, or overseeing FPS services or programs. We have done our best to include the latest, most up-to-date information on peer support service. The workforce continues to develop.

There is a movement in progressive regions around the world to manage mental health in their communities by including Family Peer Support as a core tool to build a support system and facilitate recovery for the whole family while addressing the needs of each member. FPS is becoming a more common resource in Australia, New Zealand, the UK, and the US, where specialized services are now being delivered to great effect.

**As family members, we KNOW the true value of peer support.** It is time for governments, medical institutions, and funding bodies to fully understand and acknowledge that value. The evidence for this is not only anecdotal; FPS delivers true results for families and individuals, which cascades into quicker recovery, lowered draw on medical services, quicker recapture of lost productivity, and massive savings in health care costs. Just as importantly, it improves quality of life.

Source: CMHA BC DIVISION – 2007 “Environmental Scan on Youth & Family Peer Support”

## How it all began...

### Child and Adolescent Service System Program (CASSP)

**Brief History** A national study in 1982 found that two-thirds of all children with severe emotional disturbances were not receiving appropriate services. These children were "unclaimed" by the public agencies responsible to serve them, and there was little coordination among the various child-serving systems. To address this need, Congress appropriated funds in 1984 for the Child and Adolescent Service System Program (CASSP), envisioned as a comprehensive mental health system of care for children, adolescents, and their families.

**CASSP Core Principles** CASSP is based on a well-defined set of principles for mental health services for children and adolescents with (or who are at risk of developing) severe emotional disorders, as well as their families. These principles are summarized in six core statements.

**Child-centered:** Services meet the individual needs of the child, consider the child's family and community contexts, and are developmentally appropriate, strengths-based, and child-specific.

**Family-focused:** Services recognize that the family is the primary support system for the child and participates as a full partner in all stages of the decision-making and treatment planning process.

**Community-based:** Whenever possible, services are delivered in the child's home community, drawing on formal and informal resources to promote the child's successful participation in the community.

**Multi-system:** Services are planned in collaboration with all the child-serving systems involved in the child's life.

**Culturally competent:** Services recognize and respect the behavior, ideas, attitudes, values, beliefs, customs, language, rituals, ceremonies, and practices characteristic of the child's and family's ethnic group.

**Least restrictive/least intrusive:** Services take place in settings that are the most appropriate and natural for the child and family and are the least restrictive and least intrusive.

**Unconditional Care – Never Give Up!**

## DEFINITION OF FAMILY PEER SUPPORT (SAMHSA)

Parent peer support, also commonly called Family Peer Support or family support services, offers hope, guidance, advocacy, and camaraderie for parents and caregivers of children and youth receiving services from mental health, substance use, and related service systems. Parent support providers deliver peer support through face-to-face support groups, phone calls, or individual meetings. They bring expertise based on their own experience parenting children or youth with social, emotional, behavioral, or substance use challenges, as well as specialized training, to support other parents and caregivers. Working within a peer support framework that recognizes the power of mutuality and experiential understanding, parent support providers deliver education, information, and peer support (Obrochta et al., 2011).

Parents trying to identify and access appropriate services for their child may find child-serving systems (e.g., mental health, education, juvenile justice, child welfare, substance use treatment) complicated and overwhelming. Parent peer support can help parents navigate these systems more effectively, learn from the experiences of other families, feel less alone, and gain hope, ideas, and information. This support can help parents meet their children's needs more efficiently, and with greater confidence and hope. (Kutash et al., 2011, Hoagwood et al., 2009).

## FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS

People do not live in isolation; they live in families (however defined) whose relationships can affect each other in both toxic and healing ways.

Families are the center of individual and community healing. No individual or family lives in isolation. When families grow strong, so do the individuals within them and the communities they call home.

All families have strengths that they can tap into to build a fulfilling life together and to support their individual members' growth and dreams.

By focusing on strengths, rather than problems, we can help families rediscover their own path to wellness.

Families can be their own healers. With our support and encouragement, they can draw on inner strengths, develop skills, and reach out for the resources they identify as necessary for their success.

Families may need different supports at different times. These can range from traditional therapy to individual support and empowerment, group support, parenting skills development, and/or concrete advocacy.

## *RATIONALES FOR FAMILY PEER SUPPORT*

Families need access to a wide range of information, care, and resources.

Families need information and perspective on the challenges of being a family member within a family raising a child who is experiencing a social, emotional, developmental, behavioral and/or a mental health challenge.

Families need external connection to keep from isolating or succumbing to stigma and discrimination.

Families need support, encouragement, and hope – personally and collectively.

Families benefit from other families who have made the journey and lived the experience, who can walk shoulder to shoulder with them through the trials and tribulations they face on a daily basis.

Families navigate the service system choosing services that fit their unique needs, no two families navigate the system in the same way.

Family Support Providers have expertise on the service system in their community and have the unique ability to assist a family in making informed choices, addressing questions and concerns, and making course corrections as needs change.

## *MISSION*

*Family Peer Advocates with personal lived experiences support families by meeting them where they are to offer support so families can strengthen themselves during challenging times.*

## *Core Values*

**Belonging and Community** Peer support acknowledges that all human beings need to belong and be a part of a community. Peer support recognizes that many people have barriers that keep them from developing community. We actively work towards deconstructing those social blockades that prevent inclusion and acceptance. Peer support workers assist families in identifying and building their natural support network. Family support workers serve with a social justice mindset, and intentionally practice empathy, compassion, and self-compassion. Family Support helps to reduce these barriers thereby reducing stigma and creating a safe space for families to prosper.

**Social Justice Mindset:** Peer Support Workers serve with a social justice mindset, believing that all families have a right to the best mental health care New York State can offer.

**Respect, Dignity and Equity** All human beings have intrinsic value. Peer support workers acknowledge that deep worth by:



- practicing cultural humility and sensitivity
- serving with a trauma-informed approach
- offering generosity of assumption<sup>[1]</sup> in communication and conflict
- mindfully addressing personal biases

Peer support is about meeting people where they are at and serving others with a knowledge of equity.

**Curiosity** We are always intentional about how curiosity and inquiry support connection, growth, learning and engagement. We encourage curiosity while respecting the boundaries and protecting the privacy of the people we support. We are continually curious, but not invasive, while challenging assumptions and narratives. We ask powerful questions. We offer generosity of assumption to those who think differently than we do. We know that active, nonjudgmental, listening, and asking questions are more important than providing answers.

**Professionalism** We maintain professionalism in the manner in which we provide support services, the attitude we bring, the relationships we build, and our commitment to the mission of Family Peer Services. At all times, we approach our work with openness, respect, transparency, and humility.

**Compassion** Empathy for children, their families, and our staff is ingrained in our history and inspires our future. We do more than treat the child; we practice family-centered care as the cornerstone of compassion.

**Excellence** We follow the highest standards of quality and safety and expect accountability from each other as well as other child/family serving organizations. We continually strive to offer our best to the youth and families we support.

**Collaboration** We work throughout the state in alliance with families, staff, providers, and volunteers, creating a positive impact for all families we serve. This spirit of respectful, culturally humble partnership extends beyond our walls to our provider colleagues and community leaders.

**Innovation** We aspire to be an innovative leader in family support. We continually seek new and better solutions. Because innovation springs from knowledge, we foster learning in all disciplines.

**Acknowledgement** We believe that all human beings long to know and be known – to be seen for who we are, and deeply heard, without someone trying to fix or save us.

**Mutuality** The peer relationship is mutual and reciprocal. Peer support breaks down hierarchies. The peer support worker and the peer co-create the relationship equally, and both participate in boundary creation. We grow and learn from each other.

**Strength-Based/Solution-Focused** We intentionally build on already existing strengths. We thoughtfully and purposefully move in the direction of thriving, rather than only responding to pain and oppression. We use strength-based language and challenge others to do the same.

**Self-Determination** is the right to make one's own decisions and be free from coercion. We support the facilitation and creation of an environment where people can feel free to tap into their inner motivation. Peer support workers don't fix or save. We acknowledge and hold space for resilience and inner wisdom.

**Stewardship** We accept the responsibility of the development in public policy that affects youth and families, and we recognize that collaboration with other child-service organizations is vital to the success of youth and families

## COMMITMENTS - WE ARE COMMITTED TO:

- Nothing about me without me!

- Family voice is at the forefront of all services.
- Awareness of personal experiences and how we view the families we serve.
- Training that follows trends and consistently updated informed by current research.
- Allowing families to feel free of judgment. (Trauma informed.)
- Meeting families where they are.
- Remaining culturally humble and open to learning of a family's beliefs.
- Meeting families in various environments using different modalities chosen by the family.
- Never defining a family by their behavior.
- Encouraging families to advocate for themselves.
- Remaining curious or learning more about the family story throughout the duration of service.
- Only sharing lived experience that is appropriate and beneficial to the family.
- Developing family perspective as they prefer to be seen.
- Noticing and acknowledging the strengths that each family member brings to the relationship.
- Nonjudgmental listening.
- Seeking to understand each family member's wishes, hopes, and intentions.
- Maintaining ethical boundaries.
- Our role is to support not report.
- Consistent interaction and communication with the families we serve.

## *ETHICS*

The purpose of the certified Family Peer Advocate (FPA) Code of Ethics is to outline the basic ethical principles of peer support practice. The code shall serve as a guide for the FPA in the State of New York by defining professional responsibility and ethical standards for the profession.

The FPA will never discuss the families they are supporting outside of the necessary work conversations.

The FPA will ensure that all necessary professional conversations about families are happening from a solution-focused and family-driven lens. The FPA will be on the alert for judgmental and stigmatizing language and advocate for a strength-based focus.

On all teams, the FPA's primary responsibility is to advocate for the family.

The FPA always maintains professional and personal boundaries and helps the family to engage community resources for long term solutions.

The FPA acknowledges the family stress that comes with having strangers in their homes. The FPA is respectful of the family's time, schedules, and home environment needs, e.g. be on time, keep appointments, and communicate regularly.

The FPA's personal triggers and traumas are processed in supervision for support and self-care.

The FPA safeguards information about the family by sharing only what is relevant and approved by the family with other professionals and community providers.

The FPA remains current on certification and continuous education.

The FPA acts as a bridge between the family and the service providers as well as other supports.

The FPA will apply the principles of resiliency, wellness and/or recovery, family-driven approach, youth-guided approach, and peer-to-peer mutual-learning principles in everyday interactions with family members.

The FPA will partner with family members' decision-making consistent with their culture, values, and beliefs.

The FPA will provide information, resources, and options needed to strategize and make decisions about the next steps in their process. The FPA joins in the family's evolving journey.

The FPA will support each family members voice and choice.

The FPA will stay informed on current research, policy, and developments to meet the unique needs of each family.

The FPA will be transparent with families and supervisors when prior relationships or connections are identified and the parties will collectively determine if it is appropriate and in everyone's best interest to form a working relationship.

The FPA will maintain and foster a supportive relationship with the family by focusing on moving toward the family's self-defined aspirations.

The FPA will present themselves in appearance and demeanor to be recognized as a role model.

The FPA shares their own recovery story in a manner that promotes recovery, instills hope, and is beneficial to those they are serving. The focus should always be on the family's journey, "we share for the purpose of hope."

Family Peer Advocates will discuss privacy and confidentiality policies as well as limitations with each family. As mandated reporters, we are obligated to report any instances of abuse or neglect.

Family Advocates will develop a strategy to acknowledge a family member when an unplanned encounter happens in the community.

The FPA will not practice, condone, facilitate, or collaborate in any form of discrimination based on ethnicity, race, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, gender, etc.

The FPA will explore and respect the values of each individual he/she serves.

The FPA will be transparent with her/his supervisor about any conflict of interest, values, or beliefs that threaten or disrupt the relationship with the families.

The FPA will always use strength-based language when discussing family needs or challenges in all settings, especially with colleagues and supervisors or other collaterals.

The FPA will always listen to and respect each person they support in an effort to help them feel more powerful.

## *SCOPE OF PRACTICE*

### **Family Centered Support**

- Create a sense of belonging with each family to help them feel that they are part of a family support community, which allows them to give and receive support. We reduce stigma by creating a place of belonging for each family member.

- Develop a relationship based on the strengths and resiliencies of the family through face-to-face or telephone contacts as determined by the family.
- Share strategies with parents/caregivers that increase resilience and protective factors and build skills within the family.
- Support families through difficult and crisis situations.
- Be willing and able to share your own lived experience in a meaningful way that reduces feelings of hopelessness and isolation.
- Facilitate parent/caregiver (including fathers, grandparents) and sibling support groups in an effort to help them better understand and cope with the symptoms of mental illness.
- Actively listen and provide emotional support.
- Help parents/caregivers incorporate strategies that promote wellness and resilience.
- Strategize with parents/caregivers in the next step in their journey.
- Demonstrate and continue to build knowledge and understanding of community-based resources and systems of care.
- Provide support and services at times and locations convenient for the family, including during times of crisis or transition.
- Provide transportation or travel assistance when it is necessary for the family.
- Assist in the empowerment of families, through knowledge and support toward self-sufficiency to prevent crisis.

### **Education**

- Encourage and support parents/caregivers create strategies for self-empowerment utilizing their preferred view.
- Provide mutual support to parents/caregivers in discovering and building natural support systems and community connections.
- Provide resources to families for training and education to increase knowledge and expertise including local, state, and national organizations.
- Support the parent to become the expert in their child's development and diagnosis.

### **Professional Responsibility**

- Understand the importance of care teams and systems and how to partner with them.
- Understand and abide by the code of ethics.
- Fulfill training and ongoing education requirements, "continuous improvement".
- Understand and comply with mandatory reporting requirements.
- Participate in supervision that provides guidance and support to promote competent and ethical delivery of peer services and supports through skill building, reflection, debriefing, documentation guidance, and solution development.
- Understand risk factors for suicide and current suicide prevention and intervention practices.

- Act as a liaison between parents/caregivers and providers to promote understanding of the family's hopes, dreams, and intentions.
- Provide advocacy and support for family engagement and family-centered care where voice and choice are respected and promoted.
- Conduct mutual education with the family, community, and systems regarding the needs and barriers to accessing services.
- Family support providers offer a wide range of assistance and support, depending on the settings in which they work and the needs of the families they serve.
- Offer specialized supports for families experiencing challenges with systems such as child welfare, juvenile courts, probation, or schools, etc.
- Ensure that all support is trauma, informed, culturally, competent, and solution focused.
- Plan community events to bring families together, raise awareness, and offer educational opportunities.
- Offer social activities to promote connectedness, belonging, and tradition to families that provide an opportunity to celebrate and enjoy one another.
- Complete all required documentation including assessments, service plans, progress notes, etc.
- Dress appropriately for the activities planned. FPA's should note that their appearance matters. An FPA's appearance can create a positive or negative impression that reflects on all of us. All FPAs must be clean and well-groomed. Clothes that are revealing or project an inappropriate message are not allowed.

## Core Competencies

### FAMILY PEER SUPPORT ADVOCATE

Family peer support competencies refer to the skills and qualities that individuals possess or develop to effectively provide support to other families who may be facing challenges or going through difficult times. These competencies are essential for creating a supportive and empathetic environment where families can feel understood, empowered, and encouraged. Here are some key competencies related to family peer support:

- 1. Lived experience:** lived experience refers to the first-hand involvement or direct experiences and choices of a given person, and the knowledge that they gain from it, as opposed to the knowledge a given person gains from second-hand or mediated source.
- 2. Family Driven:** Family-driven care is a model of care that emphasizes the importance of families in the lives of children and youth with mental health needs. It is based on the principles of partnership, choice, respect, and collaboration between families and professionals. The guiding principles of family driven care include shared decision making and responsibility, practice and changes from provider driven to family driven, families have accurate and complete information, all youth have a family voice advocating for them, remove barriers created by stigma, families have access to peer support, celebrate diversity and honor

each family's culture, and families and family were on organizations provide direction on funding policies and service options

- 3. Social Justice Framework:** All individuals deserve equal rights, opportunities, and treatment within our society. The FPA focuses on promoting fairness and addressing inequalities that may exist based on factors such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, or any other characteristic that can lead to discrimination or disadvantage.

Family Peer Support aims to create a society where everyone has access to basic human rights, such as education, healthcare, housing, and employment, regardless of their background or circumstances. The FPA seeks to challenge systemic barriers and prejudices that can perpetuate inequality and work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society.

It is important to note that social justice is not just about equal distribution of resources, but also about addressing the root causes of inequality and actively working towards dismantling oppressive systems. It involves advocating for policies and practices that promote fairness, inclusivity, and social change.

- 4. Active Listening:** The ability to listen attentively and without judgment is crucial. By actively listening, you show genuine interest in understanding the experiences and needs of the family you are supporting.
- 5. Empathy:** Being able to understand and share the feelings of others is essential in providing meaningful support. Showing empathy helps create a safe and non-judgmental space for families to express themselves.
- 6. Effective Communication:** Good communication skills are vital for building trust and maintaining open lines of dialogue. Clear and compassionate communication helps families feel heard and understood.
- 7. Advocacy:** Being an advocate for the families you support involves empowering them to make informed decisions and ensuring their voices are heard within systems and services. Advocacy may include assisting families in navigating resources, providing information, and helping them access appropriate support.
- 8. Knowledge of Resources:** Familiarity with community resources, services, and supports is crucial. Having an understanding of available resources allows you to guide families towards the appropriate help they may need.
- 9. Strength-based:** The Family Peer Advocate focuses on the strengths and resourcefulness of the people they support, rather than their weaknesses, deficits, or failures. This helps the person build a mindset focused on positive capacity building and helps them understand that they are resilient, leading to more reasonable expectations of themselves and others. Preferred View techniques are recommended.
- 10. Solution-focused:** Being able to help families identify and explore potential solutions to their challenges is an important skill. Assisting families in brainstorming and developing action plans can empower them to address their difficulties more effectively. Preferred View techniques are recommended.
- 11. Cultural Humility:** Recognizing and respecting the diverse backgrounds and cultures of the families you support is essential. Being culturally sensitive helps create an inclusive and supportive environment.



**12. Boundaries and Self-Care:** Maintaining healthy boundaries and practicing self-care is crucial for family peer supporters. It ensures they can provide support without overextending themselves, maintaining their own well-being.

**13. Fidelity to the Model of Family Support** The FPA is aware of and in agreement with the model of family peer support as described by the New York State Coalition of Family Support Provider

Remember, these competencies are not exhaustive, but they provide a foundation for effective family peer support.

## **FAMILY PEER SUPPORT SUPERVISOR**

Family peer advocate supervisors play a vital role in supporting and guiding family peer advocates as they work with families in need. In addition to the family peer support advocate competencies the supervisor will have the following:

- 1. Leadership:** A family peer advocate supervisor should possess strong leadership skills to effectively guide and inspire their team of family peer advocates. They should be able to set clear goals, provide direction, and motivate their team members to achieve success. Use of the Situational Leadership model is recommended.
- 2. Communication:** Excellent communication skills are crucial for a family peer advocate supervisor. They should be able to communicate effectively with both their team members and the families they serve. This includes active listening, providing feedback, and facilitating open and honest dialogue.
- 3. Significant Knowledge of Family Advocacy:** A supervisor should have a deep understanding of family advocacy principles and practices. This includes knowledge of resources, services, and support systems available to families, as well as an understanding of the unique challenges they may face.
- 4. Supervisory Skills:** A family peer advocate supervisor should have strong supervisory skills to effectively manage their team. This includes providing guidance, support, and feedback to family peer advocates, as well as monitoring their progress and ensuring their professional development. Both group and individual supervision are provided by the supervisor according to the agency protocol as well as the needs of each family peer advocate. Use of Reflective Supervision recommended.
- 5. Collaboration:** Collaboration is key in the role of a family peer advocate supervisor. They should foster a collaborative and supportive environment, encourage teamwork, and promote partnerships with other service providers to ensure families receive comprehensive support.
- 6. Provide Protection and advocacy** for FPA in their role within the agency and to external colleagues. The supervisor ensures that the FPA's that report to them are protected from stigma and judgment by the agency they work for. The supervisor advocates for the FPA's in their role as advocates for the families they serve. The supervisor ensures that the FPAs who report to them are not Co-opted by internal or external people or entities. The FPA is empowered and supported in advocating for families without fear of retribution.

**7. Approachable:** Approachability is the ability to be easy to approach and talk to and to put others at ease. Examples of approachability include:

- ☐ Maintaining a calm and composed demeanor under stressful situations
- ☐ Acknowledging and recognizing any proposal for change
- ☐ Promptly tackling changes while completing assignments
- ☐ Welcoming criticism that will help to improve the business
- ☐ Willingness to look for more effective methods to conduct business

**8. Empathetic listening** To prepare for empathic listening, begin by quieting the mind in order to focus fully on what the other is saying, listening fully and openly, and listening through the words. Steven Covey (2020), tells us there are four stages of empathic listening:

- ☐ **Stage 1: Mimicking content** This is the least effective stage of listening taught in active or reflective listening courses.
- ☐ **Stage 2: Rephrasing the content** This is somewhat more effective but remains limited to the verbal portion of communication.
- ☐ **Stage 3: Reflecting feelings** This stage includes not only what was said, but how the speaker feels about it.
- ☐ **Stage 4: Rephrasing content and reflecting feelings** This stage incorporates both the second and third stages of the golden nugget of communication. Covey describes this stage as giving the speaker *psychological air*.

Rephrasing content and reflecting feelings draws the speaker closer to the listener, reassuring them they are in a safe space. The barrier between the parties is removed for what Covey describes as *soul-to-soul flow*, which includes trust and vulnerability.

Use empathic listening when the topic is crucial, meaningful, or substantial. Empathic listening is also effective when emotions are running high, when either party doesn't feel understood, or when there is low trust in the relationship. Covey, S. R. (2020). *The 7 habits of highly effective people*. Simon & Schuster.

**9. Substantial knowledge of the “systems” and resources** the supervisor understands and can access information about the various systems that families encounter in their daily lives. The supervisor is able to share this information with the family peer advocates when a situation arises that requires the FPA to utilize a system that they are not familiar with. The supervisor can research and access information that is helpful to the individual FPA in their work with families.

Remember, these are just some of the competencies that are important for a family peer advocate supervisor. Each individual may bring their own unique strengths and experiences to the role, further enhancing their ability to support and empower families.

## STAGES/COMPONENTS OF FAMILY PEER SUPPORT

Family Peer Support is a valuable resource for individuals and families facing various challenges. It provides a safe space for families to connect, share experiences, and receive support from others who have gone through similar situations. It is hard to nail down some components as it depends on where the family is in the system and how billing occurs in the agency, and how the agency is funded. Some agencies employ a marketing person who controls the social media messaging, and for some the FPA can put material in a social media group. Some agencies cannot do any phone or online outreach, it must all be in person. Others can use text to keep in contact with families.

The stages and components of family peer support may include:

### **1. Recruitment/Messaging.**

When it comes to messaging and recruiting families for family peer support, it's important to communicate the benefits and create a warm and inviting atmosphere. Here are some friendly and effective approaches you can take:

- ☐ **Highlight the Benefits:** Clearly communicate the advantages of family peer support, such as the opportunity to connect with other families facing similar challenges, share experiences, and gain valuable support and advice. Emphasize that it's a safe and non-judgmental space where everyone can learn and grow together.
- ☐ **Personal Testimonials:** Share stories or testimonials from families who have benefited from family peer support. Hearing about real-life experiences can be compelling and help potential participants understand how it can positively impact their own lives.
- ☐ **Utilize Various Channels:** Use multiple communication channels to reach families, such as social media, community bulletin boards, newsletters, or local parenting groups. Tailor your messages to suit each platform and consider partnering with community organizations or schools to help spread the word.
- ☐ **Warm and Friendly Tone:** Craft your messages using a warm, friendly, and empathetic tone. Show that you genuinely care about the well-being of families and understand the challenges they face. Avoid using jargon or technical language that may alienate or confuse potential participants.
- ☐ **Personal Invitations:** Personally reach out to families who might benefit from family peer support. This could be through direct conversations, phone calls, or personalized emails. Let them know they are specifically invited and that their presence and contributions would be valued.
- ☐ **Visual Materials:** Create visually appealing materials, such as flyers or posters, that convey the essence of family peer support. Include images that represent diverse families and showcase the sense of community and support that can be found within the program or service.
- ☐ **Address Concerns:** Anticipate and address any concerns or barriers that families may have about participating in family peer support. This could include addressing issues like time commitments, confidentiality, or accessibility. Providing clear information and reassurance can help alleviate any hesitations.

Consistency and ongoing communication are key. Regularly remind families of the benefits of family peer support and keep the lines of communication open for any questions or inquiries they may have. By using these friendly and creative approaches, you can effectively recruit families and build a strong network of support.

## **2. Referral.**

When seeking referrals for family peer support, it's important to reach out to various sources that are connected to families who may benefit from such support. Here are some potential referral sources to consider:

- ❑ **Healthcare Providers:** Reach out to healthcare professionals, such as doctors, pediatricians, therapists, or counselors. They often have direct contact with families experiencing challenges and can refer them to family peer support programs.
- ❑ **Community Organizations:** Collaborate with community organizations that serve families, such as family resource centers, community centers, or social service agencies. These organizations may already have established relationships with families and can provide valuable referrals.
- ❑ **Schools and Educational Institutions:** Contact schools, including teachers, school counselors, or parent-teacher associations. They can identify families who may need support and refer them to family peer support programs.
- ❑ **Support Groups:** Connect with existing support groups for specific challenges or conditions, such as groups for parents of children with disabilities, mental health support groups, or addiction recovery groups. These groups may have members who are interested in family peer support.
- ❑ **Online Communities:** Engage with online communities and forums where families discuss parenting or specific challenges they face. Offer information about family peer support programs and encourage interested individuals to seek further assistance.
- ❑ **Word of Mouth:** Encourage current participants of family peer support programs to spread the word to their friends, family, and acquaintances who may benefit from the support. Personal recommendations can be influential in gaining referrals.
- ❑ **Social Service Agencies:** Establish connections with social service agencies that work with families in need. They may have caseworkers or coordinators who can refer families to family peer support programs as part of their overall support plan.
- ❑ **Pediatric Hospitals or Clinics:** Collaborate with pediatric hospitals or clinics to identify families who may benefit from family peer support. They can refer families who may have a child with a chronic illness, disability, or other medical conditions.

Programs should provide referral sources with clear information about the family peer support program, including its benefits, eligibility criteria, and how to make a referral. Building strong relationships with these resources can ensure a consistent flow of referrals and help families access the support they need.

### **3. Connection to an FPA.**

When deciding which family peer supporter to assign to a family in a family peer support program, it's important to consider several factors to ensure a successful match. Here are some considerations to keep in mind:

- **Needs and Challenges:** Evaluate the specific needs and challenges of the family. Consider their circumstances, such as parenting struggles, mental health concerns, special needs, or addiction issues. Look for a family peer supporter who has personal experience or expertise in those areas. The supervisor/agency should have a strong understanding of the FPA on staff. Their lived experience, current situation, background, and wellbeing on a day to day basis, The question, "will the family's situation be triggering for the FPA?" must be considered.
- **Similarities and Shared Experiences:** Seek a family peer supporter who can relate to the family's experiences and background. Matching them based on similarities, such as cultural background, language, or specific family dynamics, can help establish a stronger connection and build trust. It is important that there can be a warm hand off if the family and/or FPA don't feel like they have shared experiences, well matched, or feel a strong connection. FPA should understand the family's background and information before making first contact.
- **Training and Skills:** Assess the training and skills of the family peer supporters. Look for individuals who have received appropriate training or certification in family peer support and have a strong understanding of the challenges faced by families. Consider their ability to provide appropriate guidance and support. All FPA should have sufficient training and updated credentials. All FPA's should have access to training and classes, CTAC for free trainings, know where and how to access trainings. All training should be posted to ALL FPA's and not just to FPA that request additional training. FPA should also be able to have access to training that will provide information and skills in areas of interest.
- **Compatibility and Personal Connection:** Consider the personality and communication style of both the family peer supporter and the family. It's crucial to match individuals who can establish a positive and comfortable rapport. Look for compatibility in terms of values, beliefs, and communication preferences.
- **Availability and Accessibility:** Consider the availability of the family peer supporter and the family's schedule and preferences. Ensure that the assigned family peer supporter can commit to regular meetings or sessions and is accessible when the family needs support. Agencies may consider being open for longer hours with a flexible workday (12 hours) with both day and evening shifts available for FPA work.
- **Feedback and Preferences:** Seek input from the family when possible. Ask them about their preferences, expectations, and any specific qualities they are looking for in a family peer supporter. Their feedback can help guide the matching process and ensure a better fit.
- **Supervision and Support:** Provide ongoing supervision and support to family peer supporters. Regular check-ins and debriefing sessions can help identify any challenges or concerns and provide necessary guidance to ensure the success of the support relationship.

The matching process may require flexibility and adaptability. If the assigned family peer supporter and the family do not form a strong connection or if challenges arise, be open to re-evaluating and making necessary adjustments to ensure the family receives the appropriate support.

#### **4. Engagement.**

Parent engagement in family peer support is incredibly important for the overall well-being and success of families. It involves actively engaging parents in supporting and learning from one another in a supportive and non-judgmental environment.

When parents engage in family peer support, they have the opportunity to connect with others who may be experiencing similar challenges or situations. This shared experience fosters a sense of community and allows for the exchange of knowledge, advice, and emotional support.

To encourage parent engagement in family peer support, here are a few creative ideas you can try:

- **Use of Preferred View:** The Preferred View approach maintains that it is important to answer the question, "What are the key ingredients of a helpful conversation?" By presenting a coherent framework, preferred view provides a compelling answer about how helpers can more effectively talk with the people they assist using strength-based interactions. This is a solution-focused approach that emphasizes the person's concrete actions as well as the meanings behind these actions.
- **Parent Support Groups:** Establish regular parent support group meetings where parents can come together to discuss common concerns, share experiences, and offer support to one another. These groups can be organized in person or virtually, depending on the preferences and accessibility of the parents involved. Various types of support groups that match the needs of the families served should be made available. Programs should provide groups at times that make them accessible to working families. After hours incentives should be available for FPA to facilitate support groups.
- **Parent-led Workshops:** Encourage parents to share their expertise by facilitating workshops on various topics related to parenting and family well-being. This could include sessions on effective communication, positive discipline strategies, or managing stress. It allows parents to take on an active role in supporting their peers while also enhancing their own knowledge and skills. The FPA should collaborate with other agencies for workshop and training for parents.
- **Parent Mentoring Programs:** Develop a mentoring program where experienced parents can provide guidance and support to newer or less experienced parents. This one-on-one approach can be highly beneficial, as it allows for personalized support tailored to specific needs.
- **Social Media Groups:** Create online communities or social media groups dedicated to supporting parents. These platforms can provide a space for parents to connect, share resources, seek advice, and build relationships with others who understand their unique challenges.
- **Parent Education Events:** Host educational events for parents that focus on topics such as child development, mental health, or navigating school systems. By providing valuable



information and resources, you can empower parents and encourage their active engagement in supporting their families.

Fostering parent engagement in family peer support requires creating a welcoming and inclusive environment where parents feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, concerns, and experiences. By implementing these creative strategies, you can help parents form meaningful connections and tap into the support they need to thrive as individuals and as families.

## **5. Exploration of strengths and challenges and what is important to the family, understanding the system's process.**

Exploring strengths, challenges, and what is important to a family in the family peer support process is crucial for providing effective and meaningful support. Here are some key points to consider:

- ☐ **Strengths:** Identify and build upon the strengths of the family. This could include their resiliency, problem-solving abilities, support networks, or any other positive aspects they possess. Recognizing and utilizing their strengths can empower the family and enhance their ability to overcome challenges.
- ☐ **Challenges:** Understand the specific, self-defined challenges the family is facing. This could include financial difficulties, parenting issues, mental health concerns, substance abuse, or any other obstacles they are encountering. By identifying these challenges, the family peer supporter can tailor their support to address these specific areas of need.
- ☐ **Goals and Priorities:** Work with the family to establish their goals and priorities. This could involve discussing what they hope to achieve through the family peer support process, whether it's improving communication, accessing community resources, or enhancing parenting skills. Understanding their goals will help guide the support provided and ensure it aligns with their needs.
- ☐ **Cultural Sensitivity:** Recognize and respect the cultural background and values of the family. Cultural sensitivity is crucial to ensure that the support provided is relevant and respectful. Be open to learning about and incorporating the family's cultural practices and beliefs into the support process. Maintain an "asking stance" by staying curious about a family's beliefs, values and intentions.
- ☐ **Empowerment and Autonomy:** Empower the family to make decisions and take charge of their own lives. The family peer support process should focus on building their confidence, skills, and self-advocacy abilities. Encourage them to actively participate in setting goals, making decisions, and accessing resources, fostering their autonomy and ownership of the support process.
- ☐ **Confidentiality and Trust:** Establish a safe and confidential environment for the family. Respect their privacy and ensure that any information shared remains confidential, fostering a sense of trust between the family and the family peer supporter. This trust is vital for building a strong support relationship.
- ☐ **Flexibility and Individualized Support:** Recognize that each family is unique, with their own needs and preferences. Offer flexible support that is tailored to the specific circumstances

and dynamics of the family. Adapt the support approach as needed to meet their changing priorities over time.

By exploring the strengths, challenges, and priorities of the family, the family peer support process can be individualized and responsive to each family's specific needs. This approach promotes empowerment, trust, and collaboration, ultimately enhancing the effectiveness of the support provided.

## **6. Prioritizing the challenges with the family.**

When providing family peer support, it is essential to prioritize the family's challenges based on their immediate needs and the impact those challenges have on their overall well-being. Here are some factors to consider when prioritizing the family's challenges:

- ☐ **Family's Perspective:** Listen to the family's perspective and understand what challenges they consider to be most pressing. Respect their insights and priorities, as they have the best understanding of their own circumstances. Collaboratively identify challenges that are most relevant to them and align with their goals.
- ☐ **Urgency:** Identify challenges that require immediate attention and intervention. These could include safety concerns, mental health crises, or any other pressing issues that demand immediate support.
- ☐ **Impact:** Assess the challenges in terms of the extent to which they affect the family's daily functioning and overall well-being. Prioritize challenges that have a significant impact on their ability to meet their basic needs, maintain relationships, or navigate their daily lives.
- ☐ **Interconnectedness:** Consider how challenges are interconnected and influence one another. Addressing a root challenge might have a positive ripple effect on other related challenges. Prioritize challenges that, when addressed, have the potential to create positive change in multiple areas of the family's life.
- ☐ **Capacity for Change:** Assess the family's readiness and capacity to address specific challenges. Prioritize challenges that the family is willing and able to work on at the present moment. It is important to ensure that the family feels supported and empowered throughout the process, and tackling challenges they are ready to address can contribute to their motivation and engagement.
- ☐ **Resources and Supports:** Take into account the availability of resources and supports to address specific challenges. Prioritize challenges that can be effectively addressed through existing community resources, services, or interventions. This helps ensure that the family can access the necessary support to address their challenges effectively.

Remember, the prioritization of challenges may vary depending on the family's unique circumstances and needs. Maintaining open communication, actively listening, and regularly reassessing priorities will help guide the family peer support process effectively.

## **7. Align the family members.**

When using family peer support to address challenges, it is important to help the family align family members and foster collaboration. Here are some strategies to facilitate this process:

- ❑ Open communication: Create a safe and open space for all family members to express their thoughts, concerns, and ideas. Encourage active listening and ensure that everyone's voice is heard and respected.
- ❑ Shared goals: Facilitate a discussion where family members identify and agree upon common goals. Encourage them to focus on shared values and aspirations that can unite them in their journey towards addressing challenges.
- ❑ Strengths-based approach: Highlight the individual strengths, skills, and resources of each family member. Emphasize their unique contributions and how they can collectively work together to overcome challenges. This helps build a sense of empowerment and positivity within the family.
- ❑ Be aware of trauma in both physical and verbal communication, recognize family needs, location of meeting (community or home) doors open or closed/back to the door or ability to see the door.
- ❑ Be comfortable with silence and allow families to collect their thoughts, this is their plan and is a living document that can be changed as families see fit.
- ❑ Don't use acronyms or mental health jargon, such as the overused phrase "so what I hear you say" Use language that families can receive, and be aware of technical words, use everyday language.
- ❑ Collaborative problem-solving: Encourage family members to work together to identify possible solutions and strategies for addressing challenges. Facilitate brainstorming sessions where everyone's ideas are welcomed and valued. Encourage compromise and negotiation to find solutions that are acceptable to all.
- ❑ Individual responsibilities: Help family members identify their individual roles and responsibilities in the process of addressing challenges. Assign tasks and encourage accountability to ensure that everyone actively participates and contributes to the family's progress.
- ❑ Celebrate achievements: Acknowledge and celebrate small successes along the way. Recognize individual and collective efforts to keep motivation high and reinforce the importance of working together as a family.
- ❑ Continuous support: Provide ongoing support and encouragement to the family throughout the process. Check-in regularly to address any concerns or obstacles that may arise. Offer guidance, resources, and referrals as needed to help the family overcome challenges effectively.

Remember, each family is unique, and the process of aligning family members may take time and patience. Be flexible in your approach and adapt to the family's dynamics and needs. Ultimately, the goal is to foster a sense of unity, collaboration, and shared responsibility within the family as they navigate their challenges together.



## 8. Develop a plan to address the challenges.

To develop a plan with a family to address their challenges using family peer support, follow these steps:

- ☐ Set up regular check in dates and times, be consistent. Look at next steps and use “next step” language.
- ☐ Remind the family of the value of family peer support: Highlight the benefits of learning from others who have faced similar challenges and have successfully overcome them. Share personal experiences or stories of other families who have benefited from peer support.
- ☐ Set goals: Collaboratively identify and prioritize the goals the family wants to achieve. Ensure that the goals are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART). This will provide a clear direction and focus for the family's efforts.
- ☐ Utilize family strengths: incorporate the family's strengths, resources, and support systems. Help them recognize and build upon these assets as they work towards addressing their challenges. Encourage family members to share their skills, experiences, and knowledge with each other. Use Preferred View and encourage family members to talk about the strengths of their family members.
- ☐ Develop an action plan: Together with the family, create an action plan that outlines the steps they will take to address their challenges. Break down the goals into smaller, manageable tasks. Encourage family members to take ownership of their individual responsibilities within the plan.
- ☐ Provide ongoing support: Regularly check in with the family to provide support, guidance, and encouragement. Address any barriers or obstacles they may encounter along the way. Offer assistance in troubleshooting challenges, exploring alternative solutions others have tried, and connecting them with additional resources if needed.
- ☐ Remember that the plan belongs to the family and does not require our agreement, only our support and guidance.
- ☐ Evaluate progress: Assess the family's progress towards their goals periodically. Celebrate achievements and discuss any adjustments or modifications that may be necessary. Continuously monitor the effectiveness of the plan and make adjustments as needed.
- ☐ Sustain and empower: Encourage the family to sustain their newfound skills, resilience, and support networks beyond the immediate challenges they are facing. Empower them to become advocates for peer support within their community and help others who may be experiencing similar challenges.

Remember that every family's journey is unique, and the plan should be tailored to their specific needs and circumstances. Flexibility, adaptability, and ongoing support are key to the success of the family peer support plan.

## 9. Services provided by Family Peer Support Programs.

Family peer support services can provide a range of support to families facing challenges. Here are some examples of support services that family peer support can offer:

- ❑ Emotional support: Family peer supporters can provide a safe and non-judgmental space for family members to express their emotions, fears, and frustrations. They can offer empathetic listening, understanding, and validation of the family's experiences.
- ❑ Accepting the family from where they are “at”!
- ❑ Information and education: Family peer supporters can share their own experiences and knowledge about navigating challenges, accessing resources, and understanding the systems and services available to families. They can provide information on evidence-based practices, coping strategies, and self-care techniques.
- ❑ Advocacy: Family peer supporters can help families navigate complex systems and advocate for their rights and needs. They can assist in understanding and participating in meetings, appointments, and negotiations with service providers, schools, or agencies. They can also help families access entitlements, benefits, and support services. Educate families so that they can support themselves.
- ❑ Skill-building: Family peer supporters can help families develop practical skills to address their challenges. This may include communication skills, problem-solving techniques, conflict resolution strategies, and stress management techniques. They can also assist in developing parenting skills and strengthening family relationships.
- ❑ Connect families to resources and community programs that can help them improve their skills.
- ❑ Peer mentoring: Family peer supporters can act as mentors, sharing their own experiences and providing guidance and encouragement to family members. They can offer hope, inspiration, and motivation as families work towards their goals. Peer mentors can also provide role modeling for healthy coping and resilience.
- ❑ Encourage families to become helpers of others.
- ❑ Role modeling advocacy to work with elected officials and decision makers- sharing their experiences and stories.
- ❑ Peer support groups: Family peer support services may organize or facilitate peer support groups where families can connect with and learn from each other. These groups provide a sense of community, shared experiences, and mutual support. Families can share challenges, successes, and strategies for overcoming difficulties by providing hope and mutual support.
- ❑ Referrals and resource connections: Family peer supporters can help families access appropriate resources and services within their community. They can provide information about local, state and online support networks, social services, counseling services, educational programs, and recreational activities that may be beneficial to the family.
- ❑ Follow-up and ongoing support: Family peer support is not a one-time intervention but an ongoing process. Family peer supporters can provide regular check-ins, follow-up support, and encouragement to families as they progress on their journey. They can assist in problem-solving and adjusting strategies as new challenges arise.
- ❑ Advocates provide emotional support in an effort to help people thrive!



It's worth noting that the specific support services provided by family peer support may vary depending on the organization or program offering the services. The goal is to create a supportive and empowering environment that helps families build resilience, develop skills, and overcome challenges. ***"Whatever it takes!"***

## **10. Empowerment.**

Empowerment is a key aspect of the family peer support process. Here's how empowerment is fostered within family peer support:

- Collaborative approach: Family peer support embraces a collaborative, partnership approach where the family and the peer supporter work together as equals. The peer supporter acknowledges and respects the expertise and strengths of the family, while also bringing their own lived experience and knowledge. This collaborative approach empowers the family to actively participate in decision-making and problem-solving processes.
- Remain curious, not judgmental – no predetermined outcomes- all service is family-driven.
- Strength-based perspective: Family peer support emphasizes the strengths and resources of the family rather than focusing solely on deficits or challenges. By highlighting the family's existing capabilities and resilience, the peer supporter helps the family recognize their own potential for growth and positive change. This strength-based perspective fosters a sense of empowerment, acceptance and confidence within the family.
- Validation and empathy: Family peer supporters provide validation and empathy for the family's experiences and emotions. By offering understanding and acceptance, the peer supporter helps the family feel heard and validated, which in turn boosts their self-esteem and belief in their own abilities. This validation and empathy contribute to the family's empowerment by affirming their resilience, strengths and worth and acknowledging their unique circumstances.
- Information and education: Empowerment is facilitated through the sharing of information and education. Family peer supporters provide families with accurate and relevant information about resources, services, and strategies. By equipping families with knowledge and skills, they are empowered to use their voice to make informed decisions, advocate for themselves, and navigate systems effectively.
- Skill-building: Family peer support focuses on skill-building within the family. Peer supporters help families develop practical skills such as communication, problem-solving, and self-advocacy. By learning and practicing these skills, families gain a sense of competence and empowerment in managing their challenges and achieving their goals.
- Encouragement and motivation: Family peer supporters offer encouragement, motivation, and hope to families. Through sharing their own experiences of overcoming challenges and achieving positive outcomes, peer supporters inspire families to persevere and believe in their own ability to succeed. This encouragement and motivation contribute to the family's empowerment by instilling a sense of optimism and resilience.
- Self-determination: Family peer support **respects** and promotes the family's right to self-determination. Peer supporters assist families in identifying their own goals, values, and

priorities, and support them in making decisions that align with their own needs and aspirations. This focus on self-determination empowers the family to take ownership of their journey and assert their autonomy.

Overall, empowerment in family peer support is achieved through a collaborative, strength-based, and person-centered approach. By fostering a sense of self-belief, providing information and skills, and supporting the family's self-determination, family peer support empowers families to overcome challenges, build resilience, and thrive.

## **11. Self-Advocacy within systems.**

Teaching families how to advocate for themselves is an important component of family peer support. Here are some strategies and approaches that can be used to empower families in self-advocacy:

- Education on rights and resources: Provide families with information about their rights, entitlements, and available resources. This includes educating them on laws, policies, and services relevant to their situation. By understanding their rights and the support systems available, families can better advocate for themselves and access the necessary services and supports.
- Communication skills: Teach families effective communication skills, such as active listening, assertiveness, and clear expression of their needs and concerns. Emphasize the importance of open and honest communication when interacting with professionals, service providers, and other stakeholders. This enables families to effectively articulate their perspectives, share their experiences, and advocate for their needs.
- Building confidence: Help families build confidence in their ability to advocate for themselves. Encourage them to recognize their strengths and achievements and remind them of their unique expertise as parents or caregivers. By highlighting their capabilities, families gain the confidence needed to assert their needs and advocate for themselves and their loved ones.
- Individualized support: Tailor the support to the specific needs and preferences of each family. Recognize that families may have different communication styles, cultural values, or preferred approaches to advocacy. Be aware of your biases and discuss their impact in supervision. By respecting and adapting to each family's unique circumstances, the support provided can be more effective and empowering.
- Role-playing and practice: Engage in role-playing exercises where families can practice self-advocacy skills in a safe and supportive environment. This allows them to gain experience in articulating their needs, responding to challenges, and negotiating for their rights. Provide constructive feedback and guidance to help them refine their advocacy skills.
- Community connections: Connect families with other families who have successfully advocated for themselves. This allows families to learn from the experiences and strategies of others who have faced similar challenges. This provides a sense of support, inspiration, and validation, while also fostering a community of shared empowerment.
- Encouraging self-reflection: Encourage families to reflect on their own experiences and identify areas where they feel they need to advocate for themselves or their loved ones. Help them develop a clear understanding of their goals, priorities, and the changes they would like to see.

This self-reflection enables families to become more self-aware and proactive in their advocacy efforts.

- Providing support and guidance: Offer ongoing support and guidance to families as they navigate the advocacy process. Be available to answer questions, provide information, and offer assistance when needed. Help families develop action plans, identify potential obstacles, and explore different strategies for effective advocacy.

Remember, the goal is to empower families to become their own advocates, not to replace their voices or take over their decision-making. Family peer supporters should work in partnership with families, providing the necessary tools, knowledge, and support to help them confidently advocate for themselves and their loved ones.

## **12. Teach collaborative advocacy skills.**

Teaching collaborative advocacy skills is crucial when working in family peer support. Here are some steps to consider:

- Explain the concept of collaborative advocacy: Start by explaining the importance and benefits of collaborative advocacy to families and system representatives. Collaborative advocacy involves working together with families to identify their needs, goals, and preferences, and then advocating collectively for the necessary support and resources. Emphasize that collaborative advocacy aims to empower families and promote their active participation in decision-making processes.
- Foster a partnership approach: Encourage system representatives to adopt a partnership approach when working with families. This means treating families as equal partners in the advocacy process, valuing their expertise and lived experiences, and involving them in decision-making. Representatives should aim to build trust, open communication channels, and establish a shared understanding of the family's strengths and needs.
- Provide advocacy training: Offer training to families and system representatives on the fundamentals of advocacy. This can include topics such as understanding the rights and entitlements of families, navigating systems and services, effective communication and negotiation skills, and strategies for overcoming barriers and challenges. Equip representatives with the knowledge and tools they need to support families in advocating for themselves.
- Help families articulate their needs and desires and support them in setting realistic and achievable goals. System representatives should actively listen to families, ask open-ended questions, and encourage them to express their concerns, fears, and aspirations. This collaborative process ensures that advocacy efforts are directed towards meeting the family's specific needs.
- Assist with information and resources: Help families access and understand relevant information and resources. System representatives can assist families in gathering information about available services, eligibility criteria, and rights. They can also provide educational materials, connect families with support networks and community organizations, and help them navigate complex systems. The goal is to empower families with the knowledge and resources they need to advocate effectively for themselves.

- Support self-advocacy skills: Encourage and support families in developing their own self-advocacy skills. This involves helping them build confidence, assertiveness, and effective communication skills. Peer support advocates can role-play advocacy scenarios, provide feedback and guidance, and offer ongoing support and encouragement. By empowering families to advocate for themselves, FPA's foster self-determination and independence.
- FPA's should network and collaborate with other stakeholders: Engage with other stakeholders, such as policymakers, service providers, and community organizations, to create a collaborative advocacy network. FPA's can establish relationships and partnerships with these stakeholders to amplify families' voices, influence policies and practices, and advocate for systemic changes that better support families. Collaboration with other advocates and organizations increases the collective impact of advocacy efforts.

By teaching and promoting collaborative advocacy skills, FPA's can help families effectively navigate systems, access resources, and have their voices heard. This collaborative and empowering approach ensures that families are actively involved in shaping their own lives and the services they receive.

### **13. Self-care and natural supports beyond services.**

Self-care and natural supports play a crucial role in family peer support. Here's why they are important:

- Enhancing well-being: Self-care practices and natural supports contribute to the overall well-being of families. Taking time for self-care allows family members to recharge, reduce stress, and maintain their physical and emotional health. Natural supports, such as friends, extended family, and community connections, provide a sense of belonging, validation, and social connection, which are essential for mental and emotional well-being.
- Modeling healthy behaviors: By prioritizing self-care and utilizing natural supports, families can model healthy behaviors for their loved ones. This sets a positive example for children and other family members, empowering them to prioritize their own well-being and seek support when needed. It helps create a culture of self-care and support within the family unit.
- Building resilience: Self-care and natural supports help families build resilience in the face of challenges. When families practice self-care regularly, they are better equipped to cope with stress, setbacks, and crises. Natural supports provide a network of people who can offer emotional support, practical assistance, and guidance during difficult times. These resources enhance families' ability to bounce back and adapt to difficult situations.
- Preventing burnout: Families often face various stressors and responsibilities, particularly when caring for a loved one with special needs or mental health concerns. Engaging in self-care activities and leaning on natural supports can prevent burnout and compassion fatigue. Taking breaks, seeking support from friends or support groups, and engaging in hobbies or relaxation techniques can help families replenish their energy and maintain their emotional well-being.
- Expanding support networks: Natural supports provide families with a diverse network of people who can offer different perspectives, experiences, and resources. These connections can be invaluable when families need advice, information, or access to services. By nurturing natural supports, families expand their support networks beyond professional services, creating a more holistic and comprehensive support system.

- Promoting self-advocacy: Self-care practices and natural supports contribute to families' ability to advocate for themselves and their loved ones. When families prioritize their well-being, they develop a stronger sense of self-efficacy and confidence. Natural supports can provide guidance, validation, and encouragement, empowering families to assert their needs and navigate systems effectively.
- Fostering a sense of belonging: Self-care and natural supports help families feel connected and supported within their communities. By engaging in activities that bring joy and fulfillment, families can develop a sense of purpose and belonging. Natural supports provide opportunities for social interaction, shared experiences, and a sense of being understood and accepted. This sense of belonging boosts families' overall well-being and resilience.

In family peer support, it is crucial to promote and facilitate self-care practices and the utilization of natural supports. By prioritizing these aspects, families can enhance their well-being, build resilience, prevent burnout, expand their support networks, and develop the skills needed for effective self-advocacy.

#### **14. Prepare system representatives for the family's fears, frustrations and sadness.**

When preparing the system representatives for a family who is experiencing fear, frustration, and sadness when in family peer support, it is important to consider the following:

- Training and education: Provide comprehensive training to system representatives, such as healthcare professionals, educators, and social workers, on the principles and practices of family peer support using all modalities. This training should focus on understanding the unique experiences and challenges faced by families, as well as strategies for providing empathetic and supportive care.
- Knowledge of resources: Ensure that system representatives are familiar with available resources and services that can support families in their specific needs. This may include mental health services, support groups, respite care, financial assistance programs, and educational resources. Equipping representatives with this knowledge helps them connect families to appropriate support networks.
- Active listening skills: Teach representatives the importance of active listening to effectively understand and address the fears, frustrations, and sadness expressed by families. Active listening involves giving undivided attention, demonstrating empathy, and validating the family's emotions and experiences. Encourage representatives to create a safe and non-judgmental environment for families to express themselves.
- Culturally responsive approach: Encourage system representatives to be culturally responsive and aware of the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the families they support. This includes understanding and respecting cultural beliefs, practices, and values. Representatives should be prepared to provide support that is sensitive to cultural differences and promotes inclusivity.
- Trauma-informed care: Recognize that families experiencing fear, frustration, and sadness may have experienced trauma or adverse events. Train representatives to adopt a trauma-informed approach, which involves understanding the impact of trauma, creating safe spaces, and providing support that promotes healing and resilience.

- Peer support networks: Establish and promote peer support networks within the system, where families can connect with and learn from other families facing similar challenges. These networks can provide a sense of community, validation, and shared experiences, which can help alleviate fear, frustration, and sadness. Encourage representatives to facilitate these connections and provide information about available peer support groups.
- Self-care and well-being: Emphasize the importance of self-care and well-being for system representatives. Supporting families experiencing fear, frustration, and sadness can be emotionally demanding, so representatives need to prioritize their own self-care to prevent burnout. Provide resources and encourage practices that promote self-care, such as regular breaks, debriefing sessions, and access to support networks.

By preparing the system representatives to effectively support families experiencing fear, frustration, and sadness using family peer support, we can create a more empathetic and responsive support system. This approach ensures that families feel understood, validated, and empowered to navigate their challenges and find the support they need.

## 15. Reflective Supervision

Reflective supervision is a valuable practice in family peer support that promotes self-reflection, growth, and professional development for individuals providing support to families. Here's how reflective supervision can be used in family peer support:

- Creating a Safe Space: Reflective supervision provides a safe and non-judgmental space for family peer support providers to share their experiences, challenges, and emotions. This space encourages open dialogue and supports personal and professional growth. This also ensures that both the FPA and supervisor are hearing each other's ideas.
- Self-Reflection: Through reflective supervision, family peer support providers can reflect on their own beliefs, values, and biases that may impact their interactions with families. Self-reflection helps providers gain insight into their own strengths, weaknesses, and areas for growth.
- Enhancing Empathy: Reflective supervision enables family peer support providers to develop a deeper understanding and empathy towards the families they are supporting. It encourages providers to consider multiple perspectives and helps them recognize the impact of their words and actions. It is also a good way to combat "peer drift" \* (see page 38).
- Identifying Learning Opportunities: Reflective supervision allows family peer support providers to identify learning opportunities from their experiences. They can explore new strategies, techniques, and approaches to better support families. It also helps providers stay updated with current research and best practices, it acts as a roadmap.
- Consultation: Reflective supervision provides an opportunity for family peer support providers to seek guidance and consultation on challenging situations. They can discuss complex challenges, ethical dilemmas, and explore different perspectives to find effective solutions.
- Personal and Professional Growth: Through reflective supervision, family peer support advocates can develop a greater self-awareness, improve their communication and interpersonal skills, and enhance their overall professional competence. It supports ongoing



growth and development in their role as well as provides opportunities for career advancement.

- Ensure workload is evenly distributed.
- Both parties (FPA & supervisor) should be able to be accountable to their mistakes and grow from them

Reflective supervision should be carried out by a trained supervisor who can guide and facilitate the process as well as supporting the individual peer advocate. It is a collaborative approach that promotes continuous learning, self-care, and improvement in family peer support practice.

## **16. Evaluation**

Evaluation in family peer support is an essential process that allows for the assessment and improvement of the effectiveness and impact of the support provided to families. Here are some key aspects of evaluation in family peer support:

- **Data Collection:** Collect relevant data to assess the impact and outcomes of family peer support. This can include quantitative data (e.g., number of families served, demographic information) and qualitative data (e.g., feedback from families, success stories). Use a combination of methods, such as surveys, interviews, and focus groups, to gather comprehensive information. Ensure that collection methods are streamlined and “family-friendly.”
- **Evaluation Tools:** Develop or adopt evaluation tools that align with the goals and objectives of the family peer support program. These tools can include standardized questionnaires, rating scales, or checklists. Ensure that the tools capture the relevant aspects of support provided and measure the desired outcomes. These tools should be easy to understand and complete. Ensure that family friendly language is used. Make sure tools are accessible to all (language, learning disabilities, deaf/mute)
- **Continuous Monitoring:** Regularly monitor the progress of the family peer support program to identify areas of strength and areas that need improvement. This can involve reviewing data, conducting regular check-ins with family peer support providers, and seeking feedback from families.
- **Analysis and Interpretation:** Analyze the collected data to identify trends, patterns, and themes. Interpret the data to gain insights into the effectiveness of the family peer support program. This analysis can help identify areas of success and areas that require adjustments or enhancements.
- **Feedback and Reporting:** Share the evaluation findings with family peer support providers, program administrators, and stakeholders across agencies/programs. Provide feedback on the strengths and areas for improvement. Use the evaluation results to inform decision-making, program planning, and resource allocation.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Use evaluation findings as a basis for continuous improvement. Implement changes or modifications based on the evaluation results to enhance the quality and impact of family peer support. Regularly revisit and revise program goals and evaluation

methods to ensure ongoing improvement. Findings can also help FPAs to improve their weaknesses by getting training in those areas.

- Allow for cross agency and region partnership to grow from learning from others.

Evaluation in family peer support is an ongoing process that helps ensure accountability, quality improvement, and the provision of effective support to families. It allows for evidence-based decision-making and helps demonstrate the value and impact of family peer support programs.

## *Evaluation - Some Questions*

A suggestion is to use the solution-focused method of scaling, e.g., “on a scale of 1-10 with one being Absolutely not and ten being Absolutely yes...

Here are some questions you can consider when evaluating family peer support:

1. Did the family peer support program impact your overall well-being and ability to cope with challenges?
2. Did the family peer support program provide you with practical strategies and resources to navigate your specific situation?
3. Did you feel understood and supported by the family peer(s) who provided support to you?
4. Were you able to develop meaningful connections and a sense of belonging within the family peer support program?
5. Did the family peer support program help you build stronger relationships and communication within your family?
6. Did the family peer support program empower you to advocate for yourself and your family's needs?
7. Were you able to sustain the benefits gained from family peer support in the long term?

And the following questions that require a narrative answer...

8. What specific changes or improvements have you noticed in yourself or your family as a result of receiving family peer support?
9. How did the family peer support program compare to other forms of support you have received in terms of its effectiveness and impact?
10. What suggestions do you have for improving the family peer support program to better meet the needs of individuals and families?
11. What was most helpful?
12. What should be strengthened?

These questions can help gather valuable feedback from both the individuals providing support and those receiving it, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of the family peer support program. Remember to tailor the questions to the specific goals and objectives of your evaluation.

# SAMPLE SURVEY

## Participant Survey

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Initials \_\_\_\_\_

We want to hear about your experience so that we can do our best to serve you. Please complete the following questionnaire to let us know about your experience with Family Peer Support.

**Please answer the questions below by circling the number.**

**4 = Strongly Agree    3 = Agree    2 = Disagree    1 = Strongly Disagree    NA = Not Applicable**

Questions	4	3	2	1	
1. Program staff helped me to feel like a part of my community	4	3	2	1	NA
2. Program staff helped me to connect to supports in my community	4	3	2	1	NA
3. Program staff helped me to obtain supports ( <i>could include benefits, housing, employment, school, etc.</i> )	4	3	2	1	NA
4. Program staff helped me to identify my strengths and passions	4	3	2	1	NA
5. A Peer Supporter at the Program collaborated equally with me to develop a recovery plan that meets my goals	4	3	2	1	NA
6. The Program offered group activities that made me feel welcomed	4	3	2	1	NA
7. I felt listened to by Program staff	4	3	2	1	NA
8. The Program offered groups in the community that met my interests and goals	4	3	2	1	NA
9. Program staff treated me with dignity and respect	4	3	2	1	NA
10. Overall, I am satisfied with my experience at the Family Support Program	4	3	2	1	NA
11. I would like the Family Support Program to offer more of the following: a. Groups    b. Education about wellness    c. Volunteer Opportunities    d. Social Outings e. Other _____					
12. What types of groups would you like to see Program offer or offer more of? a. Support    b. Wellness    c. Job Skills    d. Social Skills    e. Other _____					
13. What topics would you like to learn more about from Program? a. Training/Workshops    b. Community Connections    c. Recovery    d. Socialization e. Skills Development as Peer Specialist    f. Other _____					

What other Programs/activities have you participated in? \_\_\_\_\_

How did you hear about Family Peer Support?

General Comments/Suggestions: \_\_\_\_\_

## *Sample Job Description: Family Peer Advocate*

### **Job Summary:**

A Family Peer Advocate is a compassionate and supportive professional who provides guidance, advocacy, and assistance to individuals and families dealing with various challenges. They utilize their personal lived experience to connect with families, empower them, and help them navigate through systems and services. The Family Peer Advocate serves as a crucial link between families, community resources, and service providers to ensure access to necessary support.

### **Responsibilities:**

1. **Support and Empowerment:** Provide emotional support, empathy, and encouragement to families facing challenges, such as mental health issues, substance abuse, developmental disabilities, or other crises.
2. **Advocacy:** Act as a vocal advocate for families within the healthcare, education, and social service systems, ensuring their rights and needs are met.
3. **Information and Referral:** Assist families in understanding available resources, benefits, and services, and help them navigate through complex systems by providing information and referrals.
4. **Case Management:** Collaborate with families to develop individualized service plans, set goals, and monitor progress. Maintain accurate and up-to-date records of all interactions and services provided.
5. **Education and Training:** Conduct workshops, training sessions, or support groups for families, sharing knowledge and skills related to self-advocacy, effective communication, and navigating systems.
6. **Crisis Intervention:** Provide immediate support and intervention during crisis situations, ensuring the safety and well-being of families.
7. **Collaborative Networking:** Establish and maintain positive working relationships with community organizations, agencies, and service providers to enhance the availability of resources and support for families.
8. **Continuous Learning:** Stay updated on current trends, research, and best practices in the field of family support and advocacy and participate in relevant professional development activities.

### **Requirements:**

1. **Lived Experience:** Must have personal experience as a family member or caregiver of an individual with mental health challenges, developmental disabilities, substance abuse, or other related issues.
2. **Strong Communication Skills:** Excellent verbal and written communication skills, with the ability to effectively engage with families, professionals, and community stakeholders.
3. **Empathy and Compassion:** Demonstrated ability to connect with families, show empathy, and provide non-judgmental support.

4. Knowledge of Support Systems: Familiarity with local community resources, social services, and healthcare systems.
5. Advocacy Skills: Proficient in advocating for the rights and needs of families and individuals within various systems.
6. Organizational Skills: Ability to manage multiple situations and responsibilities, maintain accurate records, and meet deadlines.
7. Cultural Sensitivity: Respect for and understanding of diverse backgrounds, cultures, and beliefs.
8. Confidentiality: Adhere to strict confidentiality guidelines and maintain the privacy of families and their personal information.

Note: The specific requirements and responsibilities may vary depending on the organization, population served, and local regulations.

## PEER DRIFT - CAUTION

Peer drift refers to a situation where a peer support person starts behaving more like a traditional service provider rather than maintaining the unique role and approach of peer support. Peer support is a form of support where individuals with similar lived experiences provide assistance, empathy, and understanding to others facing similar challenges.

The essence of peer support lies in the shared experience and the ability to provide support from a place of empathy and understanding. However, when a peer support person starts acting like a traditional provider, they may begin to take on a more authoritative or expert role, which can undermine the peer-to-peer dynamic.

This drift can occur for various reasons, such as pressure from the system or organization to conform to traditional service delivery models, a lack of clear boundaries or guidance, or personal motivations to be seen as an expert. It is important for organizations and individuals involved in peer support to be aware of this drift and take steps to prevent it.

Maintaining the integrity of peer support involves ongoing training, supervision, and regular reflection on the principles and values of peer support. It is crucial to emphasize the importance of lived experience, shared learning, and mutual support in order to prevent peer support drift and preserve the unique benefits of this approach.

It is further recommended that the supervisor provide regular and ongoing reflection to assist the peer in maintaining the passion and purpose that the worker originally came to the organization with. Consistent reminders of the peer supporters own experience and feelings during the challenging times that they had while raising their children help the FPA maintain their empathy for families. In the Preferred View approach, we teach that if you become part of the “problem chorus” you have little to no chance of helping the person heal, or for that matter. remain in the helping relationship. Some of the suggestions that make a difference are:

1. Display the Mission, Vision, and Values prominently in the office spaces.
2. The supervisor should check the FPA during supervision using curiosity. E.g. “Can you tell me how your actions are in line with our value of “Non-judgmental”?”
3. Another curious question that could help a FPA come back into line with the mission, vision, values is: What needs to happen for you to see the strengths of this parent?
4. Remind the FPA of what was helpful to them when they first became involved with Family Peer Support.
5. Remind the FPA that often when a parent is frustrated, angry and/or feeling depressed about their situation they may act in ways that do not line up with the person’s Preferred View. The FPA may need help in assisting the person to come back into line with how they like to see themselves.
6. Return to the FPA’s Preferred View, e.g., Ask “Can you tell me how what you did lines up with your strength of seeing a person’s strengths?”

There are several activities that assist with this concept that are shared during the trainings on Preferred View and Reflective Supervisory Practice.

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