Peer Practice Brief: How Youth Partners Can Collaborate with Family Partners in Wraparound

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Peer Practice Brief: How Youth Partners Can Collaborate with Family Partners in Wraparound

Youth partners and family partners each have key roles on Wraparound teams, and they work with each other as well as with care coordinators, other team members, and, of course, family members and young people. Their roles are similar in function but separate in practice, as the family partner is a designated peer support specialist for the family member and the youth partner is a designated peer support specialist for the youth participating in the Wraparound process. It is crucial that these supports work with each other — as well as with the other members of the team, the youth, and the family — to achieve successful outcomes. In this Peer Practice Brief, we will describe how family partners and youth partners can collaborate in a synergistic way, some common challenges they might face, and how these challenges can be addressed. We also will provide scenarios along with discussion questions to help you consider how these collaborations and challenges might play out with real youth and family, and their unique strengths and needs. The accompanying Study Guide provides answers to these questions that you can use to guide individual or group supervision, coaching, or training.

KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION:

1. Clarify the Role

To successfully collaborate with other providers, youth, and family members, it is important that youth partners (and family partners) clearly explain their role at the start of the Wraparound process, and that they clarify their role as challenges arise. Youth partners should emphasize from the beginning that they are tasked with helping the youth advocate for themselves and bring their voice into the planning process, even when the youth’s perspectives and ideas may clash with those of their parent(s) and/or other team members. The youth partner also should be clear about what they will and will not be sharing with the youth’s parent and the team — for example, most conversations concerning personal subjects and goals would remain confidential between the young person and their youth partner, but issues of safety likely would need to be brought to the attention of the team. It also is important that the youth partner explain to the young person and their parent that they are mandatory reporters and have received specific training and certification for their role.

2. Keep It Confidential:

Sometimes, it may be valuable for the youth partner to share the youth’s perspective on particular goals, circumstances, crisis events, etc., with the family partner on their Wraparound team. While this kind of collaboration can lead to solutions — like the discovery of natural supports, ideas for crisis plans, and common ground the youth and parent may share — it is crucial that at no point is the youth partner sharing confidential information about the youth with the family partner. If the youth partner feels that it would be beneficial to share information with the family partner, they should explain to the youth exactly what they want to share and why they want to share it, and make sure that the youth is comfortable with this plan before moving forward.

3. Promote Positive/Proactive Communication:

Sometimes, a young person might do, or plan to do, something that is contrary to their parent’s wishes. When this happens, the youth partner can help pre-empt conflict by exploring consequences with the young person and

Throughout this document, we will use “parent” or “parents” as a stand-in for “parent, guardian, or caregiver.”
supporting them to communicate their decision to their parent if they choose to do so. At times, the youth partner also will talk about what they are doing, or they are helping the young person work on positive communication with their parent (of course, with the youth’s permission). The family partner can strategically work with the youth’s parent on how to positively communicate with their young person. Additionally, when the youth partner anticipates that a topic the youth is intending to bring up at a Wraparound team meeting will be contentious, they should support the young person to communicate this with their parent before the meeting to minimize conflict, using these same positive communication strategies. Usually the youth partner and family partner will work with the youth and family member individually to work on these effective communication strategies, but they may all meet together if the youth and/or family member prefers to do so.

4. Provide Perspective:

Often when youth and their parents are encountering conflict it is because they are not seeing eye-to-eye or understanding each other’s perspective. In this circumstance, it can be helpful for the youth peer support partner to share a bit of their lived experience with the youth partner, which the family partner can then share with the family member as appropriate. For example, if a young person is going to psychiatric residential treatment, the youth partner might share their own experiences in residential treatment to help the parent understand why being admitted to a residential facility might be a frightening prospect for a young person. Learning some of the youth partner’s story as it relates to that of their youth could help the parent better contextualize their young person’s perspectives and behaviors.

5. Share Resources:

Youth partners frequently help youth identify resources (e.g., youth drop-in centers to go to if they are feeling overwhelmed) to meet the youth and family’s identified needs. When Wraparound is suggested for a youth and their family, there is usually a crisis and disagreement in the home; however, this is not to say that young people and their parents never see eye to eye. Nonetheless, there are times when the rift between a young person and their parent is so deep that it becomes hard for them to agree upon specific strategies, or even be in the same meeting together. As one can imagine, this poses a serious challenge to the planning process, and can make the job of the youth partner particularly difficult.

Solving this problem generally takes a significant amount of effort on the part of the youth and family partner, with their individual clients, each other, and the team. As with all youth and family partner work, addressing this conflict first starts with a conversation between the youth and their assigned youth partner, and the family member and their assigned family partner. The youth partner should ask the young person what their vision, goals, and strengths are, and how they would want that communicated to their parent(s) and their team. Due to the contentious nature of this particular situation, it is often helpful for the youth partner to assist the youth in developing strategies that are unconventional, like writing letters to their parent, accompanying the youth partner to share the perspective of the youth with the family partner, or scheduling a meeting with the youth partner, family partner, youth, and parent so they can be prepared for the meeting at which the youth and parents share their perspectives while the youth partner and family partner facilitate. Additionally, it may be discovered that there are unmet underlying needs that should be addressed as a part of the Wraparound process.
Kerry (17 years old) and her mother, Jane, have been participating in the Wraparound process for four months. Kerry recently was assigned a youth partner and Jane has had a family partner since the start of the Wraparound process. When Kerry first met with her youth partner, she expressed that she wants to move out of her mom’s house because “all they do is fight” and she does better in school and with her mental health when she is not living at home. She suggested moving in with her aunt, Beth. The youth partner asked Kerry if she had spoken with her family about this, and Kerry shared that while she already had sought Beth’s approval, she had not shared the idea with her mom for fear of retaliation. In the past when Kerry brought up such strategies to her mom, Jane cut off her access to her phone and internet, which Kerry says she needs to complete schoolwork. Kerry’s youth partner asked if Kerry would like to talk about her hopes to move out of her mom’s house at her upcoming Wraparound meeting, and Kerry responded yes. Kerry’s youth partner supported Kerry in planning to share her agenda item with her team facilitator and helped her anticipate what her mom and other team members might say.

When Kerry arrived at the meeting, she asked to share her hopes to move out of her mom’s house. Jane was concerned for fear of her safety, but was assured that this was the best way for Kerry to stay at home. Both contend that the other’s strategy differs. Kerry wants to move in with her aunt, Beth, and Jane wants Kerry to stay at home. Both contend that the other’s strategy is non-negotiable. The meeting ends with no resolution.

1. What were some successful strategies used by the youth and family partner?
2. What could they have done better and/or differently?
3. What challenges did they face?

Lola (they/them) and Michael (he/him)

Lola is 14 and has been living in a foster home for almost one year. They were voluntarily placed into foster care by their father. Michael, who felt ill-equipped to support their mental wellness, and Lola and Michael were recently accepted into the Wraparound process, and both feel discouraged about working together. Lola and Michael were both assigned a Wraparound peer partner at the beginning of the process.

The youth partner and family partner initially met Lola and Michael separately since they were living in separate homes. When the youth partner met with Lola, Lola expressed that they were angry about being voluntarily placed into care by their father, that they felt unloved and unwelcome in their family, and that their father would not accept their non-binary identity. Michael met with his family partner and shared that when Lola was living in the home, things felt chaotic and he was worried about their safety as well as that of their older brother, Anthony.

During this first meeting, the youth partner and family partner explained the Wraparound process to their peer clients, and each asked how the other felt about it. Lola told their peer partner that they “would not be in the same room with [their] father,” and Michael said that Lola absolutely would not cooperate. Both peer partners asked if they could share their clients’ concerns with the team, and they agreed to do so.

The family partner and youth partner connected and shared only relevant information with each other about how Lola and Michael were feeling. Together, they agreed that they would offer some strategies to the youth, family, and team facilitator to ensure that the youth and parent’s perspectives were understood. They took this plan back to Lola and Michael, and asked that they come up with strategies on how to make team meetings together go smoothly.

The first strategy that was arrived at (and agreed upon) was to have separate meetings: one for Lola and one for Michael, where the same needs were discussed. This was troubling for many team members (“I don’t have time for this!” “That’s not real Wraparound!”) but the family and youth partners assured the team members that this was the best way for the team to show that they are honoring youth and family voice, and that as we moved through the engagement phase things would change.

With consistent one-on-one meetings with Lola and Michael, and with each other, the youth and family partner were able to support Lola and their father coming together to create plans and strategies that they could bring to the team meetings. Their time in Wraparound was met with many bumps in the road but resulted in Lola moving back into Michael’s home.

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2. What could they have done better and/or differently?
3. What challenges did they face?
Jordan needed to be placed in a psychiatric residential treatment center. The family partner spoke with Sandra about potential natural and community supports before moving toward residential treatment. Sandra said she would “try anything” but was desperately and needed Jordan to do his part, too.

The day of the meeting, Jordan, Sandra, the youth partner, and the family partner all arrived together. They had met beforehand to discuss what Jordan would share with the team and what Sandra would share with the team. The meeting was tense, but everyone collaborated productively (with only one break). At the end of the meeting, there were strategies and action steps identified to enroll Jordan in part-time school, and a working safety plan was in place.

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Emily is 17 and has a boyfriend of whom her mother, Sarah, does not approve. Sarah and Emily frequently butt heads over Emily’s dating life, friends, etc., because Emily has spent time with unsafe people in the past. Often reacts in anger when she learns that Emily has a social life, and because of this, Emily is not open with her mother about friends and dating.

While Emily has displayed risky behaviors in the past, since she began her work in the Wraparound process and was assigned a youth partner her judgment has significantly improved. She is working on her identified goals of getting her GED and finding a job, and she has demonstrated use of her coping skills. While Sarah acknowledges this, she is still understandably apprehensive and does not want Emily to engage in social activities.

Emily approached her youth partner about accessing birth control from Planned Parenthood. Emily knew she could already access birth control on her own and without parental consent, but she wanted her youth partner to join her as a supportive young adult. The youth partner agreed, and Emily asked that the youth partner not share this information with her mother or any other Wraparound team members. The youth partner agreed and helped Emily explore the consequences of her mother finding out that she had obtained birth control. Emily still advocated that she did not want her mother or other team members to know.

In the meantime, Sarah discovered Emily’s birth control and decided she wanted to discuss this at the next Wraparound team meeting. Sarah was very upset and felt that the youth partner should have denied Emily’s request for support and reported the attempt to her team. During the meeting, the youth partner explained their role, that Emily could access birth control regardless of their support, that this was not a matter related to the Wraparound process, and that they would not share information Emily asked to be kept confidential (unless there was a safety concern).

The family partner normalized Sarah’s feelings and provided some perspective from her own experience while validating the youth partner’s explanation of their role.

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Emily (she/her) and Sarah (she/her)