

# 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.

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

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### 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

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

<sup>1</sup> 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 with the family partner about how they are helping the young person work on positive communication with their parent (of course, with the youth's permission). The family partner also 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

### COMMON CHALLENGES:

#### 1. When the young person and their parent(s) aren't on the same page:

It is not uncommon, particularly in the beginning of the Wraparound process, when the family vision is being formed, for youth and their parents to have friction. This is particularly true when working with youth who are older (usually 13 and above). When this occurs, it's usually true that the youth and parents feel misunderstood by one another and/or the team. At times, this can make the youth and their parents feel at odds and like people are "picking sides." This sometimes can be challenging for youth partners who are tasked with bringing the youth's voice to the table, whether or not they agree with the young person's perspective or think it will cause conflict. When this happens, it sometimes can result in escalation between the youth and their parents, and may make the youth partner and family partner feel like they are being put at odds as well.

This type of challenge can be pre-empted by the youth partner working with the young person ahead of time on **positive/proactive communication** strategies, especially when they anticipate a subject the young person plans to raise at the meeting may cause tension. The youth partner can help the young person practice sharing their ideas in the team meeting, anticipate how the team (and especially their parents) will react to this subject in the meeting, and identify how they might like to respond. The youth partner also may be able to support the young person to share with their parent or team what

family partner, which the family partner can then share with the family member as appropriate. For example, if a young person is resistant to 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 child may 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, art classes) that they can access in their communities. When identifying resources, the youth partner might speak with the family partner about certain things the youth and their parent can do together, or speak with them about what kinds of resources the family might approve of or enjoy. The family partner also may be able to share community resources the youth partner was unaware of, and vice versa.

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#### 2. When the team sides with either the youth or the family member:

During the Wraparound process, the youth, family, and team members generate ideas and strategies on how to meet the youth and family's identified needs. When done openly and collaboratively, this can be a successful brainstorming process, but sometimes a strategy that may be favored by a majority of the team does not align with the desires of the youth or their parents. This can result in team alliances that are problematic and lead to either the youth or their parents feeling as if they are wrong. When this feeling boils over, it often leads to the targeted party shutting down and not wanting to participate in the team planning process.

Situations like this are difficult, but can be mitigated. First, team members should understand from the beginning that all ideas are valid, that plans are more effective if the youth and their parents are pursuing strategies that work for them, and that youth and families are the best experts on their own lives. Second, it is imperative that at the first team meeting ground rules are established that honor the voice of both the youth and their parents. Third, the youth and family partner can help the youth and family member use **positive communication** when articulating their ideas to the team, as well as **provide perspective** on how the youth and/or family member may feel about certain strategies based on their own personal lived experience.

#### 3. When the youth and family members are in consistent disagreement:

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, allowing 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 their parents 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.

#### 4. When meetings become arguments or therapy sessions:

Sometimes, even with the most skilled facilitators, Wraparound team meetings can get off track. This can occur for a number of reasons, whether it be a crisis, a team member with their own "agenda," or a disagreement. Usually this means that team meetings start to look like arguments, therapy sessions, or lectures (generally directed at the youth). When episodes like this unfold, there are actions that youth and family partners can take to help address the situation.

In general, it can be a good idea for the youth and family partner to meet before the team meeting to discuss potential pitfalls and how they each plan to support the youth and family member and keep the meeting on track. This is a good strategy to establish an alliance between the two peer support professionals on the team — this way, the youth and family partner will be able to back each other up in redirecting the rest of the team as needed. When things do get off track, the youth and family partner can support each other in reminding the team of the Wraparound principles and ground rules. In Wraparound, teams use a collaborative and strength-based process that should not include shaming the youth or their parents, and usually a team's ground rules will cover respectful communication. If this is not included in the list of already formulated ground rules, then the youth partner and/or family partner should work with the youth and/or family member after the meeting to see if they'd like to amend the ground rules to ensure that future meetings go more smoothly.

Of course, another important strategy to prevent this situation is to ensure that all team members are fully prepared with agenda items and expectations before the meeting. One of the primary roles of both the youth and family partner is to make sure the youth and family member are prepared for the meeting, including identifying what they would like to share at the meeting, how they will share it, anticipating topics that other team members may bring up, and determining what kind of support or accommodations they may need if things get "out of hand." This might include the collaborations of **promoting positive/proactive communication** and sharing information that either the youth or family plans to add to the agenda ahead of the meeting, while of course **keeping it confidential**.

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## SCENARIOS

### Kerry (she/her) and Jane (she/her)

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.

On the day of the meeting, Kerry and her youth partner arrive early, shortly before Jane and her family partner do. As they sit in the meeting room together, waiting for the rest of the team to arrive, Jane asks Kerry why she didn't come home last night. Kerry states that she was at Beth's house doing homework and fell asleep. The rest of the team arrives and the meeting begins.

The first life domain the team focuses on (at the request of Kerry and Jane) is living, and it is clear that Kerry and Jane are in disagreement: 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. Lola and Michael were recently accepted into the Wraparound process, and both feel discouraged about working together. Lola and Michael were both assigned Wraparound peer partners 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 having 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 together 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?*
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### Jordan (he/him) and Sandra (she/her)

Jordan is 16 and has lived in and out of foster care since he was 12. He currently lives with his mom, Sandra, which is where he wants to be. Sandra feels overwhelmed as a single mother supporting a son with severe mental health challenges and a trauma history that leads him to act out. Jordan and Sandra were referred to Wraparound after Jordan's latest hospitalization; Sandra was assigned a family partner right away and Jordan was assigned a youth partner two months into the process.

When Jordan met with his youth partner, he shared that he was happy to be back at home and things were going well. While he had not been in school, Jordan expressed that his mom was "his best friend" and he enjoyed his time playing video games at home. When Jordan's youth partner asked what he wanted out of Wraparound, he said he wanted to make sure he did not end up back in the hospital and that the best way to do that would be to make sure his mom would not "give him up" again. When the youth partner asked if they could share this with the family partner, Jordan said he thought that would be good idea.

Meanwhile, Sandra was feeling overwhelmed, which she shared with her family partner. Jordan still had outbursts where he would break things and run

away for multiple hours. She claimed that he refused to go to school and she was worried that she would be charged with truancy. Once the youth partner joined the team, Sandra asked that the family partner share this information with them, along with the fact that Sandra was considering putting Jordan in another out-of-home placement.

The youth partner met with Jordan at a park and explained their conversation with the family partner. Jordan was upset and angry, and the youth partner validated his perspective. Once Jordan was ready, the youth partner helped him come up with strategies around what he could do in the home to be helpful, what he wanted his safety plan to include (including his triggers and how to acknowledge them), and his ideal strategies around school. Jordan did not feel comfortable in a traditional school setting, wanted to obtain his GED, and was nervous about sharing such with his mom. The youth partner helped him anticipate the situation: How would his mom react? What would other team members say? How did he want to respond?

In the meantime, the family partner shared the conversation they had with the youth partner with Sandra. Sandra cried and expressed that she wanted Jordan in the home but needed help, and she thought

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 desperate 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 (she/her) and Sarah (she/her)

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. Sarah 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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This resource was prepared with partial support from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) under contract number HHSS280201500007C with SAMHSA, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The views, opinions, and content of this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of SAMHSA or HHS.

The National Technical Assistance Network for Children's Behavioral Health (TA Network) operates the National Training and Technical Assistance Center for Child, Youth, and Family Mental Health (NTTAC), funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Child, Adolescent and Family Branch to provide training and technical assistance to states, tribes, territories, and communities funded by the Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services for Children and Their Families Program (known as “system of care grantees”), as well as jurisdictions and entities without system of care grants, including youth and family leadership and organizations.

Creation of this publication was supported by the National Institute of Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, and the Center for Mental Health Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, United States Department of Health and Human Services (NIDILRR grant 90RT5030).

