



## Parent to Parent USA Endorsed Practices for Parent To Parent Support

Parent to Parent programs provide emotional and informational support to parents of children who have special needs through a one to one match between a Referred Parent and Support Parent (see glossary below). Because the Support Parent has shared the experience of disability in the family, he/she is able to provide a unique form of support that only another parent who has "been there" can.

Parent to Parent USA (P2PUSA) is a national non-profit organization committed to assuring access and quality in Parent to Parent support across the country. The following practices are based on research<sup>1</sup> and the knowledge and experiences of Parent to Parent Program Directors.<sup>2</sup> Parent to Parent USA endorses the following practices:

### **Timing of a Match**

*Evidence-Based Practice: Match a parent seeking support and an experienced parent within 24-48 hours of the referral.*

Once an appropriate match is determined (please see Evidence Based Practices for Implementing the Parent to Parent Match and providing Follow-up Support) the Support Parent is notified and given all pertinent information about the referred parent. The Support Parent then contacts the referred parent, usually by telephone initially.

### **Making a Match**

*Research confirms the importance of "perceived sameness" between the referred and Support Parent as an essential component for a successful match – this quality gives credibility to the information shared.*

The referral coordinator, in order to ensure the most successful match, will gather information from the referred parent about (a) the child and the disability; (b) the parent's own situation, needs, and specific challenges; (c) the reasons for seeking support; (d) the qualities they hope for in a Support Parent; and (e) any unique preferences or issues related to the match. When coordinators take time to establish a relationship with a newly referred parent, this time will lead to a greater understanding of the parent's personality and preferences, and will help the coordinator to make a more successful match.

**Note:** The primary contact for referrals to the Parent to Parent program is often a parent him/herself. Parents find it comforting to talk to another parent right away and for some parents this initial contact with Program Staff may successfully meet the need for support and information. If a Program Staff

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<sup>1</sup> Singer, G.H.S., Marquis, J., Powers, L.K., Blanchard, L., DiVenere, N. Santelli, B., (1999) A Multi-site Evaluation of Parent to Parent Programs for Parents of Children with Disabilities. *Journal of Early Intervention*, Vol. 22, No 3. 217-229.

<sup>2</sup> Statewide Parent to Parent Director's Meeting Philadelphia, PA 2002.



member is a parent and has completed a Support Parent Training the match is considered an evidence-based formal match.

### **Number of Contacts**

Evidence-Based Practice: *Parent satisfaction increases with the number of contacts from the Support Parent.*

Support Parents should make at least 4 contacts within the first 8 weeks of the match and then continue to make on-going connections easy for the referred parent. All four contacts should be initiated by the Support Parent. The first contact to be made within 24 to 48 hours of receiving the referral; the second contact at 2 weeks; the third contact at 4 weeks; and, the fourth contact at eight weeks.

### **Follow-up**

Evidence-Based Practice: *Follow up with both the Support Parent and the referred parent shortly after the match is made helps ensure mutual satisfaction and provides an opportunity to offer support and additional resources to the Support Parent or re-match parents if necessary.*

Many local, regional, and statewide programs are now contacting the Support Parent within 2-3 days after they have been matched with a Referred Parent just to be sure that the important first contact has been made and to answer any questions that the Support Parent may have. A final formal follow-up call to both the referred and Support Parent should be made at 8 weeks for evaluation purposes. In the most recent Parent to Parent USA Quality Standards survey of statewide Parent to Parent programs<sup>3</sup> the following reported follow-up with both the Support Parent and referred parent 100% of the time: Raising Special Kids, Arizona; PATH Connecticut, Family Ties, Massachusetts, Washington State Parent to Parent, and Parent to Parent of Wisconsin.

### **Support Parent Training**

Evidence-Based Practice: *Support Parents should receive formalized training prior to being matched and preferably with other parents to allow them to hear others' experiences and stories.*

#### **Training components of statewide Parent to Parent programs include:**

- Program orientation including matching and referral process, follow-up and evaluation processes
- active listening and communication skills
- self-reflection/self awareness
- sharing family stories
- role play
- adjustment/adaptation process
- cultural diversity
- national, state and community resources
- positive philosophy
- advocacy

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<sup>3</sup> 2007 Parent to Parent USA Quality Standards Survey



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- leadership
- confidentiality

### **Evaluation**

Evidence-Based Practice: *Evaluations to determine quality, effectiveness and satisfaction of the match as well as the preparedness and availability of support for Support Parents should be routinely conducted.*

Evaluation results demonstrate a programs effect on families. Program evaluations provide descriptive and evaluative information to share with others and use for program planning.

### **Glossary of Terms**

- **Matching** – The act of formally connecting one parent to another parent for the purpose of receiving emotional and informational support. Formal matching involves connecting a parent to a Support Parent who has received training and ongoing support from a Parent Matching Program.
- **Parent to Parent Matching Program** – Programs that formally match a parent whose child has special needs to an experienced (veteran), trained Support Parent. \*
- **Support Parent** – Parents with children or youth who have special needs who have participated in specific skill-building or training session(s) in preparation for their role as Support Parent.
- **Referred Parent** – Parents with children or youth who have special needs who request to talk to another parent with similar experiences for the purpose of emotional and information support.