



Parent to Parent USA Endorsed Practices For Matching and Follow-Up Support

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 endorsed practices are based on research¹ and the knowledge of experienced Parent to Parent Program Directors.

The match between parents seeking support and a trained Support Parent is the heart of Parent to Parent programs. According to research on the efficacy of parent to parent support, the more a parent perceives their experience to be similar to their matched family, the more successful the match. Therefore it is important that matches are implemented with careful thought and planning.

In order for program staff to determine the most appropriate match for a Referred Parent, it is important to collect descriptive information about each participating family. Statewide Parent to Parent programs participating in the 2010 Parent to Parent USA Organization Survey indicated that they use an average of 6 different factors to determine an appropriate match. Factors that are used by responding programs are presented in the table below.

Making the Match

Factors Used
Child/adolescent with the same special health care need, disability, or mental health challenge
Similar concerns/issues/challenges
Similar ages of child/adolescent
Similar age of parents
Geographic proximity
Similar social-economic level
Similar cultural/ethnic background
Primary language
Marital status

The parent-researcher team that conducted the Parent to Parent efficacy study (1993-1996) learned from interviews with Referred Parents that aside from the factors listed in the table above, the quality of the parent match is enhanced if several other factors are considered as well. Referred Parents in the study most satisfied with their match reported that their Support Parent had:

¹ 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.

- Similar personality characteristics to their own
- A similar philosophy about parenting
- A similar communication style to their own
- Similar attitudes about health and mental health issues, disability and expectations for their child

The most important way for Parent to Parent program staff to get to know each Support Parent is by bringing prospective Support Parents together for training. As parents who wish to be Support Parents spend time sharing their own family stories and experiences with each other, program staff has an opportunity to get to know potential Support Parents in a more personal way. This personal knowledge can be used to help ensure “perceived sameness” between matched parents.

Generally, the more the Support Parent and the Referred Parent have in common, the easier it is for them to relate to each other. In some instances, (e.g. a rare disability, parent who lives in isolated rural areas) it may not be possible for a program to achieve an optimal match. And while a match that can be made around similar disability, family, and personality characteristics is often the most helpful, most parents find that even a match that does not share very many common factors is better than no match at all. The fact that both parents have a child with a similar health care need, disability or mental health issue makes the relationship one that is based on a shared understanding even when the specifics are different.

A system of recordkeeping will need to be implemented for keeping track of all the information required for matching parents, as well as for maintaining detailed records of all referrals, matches, and follow-up activities. While some programs use notebooks or file folders for each match, most programs use a database to track matches. Regardless of the method, an orderly, easily accessible system of recordkeeping is essential for the establishment of successful matches.

Once an appropriate match is determined, the Support Parent is notified and given all of the pertinent information about the Referred Parent. The Support Parent then contacts the Referred Parents, usually by telephone initially, and ideally within 24 hours of the time the referral first came in to the program. Although programs strive to match parents within 24 hours as a best practice, a recent Survey of Statewide Parent to Parent programs conducted by Parent to Parent USA² indicated that although programs have a goal of matching families between 24-48 hours, a match made within 3-7 days is more of a program reality.

Some Parent to Parent matches are short-term and consist of only a very few contacts, while others evolve into lifelong relationships. Research on the efficacy of the one-to-one parent match indicates that Referred Parent satisfaction with the match increased with the number of contacts from the Support Parent. Support Parents should strive for a minimum of four contacts during the first eight weeks of the match.

Follow-Up Support for the Match

The research results from the efficacy study of Parent to Parent support suggest that Referred Parent satisfaction with the matched experience depends on the factors upon which the match is made and on the number of contacts the Referred Parent receives from the Support Parent. Follow-up with both

² Parent to Parent USA 2010 Organization Survey

the Support Parent and the Referred Parent is recommended by Parent to Parent USA to ensure that the Support Parent and the Referred Parent are in communication, and that the match is as good a fit in reality as it is on paper. Program staff should check with Support Parents 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. Similarly, program staff should contact the Referred Parent during this same time period to see how the match is progressing and feeling to them. Extra contact between program staff and both parents is normal, especially during the first few weeks of the match. Despite the great care with which matches are made, not all matches are just right for all parents, and program staff can remind the Support and Referred Parents that a re-match can be made at any time for any reason.

Sending reminder cards and documenting contacts and the progress of each match are methods used by many programs to ensure that at least four contacts occur during the first eight weeks of the match.