

# FAMILY, PARENT AND CAREGIVER PEER SUPPORT IN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

*“My family was involved in a variety of services in our community. Once we began to work with a parent support professional, we felt that we had a person in our corner who worked just for us. It made a huge difference.”*

— David

## WHAT IS PEER SUPPORT FOR PARENTS AND OTHER CAREGIVERS?






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 these parents navigate 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).

## WHAT DO PARENT SUPPORT PROVIDERS DO?

### PARENT SUPPORT PROVIDERS OFFER:

-  **emotional connection** of people who have “been there”;
-  **informational and educational support** on systems and strategies;
-  **support for parents** as they develop positive approaches and methods for addressing their family's day-to-day needs, including their own needs for self-care;
-  **concrete support**, such as help arranging child care or transportation; and
-  **living proof** of resilience and recovery.

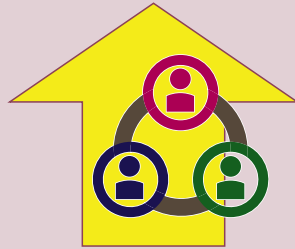
Parent support providers are also known as *parent support professionals, navigators, mentors, family partners, parent partners, and parent support specialists*. Parent support providers offer a wide range of assistance and support, depending on the settings in which they work and the needs of the families they serve.

### COMMON SERVICES INCLUDE:

-  information and referral;
-  individualized supports to help parents understand their children's needs and access natural supports;
-  support groups;
-  parent training and education to increase knowledge and skills;
-  system navigation to assist a family in finding or accessing resources;
-  intensive family support during periods of crisis;
-  specialized supports for families experiencing challenges with systems such as child welfare, juvenile courts, or schools; and
-  social activities and events to bring families together, raise awareness, or offer educational opportunities.

# WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PARENT SUPPORT SERVICES?

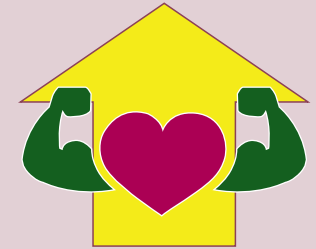
Early research suggests that parent peer support offers parents and other caregivers:



**Increased sense of collaboration:** Receiving skills training and support from parent support providers helps family members collaborate effectively with treatment professionals. (Hogwood, et al., 2010)



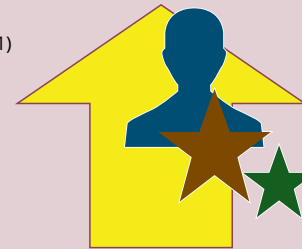
**Increased sense of self-efficacy:** Family support services increase family members' confidence in their abilities to care for their child. (Hoagwood et al., 2010; Obrochta et al., 2011)



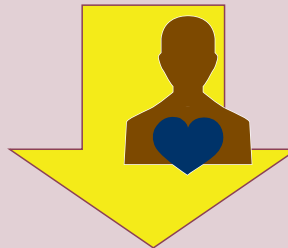
**Increased empowerment to take action:** Receiving education about service systems, navigation skills, advocacy skills, and rights helps empower families to become active participants in their child's services. (Kutash, Duchnowski, Green, & Ferron, 2011)

*"I don't know what I would have done without our parent support provider. She understood what I was going through, and she didn't judge me. She was available whenever I needed her, not just during business hours. She helped my family get back on our feet."*

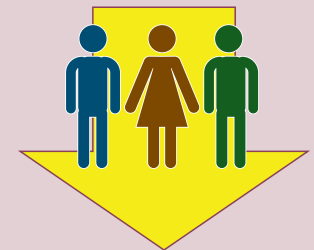
—Stacey



**Recognition of the importance of self-care:** Parent support providers help families increase their awareness of the need for self-care. (Obrochta et al., 2011)



**Decreased internalized blame:** By providing education and connections with others, parent support services help family members reframe their experiences and debunk damaging myths about behavioral health conditions and emotional distress. (Obrochta et al., 2011)



**Decreased family isolation:** Parent support providers assist family members with identifying and accessing community supports that help them feel less alone. (Obrochta et al., 2011)

(Source: Obrochta et al., 2011)

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