

SPIRIT PROGRAM

Parent Partner Training Manual



This material is adapted from *Individualized & Tailored Care/Wraparound Parent Partner Manual*, By Patricia Miles, Portland, Oregon, July 2001, Miles Consulting, Inc., Portland, OR, 503-618-1088.

Santa Barbara County Department of Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Services

October 2006

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Foreword

I was hired to be a Parent Involvement Coordinator with a large-scale urban Wraparound project in 1998. As a parent of a child who had been through the system, my job was to ensure that parents were involved with this effort that this model of implementation included Parent Partners working alongside Wraparound Facilitators. When first hired, I was also expected to provide peer parent-to-parent support for the initial families referred to the project.

After a few short weeks of providing Parent Partner services, I discovered that there was an assumption that Parent Partners know how to do their work instinctively. To a certain extent, this is true. I had traveled the road of the parent and was sometimes very adept at listening and supporting the parents referred to the project. What was also clear to me was that I was learning on the job with those initial families referred. Because I was to quickly hire more Parent Partners, I was concerned about the on-the-job learning that the role required. I discovered that what was becoming clear to me was also understood by Parent Partners in other locations: certain skills enhance the interaction between Parent Partner, parent, and professional.

A few years ago, a group of Parent Partners from Sonoma County gathered together with Pat Miles and shared their thoughts about “If only I knew then what I know now.” This manual is a result of that meeting. Those of us implementing Wraparound are fortunate to be able to benefit from their experience.

Since my initial experience three years ago, I have used this manual to train and orient over fifty Parent Partners. I have found it to be helpful in preparing folks so that not all learning has to occur on the job.

It is important to mention a few guiding principles for those using this manual:

- A Parent Partner is the parent of a child with special needs and has experienced first hand the hopelessness and isolation this brings.
- As a Parent Partner, we choose to go public with our private story. It takes skill to decide what parts of our story to share and how best to do this.
- The training should be taught by a Parent Partner.
- The most effective way to build a skills base for Parent Partners is to limit the training to Parent Partners only. The curriculum may be used in a mixed group, but it seems to change the experience of parent-to-parent understanding that is so crucial to the role.
- All of the exercises in the manual should be completed. This is often a challenge in a two-day period, but completion of the exercises is truly where the learning and building of skills takes place.
- Wraparound Parent Partners are champions for the parents, but also champions for the Wraparound process. Wraparound is a complex skill that requires much

practice. This is also one of the ways that Wraparound Parent Partners differ from other Parent Partners.

This manual may seem a straight-forward, how-to guide with eight core competency skills for Parent Partners working in Wraparound projects. Do not let the simplicity fool you. Pat Miles has thoughtfully and skillfully designed a manual that may be used by both novice and experienced Parent Partners alike. New Parent Partners will benefit by a set of practice skills, a place to start, so to speak. After incorporating these skills into daily practice, most Parent Partners will gain a new awareness of the deeper concepts. There will be many “aha” moments. This manual will equip Parent Partners with the valuable skills base necessary to effectively define their role.

Joe Anne Hust Pasadena, California
June 2003

Introduction

This workbook was developed through conversations with Parent Partners who are or have been working in wraparound projects. Since the early 1990s, a number of Wraparound Projects have included Parent Partners in the staff configuration. This has been due to a growing realization that integrating a parent perspective can be helpful on the practice, program and system levels.

On the *practice level*, the role of the paid parent may assist the family's helpers in understanding the parent's perspective. On the *program level*, a key role for Parent Partners is to help supervisors stay on top of hospitality and welcoming issues with parents organizationally as well as in the area of direct help. On the *system level*, the role of the Parent Partner is usually to influence the larger environment to set the stage for effective Parent Partner capacity at the other two levels. The focus of this workbook is for Parent Partners who operate at the practice or direct help level.

Clarifying the Role of Parent Partner

Often, Parent Partners hired and assigned to work directly in Wraparound Projects are given the same training as staff hired to function as Resource Coordinators or Team Facilitators. This is helpful in ensuring that both parties are on the same page about the Wraparound Process. What many staff find difficult, however, is that the role of the Parent Partner and the skills attached to that role are often not clarified. It is almost as if the program is saying to the Parent Partner, "Well, just be a parent" while a great deal of time is spent in developing skills for the team Facilitator. This manual is designed to add more substance to the role of Parent Partner as well as to create a training context so that the Parent Partner may get a chance to try out the skills required to be effective.

This workbook is not meant to be a "carved in stone" set of requirements. The best Parent Partners represent a perfect blend of who they are with what they can do, a mix between skill and personality. This workbook will hopefully add more opportunities for Parent Partners to practice skills and approaches prior to doing the work, affording opportunities for individuals to determine the right blend of personality and skill for themselves.

Code of Ethics

The sections for this workbook are organized around an effort that occurred several years ago in one California County. In that county, numerous parents had been hired in Parent Partner positions. After a couple of years, they began to discuss what they didn't know when they started. They brainstormed the following code of ethics for Parents hired in these positions:

- We tell our own story when it may help other families
- We support other families as peers with a common background and history, rather than as experts who have all the answers

- We acknowledge that each family's answers may be different than our own
- We take responsibility for clarifying our role as Family Partners and as a parent of a child with special needs
- We build partnerships with others, including professionals who are involved in the care of our children
- We commit to honesty with each other and all involved with the care of a child and expect the same from others
- We are committed to a non-judgmental and respectful attitude in our dealings with and discussions regarding families
- We are committed to non-adversarial advocacy in our roles within the system

This workbook is designed to provide participants with an opportunity to reflect on what it means personally and publicly to follow the areas listed above. It is also designed to be guided by parents to parents and to be rewritten by each generation of parents who participate in this training. The original is only a starting point.

Patricia Miles
July 2001

1. Telling your own story when it may help other families

The first skill set for most people employed as Parent Partners involves telling one's own story. Those individuals who have elected to work as Parent Partners make the choice to be public with their personal story and that of their loved one. This is the big difference between Parent Partners and those in other professions who may happen to have a son or daughter with a diagnosis. Because the Parent Partner makes the decision to blend their private story with a public role, they may be called on to tell their story in a variety of settings. This may not be as easy as it sounds. The Parent Partners have to relate their stories in the context of the family they are meeting in the Wraparound Process. The following tips will contribute to their success:

► **WHAT TO SAY: Identify those aspects of your own story and experience that would be most helpful to families you are encounter.**

Each family is different. A key role for Parent Partners is to create conditions that reduce isolation in families and provide parents with the knowledge that they are not alone. This is particularly relevant to parents of children with mental illness who may face a culture that blames them for their children's behavior. Parent Partners and their stories may inspire a parent who is entering the SPIRIT program.

Parent Partners should analyze their own stories against the experience of the parent they are meeting and identify aspects of their own stories that would be most relevant. In some cases, the story of the Parent Partner may serve as a reminder of deficits or shortcomings rather than as inspiration based on strengths. In any case, Parent Partners must attempt to identify what it is about themselves that would be most useful to the person they are paid to help.

► **WHEN TO SAY IT: Identify the right time to tell your story:** It's been said that timing is everything. When a parent first enters the SPIRIT program, there may be a number of crisis episodes occurring. This could include a son or daughter about to get ejected from a residential program, school or daycare; a hefty bill has been received from the child's last hospitalization; or simply a feeling of being at wit's end. The effective Parent Partner will identify *when* self-disclosure will be helpful. The Parent Partner must assess the environment and the individual challenges faced by the family before telling the story.

► **HOW TO SAY IT: Identify how to tell your story in a way that will help families:** Each family is unique. A key skill for Parent Partners will be to assess the culture of the individual family to determine the best ways to communicate. A common trap for Parent Partners is to misread the family and tell their story in a manner that is not helpful for the listener. Issues such as race, class, age and gender should be taken into account in planning how the story is shared.

A final skill for Parent Partners is to determine when to tell their stories to others involved in the support of the family engaged in the Wraparound process. The presence of a Parent Partner may be a learning experience for professionals, as well. Parent Partners must be able to tell their story in way in which professionals may learn from the story and also apply that learning in a way that benefits the family.

Practicing Your Story
An Exercise

Pair up with someone from the group you don't know or at least don't know well. You will be given 30 minutes to share your stories with each other. After sharing your stories, take a few minutes to fill out the table below.

Sum up the story. What did you hear?	List three lessons you've learned from this person's Story.	List three conclusions you drew about the person from the story.

Practicing Your Story: Step Two

When you have completed the table, share your results with your partner. When that is finished, complete the following table.

What did you have confirmed you do from this feedback?	What did you learn new about yourself from this activity?	What would you differently as a Parent Partner based on this feedback?

Applying Your Story to the Parent Partner Role

Consider the following three situations with your listening partner. Pretend that each of these families has just been referred to the SPIRIT program and that you will be meeting them within the next 48 hours. Identify how you would modify your story to be most effective in this situation. This might include how you would share it, when you would share it as well as what aspects might be most helpful.

Situation	When would you share your story?	How would you share your story?	What parts of your story would be most helpful?
<p>Raquel is a 32-year-old single mother of eight-year-old Josh and a lifelong resident of Santa Barbara County. Her son was diagnosed with ADHD at an early age, but recently there have been problems with the school that has resulted in more and more referrals. Josh's Grandparents, Raquel's folks, feel that she doesn't discipline Josh enough. They are quite well off and Raquel has relied on them in the past for financial support. She's worried that her ex-husband who lives in Northern California will make her life miserable in terms of custody if something doesn't happen with Josh.</p>			
<p>James & Lucille are parents of 16-year-old Gloria. They both work as night janitors at a local high-tech firm and are trying to make ends meet for their entire family. They relocated here from another country four years ago and have a strong work ethic. Their oldest daughter, Glenda, stays with the kids while they are working and lives at home rent-free while she's attending community college. Gloria was diagnosed with Bipolar and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder six months ago and has been receiving services since then. She is about to be released from the psychiatric hospital and wraparound is scheduled to commence.</p>			
<p>Jonathan is the adoptive father of Kelly, a 14-year-old referred to the SPIRIT program. Jonathon's wife, Dolores, died last year. Kelly was adopted at birth but in the past year he has been running away & ending up in hospitals or the detention center. He has been arrested for solicitation three times in the past year & appears to be experiencing gender identity issues. Jonathon is self-employed, computer troubleshooter with most of his extended family residing in Nebraska.</p>			

2. Supporting other families as peers with a common background and history rather than as experts who have all the answers

Parent Partners add a unique value to the SPIRIT program precisely because they are peers rather than experts purporting to have all of the answers. Skills required involve the ability to transfer knowledge to a parent as a peer rather than as a coach. To be effective, Parent Partners must:

▶ *Listen to the family's story and identify shared values and common ground:* Effective Parent Partners help parents recognize themselves in others, thereby breaking the loneliness. This is accomplished by identifying shared experiences and values that tie one parent of a child with special needs to another parent. Insights are best gained through the give-and-take of conversation and shared experience. Parent Partners must hear the family's story from their perspective and identify shared values and common experiences.

▶ *Provide candid feedback in a supportive manner:* Reports from family members suggest that effective Parent Partners are able to say things to parents that others can't. Parent Partners are non-judgmental, but this doesn't mean they don't have opinions about what's best. Effective Parent Partners are able to share those opinions in a friendly manner that allows the family to consider other options and perspectives.

▶ *Communicate common experiences to other partners:* As mentioned earlier, Parent Partners elect to become public with their private family story when they agree to be hired in these roles. As a result, Parent Partners and their own stories are always providing a learning experience to others involved in the care and support of a child and family. This requires the Parent Partner to analyze similarities and differences in their own story and that of the family involved in Wraparound as well as analyzing when others are likely to learn from the experience of the Parent Partner. Finally, effective Parent Partners are able to communicate big ideas through personal stories in an effective manner.

Identifying Similarities & Differences

Return to your partner from the first exercise. Together identify what your two stories had in common and what was different. Use the table below to identify those similarities & differences.

Similarities	Differences

Communicating Your Story to Other Professionals as a Learning Experience

Review the situation in the first column that briefly tells a situation in which a professional partner is struggling with a perspective on a family. In the next column identify something in your personal story which could relate to helping that professional change their perspective in order to fit more closely with the parent’s perspective. When you have identified something in common, practice ways you would use your own experiences to assist professionals in adapting their perspectives.

Situation	Common Personal Experience	Ways to communicate
<p>Jim, a Child Protective Worker, is very concerned about Michelle and her son, Bob. Michelle has a history of drug abuse and has been participating in recovery for the past 90 days. This morning, Jim stopped by the house and found it to be very messy and chaotic. He feels he should place Bob outside of the home until he is convinced of Michelle’s ability to stay sober. As a Parent Partner, you are aware that Michelle has been doing the best she can with Bob who has ADHD and is considered a “handful.” You also know that Michelle and Bob are very attached to each other. Since Michelle has gotten sober she has elected to spend time with Bob at school rather than doing housekeeping and basic home tasks. Think about personal experiences you have had that might help reassure the CPS worker.</p>		
<p>Terry, a therapist, is very concerned about Jake’s mother and father. Jake, a fourth grader, is in classes for students with Serious Emotional Disturbance, which include Terry on-site. Jake’s parents are extremely concerned that the school is “dumbing down” the curriculum, so they have been buying computer programs and structuring his homework time up to two hours per night. Jake’s older brother and sister are both honor students. The therapist is concerned that Jake’s parents have unreasonable expectations. As a result, the therapist is advocating for out- of-home placement to enable Jake to get out from under the pressure. Your perspective after spending time with the parents is that both of these parents want the best for their son. They are advocating the best way they know how, which often involves Jake’s dad pounding the table at school and structuring his homework time.</p>		

3. Acknowledging that each family's answers may be different than our own

Effective Parent Partners are able to:

▶ *Listen, hear and acknowledge what parents are saying and what they aren't saying:* In the heat of a Wraparound Planning process, teams and team members get excited about creative ideas. Sometimes the momentum of the creative planning process carries us away. It falls on the shoulders of the Parent Partners who hold the team up to consider what is most likely to be effective from the parent and family's point of view.

▶ *Identify a list of options and a way to decide which one is best:* When Wraparound Planning is occurring, more options may be generated than any one person could have imagined. The Parent Partner may often need to assist the parent in sorting through the helpful suggestions and creating a way to decide which one is the most helpful.

▶ *Clarify and communicate the parent's decision to others:* In the course of brainstorming, the parent and family will make a decision. Unfortunately, that decision isn't always clearly communicated or heard by the team members. Consider one mother who often received a suggestion to implement a point system with her son. She really didn't have the energy or interest to implement such an approach, but felt badly about shooting down a team member's idea. As a result, she would nod, go home and never follow up on the suggestion. Had a Parent Partner been involved, the Parent Partner could have informed the rest of the team that the suggestion was not going to be implemented and solicited alternatives.

▶ *Recognize differences between the family identity and the identity of the Parent Partner:* Sometimes the family's solution may differ from that of the Parent Partner. An effective Parent Partner recognizes cultural differences. Often Parent Partners are told that their job is to assist the family in accessing community resources. This framework often fits for families who have a "more is better" attitude, but may not be appropriate for families who are wary of services and resources. For example, a Parent Partner may have pursued an Individual Education Plan for her/his own son or daughter and may encourage another family to pursue a similar route. But it may turn out that this family is very sympathetic to alternative educational strategies such as home schooling. While the Parent Partner cannot imagine home schooling as an option, it may be what works best for another family.

▶ *Affirm the family's chosen solution and encourage others to do so:* Parent Partners often are the first source of acknowledgment for family choices. Communicate to the family respect for the decision they have made. Encourage others involved in the care and support of the child and family to also lend their support.

▶ *Plan for unanticipated results of choices:* Wraparound is not a process in which all control is given to the family to make the hard choices no one else can make. It is a process in which the family's voice is heard and recognized. The team is involved in making tough decisions together. As a result, Parent Partners are often called on to assist parents in making informed choices. This requires that Parent Partners identify future benefits and costs of decisions made today.

Recognizing Differences: Choosing the Best Solution

Take a few minutes and consider the following list. When you have completed the list, pair up with a partner and compare your lists. Identify what differences you have on the list. Discuss why you differ regarding this opinion. When you have had that discussion work with your partner to come up with two statements detailing the difference in the culture of your families.

Possible Solution	Not for Me	You Bet I'd Try That
An Individual Education Plan		
An in-home therapist		
A parent support group		
A gym membership for the whole family		
A therapeutic foster home in the community		
A residential treatment center on the other side of the state		
Some Social Security or other disability payments for my child		
Day treatment for my child		
Respite at a county shelter facility one weekend per month		
A few night's stay at a detention center to get my son/daughter's attention		
A referral to the local Child Welfare office because I can access services through them		
Other?		

What are your disagreements?

What are your two statements detailing the differences between your two families?

1.

2.

Communicating the Parent's Solution to Others

This activity is designed to assist Parent Partners in communicating the Parent's solutions to others. You will be broken into groups of three to four. One of you will take on the role of Parent Partner, while the other two or three will take on the role of a professional involved in the support of the child and family. Choose one solution from the list that you would find difficult to represent based on your personal beliefs and experiences. Pretend that this solution is one chosen by the parent for their family and spend a few minutes convincing the others in your group that this is the best solution.

- Send my child to day treatment
- Refer my child to a residential treatment program
- Keep my child in a contained classroom off-campus
- Send my child to a confrontational, boot camp program
- Move my family into a bigger home
- Get more psych. testing done on my child
- Pursue a "tough love" program at home & remove all of my child's furniture from his bedroom. He has to earn it back
- Keep my family & child involved with the therapist we've been seeing for the past five years.
- Give the family the flexible funds you get to do wraparound

Presentation Feedback

(To be answered by the people who are not playing the role of Parent Partner)

1. Think about yourself and the argument you are hearing in the role you are in. Are you convinced?
2. What does convince you?
3. What keeps you skeptical about the family's chosen solution?
4. What would you do differently?

4. Clarifying our role as Family Partners and as a parent of a child with special needs

One Wraparound manager recently commented that the hardest part of the last 15 years of implementation was integrating Parent Partners in a meaningful way.

The very nature of having Parent Partners involved within the organization represents a major cultural shift for most organizations. The presence of Parent Partners challenges the typically unintentional but significant bias against parents in many organizations. Many child-serving agencies got their start rescuing children from their families, and in particular, their parents. To move away from that identity to one of partnership represents a major cultural shift in many organizations.

Consequently, the Parent Partner is often called on to assist an organization in moving from a parent-hostile to a parent-tolerant environment and then to a parent-friendly environment. This is not easy to do on a daily, personal level. Many Parent Partners will encounter institutional bias and a culture of blame. As a coping mechanism, some Parent Partners will over-identify with agency. As a result, sometimes you encounter parents who sound a lot more like the professional staff than the staff members themselves. Effective parent partners:

- ▶ *Introduce yourself in ways that allow parents and others to understand your role:* Parents involved in the SPIRIT program might be somewhat suspicious of a Parent Partner. It's an understandable suspicion. The family referred to SPIRIT may have been looking for instant answers and "experts." To find themselves face to face with another family who's been on that journey may not be totally comforting for those expecting immediate solutions. Parent Partners need to introduce themselves and their roles in a manner that inspires confidence while not promising instant results.
- ▶ *Interrupt bias as it occurs:* Parent Partners attached to the SPIRIT program have a front seat to what happens within agencies. As a result, they may come face to face with institutional prejudice about families and, in particular, parents. This is often unintentional learned behavior. Many professionals will identify their parent bias as a need to vent or as a way to shake off frustration. Unfortunately, those venting, judgmental moments perpetuate the bias that many organizations hold towards parents. Parent Partners represent a living contradiction of that bias. However, many staff will often act on their bias by excluding the Parent Partner. Many Parent Partners have heard the following statement, "I know you're not like the parents on my caseload. I would be so lucky if my parents were more like you." This is a dangerous statement because it reinforces stereotyping. Parent Partners must learn to re-direct biased comments and conversations.
- ▶ *Inspire a non-judgmental attitude towards parents in others:* A third skill for Parent Partners involves inspiring a non-judgmental attitude in others. It's not enough for Parents Partners to hold a strength-based perspective on the family. A Parent Partner must inspire this approach among co-workers and other team members. This is accomplished through example, story telling and working on concrete tasks with system partners to build a relationship of mutual trust and respect.

Introducing Yourself as a Parent Partner

Phase I: Break into groups of three. One of you will first take on the role of Parent Partner. Have another person take on the role of a new Parent you are just meeting for the first time. The third person will be the observer. Introduce yourself to the Parent. Have the observer keep notes for feedback.

Phase II: Change roles and assign someone else to be the Parent Partner and observer. In this situation pretend the third person is a professional involved on the Wraparound Team. This person has no idea what a Parent Partner is so your job is to explain it to them. Have the observer keep notes of this interaction.

Phase III: Discuss among the three of you what were the similarities and differences among these two conversations. What was most effective? What was least effective? Be prepared to report out to the larger group.

Identifying Your Own Encounters with Bias

Many parents encounter bias through the service system. Most bias is learned and unintentional. This is good news because new patterns may be learned. When people encounter unspoken bias, they often start to internalize those misconceptions. To be an effective “bias buster,” it is important to consider how you have experienced bias. Use the table below to consider your own experience. One situation is filled in as an example to get you started. Think about why professionals would have drawn mistaken conclusions about you.

Describe a situation where people drew a conclusion about you.	What conclusions did you draw about yourself or other families?	What conclusions did you draw about professionals?
<i>A parent with an adopted daughter who seeks help: “During a meeting with professionals the comment was made that it looked like this was going to be another failed adoption. That was the furthest thing from my mind, and I had never heard this before.”</i>	<i>Other parents who have adopted kids must be returning them.</i>	<i>They are not going to help me because they’re afraid I’m going to abandon my child. I better look somewhere else.</i>

5. Building partnerships with others, including professionals who are involved in the care of our children

The Parent Partner is part of the SPIRIT team responsible for building partners with everyone involved in supporting the family. Although the Parent Partner role is different from that of the facilitator, effective Parent Partners are also pursuing effective partnerships. As a result, Parent Partners need to:

- ▶ *Introduce self and role:* Effective Parent Partners are able to introduce themselves to all players in a manner that creates credibility, understanding and confidence.
- ▶ *Identify skills, assets and abilities of professionals:* Effective Parent Partners recognize and use strength based approaches with not only the family but also the professionals involved in supporting the family.
- ▶ *Identify the position, opinion and agenda of professionals without judgment:* Effective Parent Partners are able to identify the interests of the professionals and while not necessarily agreeing with those interests they can understand them. Additionally, effective Parent Partners are able to separate those opinions from personality.
- ▶ *Identifying strategies to help professionals advance their interests while still assisting families:* Effective Parent Partners often apply the Wraparound framework to everyone involved in the support of the child and family. What this means is that Parent Partners often identify strengths of the professionals, unmet needs of the professionals and strategies for advancing their interests.

Skills, Abilities & Assets of Professionals

Identify three professionals who you found particularly helpful in your own journey. List those professionals by position in the first column. In the next column identify the professional strengths of those people. In the last column identify the personal attributes, skills, interests or abilities of those individuals.

Person/Position	Professional Strengths	Personal Strengths

Describe a time when this professional was helpful to you.

Identify what strengths they used in providing this help. Circle the ones that were personal.

6. Practicing honesty with each other and all involved with the care of a child & expect the same from others

Another skill for Parent Partners involves the capacity to honestly, openly and candidly hold conversations with the family about what is going. A common mistake found in Wraparound programs is to engage only in strength-based conversations and not deal with what's directly happening in the family's life. This is disrespectful to families as well as professionals and is not apt to create a good outcome for the child or family.

Parent Partners model open conversation from a position of problem-solving rather than judgment. Parent Partners are also called upon to inspire that same honest, problem-solving conversation among all members of the team including parents, other family members and professionals. Skills necessary to be effective in this area include:

- ▶ *Differentiate between confronting and addressing a situation:* When bad things happen, many folks have been trained to “get the family in here and confront them.” Sometimes this approach works. Often it results in those being confronted pulling away or shutting down. Each approach is geared toward obtaining a particular outcome. Typically, when *confronting* an issue, the goal of the person doing the confronting is getting the other person to identify what has been done wrong. When *addressing* a concern, the person speaking is looking for a way to come up with a solution that resolves the issue. In wraparound, the responsibility for solutions rest with the whole team; you are not looking for problem ownership by a single person. As a result, the Parent Partner must raise issues without assigning blame or responsibility.
- ▶ *Assess your own communication style:* Effective Parent Partners recognize their own challenges and are ready to “own them” openly as a modeling tool for others. This includes assessing one's own judgment and attitudes as well as skills and patterns in certain situations. Parent Partners must be aware of when they are challenged by certain situations within a family and communicate to all team members what they are doing about those situations.
- ▶ *Create conditions for honest and open conversation in and out of Wraparound Team meetings:* Parent Partners reflect candid conversation at every step of the Wraparound process. In addition to modeling for professionals how to bring up hard issues with families, they also model for families how to disagree respectfully and openly with professionals. The Wraparound process may be very helpful in creating needs statements “owned” by the individual, not problem statements that assign blame.

Describe a Family

Take a few minutes and identify your comfort level with each of the situations described below. When you have completed this meet with someone else to compare your answers and identify which families you would be most comfortable with and where you may have difficulties.

Description of the Family	Very Comfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Not at All comfortable
Two parents living together			
Single mother raising children			
Single father raising children			
Daughters are expected to help with household chores, sons aren't			
Kids are expected to get a job early, finishing school is not that important			
Kids are expected to perform in school & try out for everything			
Discipline is the father's responsibility			
Mother is expected to get dinner on the table			
Parent doesn't work and household income consists of the kid's SSI payments			
Mom is an exotic dancer for a living			
Dad raises exotic dogs who take a lot of his attention			
Parents think that the SPIRIT program should pay for everything			
The older sons are all in prison.			

Practicing the Hard Stuff: Addressing Situations in a Wraparound Manner

Listed below are several situations that are likely to come up with the SPIRIT program. Your job is to break into a small group and practice addressing those concerns in a SPIRIT Team setting. When addressing those concerns, you have to assure that the person of concern doesn't feel judged, and others involved walk away invested in creating a solution.

Situation 1: This mother, who came home from prison shortly after you began wraparound, has a no contact order with her ex-husband. The kids have started referring to him in school and the teacher called the facilitator to let them know they are having contact. The facilitator feels this has to be brought up in the Wraparound Meeting. Practice addressing this concern in a way that will keep the mother involved in the process.

Situation 2: These parents are extremely concerned about their son and his school program. The teacher, Caroline, has been running the Serious Emotionally Disturbed classroom at her high school for over 10 years. They recently discovered some snapshots of their son posing in a provocative manner on a desk with a girl in that classroom. They like the teacher as a person and think she is very warm, but they have concerns about her ability to teach and structure the classroom. Practice addressing this concern without causing the teacher to feel judged.

Situation 3: You have been attending Wraparound Meetings for the past 60 days with the Jones family. The team is trying to work on things. The problem is that, from your perspective, in all team meetings the clinician seems to be undermining or competing with the Facilitator. The clinician has expressed concerns outside of team meetings that the Wraparound process will undermine the clinical agenda. The Facilitator seems paralyzed by this dynamic. Address this concern between the two of them while maintaining a Wraparound perspective.

7. Committing to a non-judgmental and respectful attitude in our dealings and discussions regarding families

Parent Partners hired by and assigned to the SPIRIT program are not saints. The truth is that most Parent Partners encounter situations with families that challenge them and force them to explore their own bias. Effective Parent Partners continually evaluate their own perspective and opinions in order to become effective at encouraging others to explore their own agendas. Some simple rules help Parent Partners maintain and inspire a non-judgmental approach with families:

- Meet each family as a brand new situation.
- Avoid drawing conclusions based on past experiences.
- Reflect on your own trouble spots.
- Make a list of what is familiar and what is different about this family.
- Avoid offering solutions.
- Find at least 10 family strengths through conversations with them.
- Practice introducing the family using their strengths.
- Avoid passing judgment by considering why people are doing what they are doing.
- Tell co-workers and partners that you have a zero tolerance rule for judgment prior to interrupting biased statements.
- Stop judgmental statements sooner rather than later in the conversation.
- Avoid choosing sides in a situation.

Interrupting Bias

In small groups consider the following three situations. Come up with at least three concrete approaches you would use in interrupting the prejudice that is being communicated.

Situation	Concrete Approaches
You are in the lunchroom at the agency. During the conversation, one of the staff begins making a joke about a family you have been working with. In particular, the staff person is making fun of the size of the grandmother and saying that she will never be able to take care of these three active teenagers.	
You are attending training at the Probation Office. During the break, the Probation Officer who is one of your Wraparound Teams invites you and the facilitator to his office. You think that's just to give you some feedback about how SPIRIT is going. When you get to his office, you discover that his concern is that this mother is simply not getting with the program and, in his opinion, never will.	
You are visiting a therapist for initial conversations. You have met with the family once. During this initial conversation the therapist begins to roll her eyes and start talking about this "dysfunctional family" and "toxic mother."	

8. Providing non-adversarial advocacy in our roles within the system

A final skill area for Parent Partners involves moving the team to act within the system. Parent Partners are not traditional advocates, but they are required to create the conditions in which the needs of families may be met. Parent Partners have some tools that traditional advocates don't have:

- ▶ *High access on the inside:* The Parent Partner assigned to the SPIRIT program is part of the staff assigned to meet needs. They are not on the outside trying to make someone else get something done.
- ▶ *The Wraparound Process:* The Wraparound process is a discrete set of practice steps tied to a clearly articulated core philosophy of care. Wraparound is designed to produce a plan that meets family needs, builds on family strengths and delivers services and supports in the community. Wraparound is *not* certain set of services. The Parent Partner can and should use the Wraparound Process as a way to ensure that family needs are met.
- ▶ *Flexibility in Roles:* Most Parent Partners assigned to the SPIRIT program have great flexibility in roles. This workbook is one effort to bring some clarity to the role. Most Parent Partners find they may define themselves in a variety of ways because the position is so new.

Some of the challenges experienced by Wraparound Parent Partners are:

- ▶ *Determining the appropriate mix of services:* Parent Partners are often faced with the popular belief that more is better. In Wraparound this is not necessarily true. What is best is the right level of service and support that actually meets needs. Wraparound Parent Partners must be champions for the wraparound process as well as for the family.
- ▶ *Advocating in other systems:* Wraparound Parent Partners often find themselves functioning as traditional advocates in other systems when needs are unmet in those other systems. We have often seen Parent Partners become advocates to ensure that the school provides an IEP or some other service. Parent Partners in the SPIRIT program should not be put into that role, but should encourage someone else to assist in that role when needed.
- ▶ *Staying on the outside:* Some Parent Partners find themselves “a stranger in a strange land” when hired by the SPIRIT program. They elect to keep a low profile and not become too involved in the daily mechanics of the project. This allows them to keep their perspective, but results in the families being served paying the price of not having the kind of access which would be most helpful to get their needs met.
- ▶ *Taking sides:* While the role of the Parent Partner is to advance the Parent's perspective, effective Parent Partners find that there is no “right” side to any situation. Some Parent Partners identify with the parent, others identify with the children, and still others identify with the professionals. Effective Parent Partners appreciate all perspectives as they work through to a Wraparound solution.

Communicating Wraparound Solutions

Review the situations below. Identify whether the solution is compatible with the Wraparound Process. Then identify ways you would help communicate the solution to other team members.

Situation 1: This single father of Jake has just about had it. He came back into Jake's life when his mother was incarcerated two years ago. Jake is mouthy, aggressive and frequently smoking pot. Jake's dad does drink quite heavily, but he gave up the drugs about four years ago. Jake's dad wants you to help get Jake moved to a boot camp for drug users for the summer.

Is this a wraparound solution?

If no, how could you change it to make it a Wraparound solution?

What would you say to Jake's Dad in order to help him choose a Wraparound Solution?

How would you communicate Jake's dad's opinion to the rest of the team?

Situation 2: Eileen is the grandmother and custodial parent for three of her grandchildren. They appear to all have fetal alcohol syndrome, and their behavior is challenging. Eileen doesn't put much stock in diagnosis and feels they are just stubborn children. She wants someone to take these kids to church more often than she can because a religious message will probably help.

Is this a wraparound solution?

If no, how could you change it to make it a Wraparound solution?

What would you say to Eileen in order to help her choose a Wraparound solution?

How would you communicate Eileen's opinion to the rest of the team?