



Family Engagement in Child Welfare Video Series

Parents Helping Parents • Contra Costa County, California

Discussion Guide

Parents Helping Parents • Contra Costa County, California

Background on Systems of Care

In 2003 the Federal Children's Bureau funded nine demonstration grants, across 18 communities, to test the efficacy of a system of care approach to improving outcomes for children and families involved in the child welfare system. This 5-year initiative, entitled *Improving Child Welfare Outcomes through Systems of Care* (Systems of Care), focused on infrastructure development to strengthen the capacity of human service agencies to support families involved in public child welfare through a set of six guiding principles:

- Interagency collaboration
- Individualized, strengths-based care
- Cultural and linguistic competence
- Child, youth, and family involvement
- Community-based approaches
- Accountability

In the evaluation of the Systems of Care initiative, one of the guiding principles in particular—child, youth, and family involvement—was found to have a transformative effect on child welfare agencies.

In Systems of Care communities, families adopted new roles and participated more actively in their own case planning, in peer-to-peer coaching, and as advocates in systems change activities. As a result, child welfare agencies were better prepared to improve the fit between their services and families' needs. At the same time, families felt more supported and motivated to adopt active roles in working toward change.

Introduction

Family involvement is increasingly recognized in the child welfare field as a critical path to more effectively meeting the needs of children and families. Agencies across the country are looking at new strategies for involving family members in decision-making and service delivery.

Communities participating in the Children's Bureau Improving Child Welfare through Systems of Care initiative (see sidebar) made significant strides in advancing family involvement efforts. The Family Engagement in Child Welfare Video Series was developed to share their experiences, lessons learned, and guidance with others in the field working to engage and empower families. The series showcases two promising peer-to-peer family involvement programs:

- **Parent Partner Program in Contra Costa County, California**—where parents who had been involved in the child welfare system now serve as mentors and resource guides to other parents currently receiving child welfare services.
- **Kinship Liaison Program in Clark County, Nevada**—in which the child welfare agency integrated current and former kin caregivers into its workforce as paraprofessionals to offer guidance and support to other kin caregivers.

The videos, and the digital stories contained within, present administrators, supervisors, caseworkers, and family members speaking candidly about the programs—the achievements and successes as well as the fears and challenges. They offer unique insight into the key elements and real-life strategies needed to make peer-to-peer family engagement programs successful.



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Purpose of the Video Series and Discussion Guides

The videos are intended to be used as tools for building the capacity of State and local child welfare administrators and program managers to develop and manage family involvement programs. They also may serve as learning aids for supervisors and caseworkers responsible for implementing such programs.

The video discussion guides promote reflection and generate a deeper understanding of the video content through guided questions. While primarily aimed at supporting training programs, they may also be used in coaching and other professional development activities.

The sections that follow address:

- Organization of the Video Segments and Discussion Guides
 - Tips for Using the Guides
 - Training Objectives
 - 1.0 Core Segment Discussion: Parents Helping Parents
 - 1.1 Quick Cut Discussion: What Does It Take to Be a Parent Partner?
 - 1.2 Quick Cut Discussion: Changing the Culture of the Agency
 - 1.3 Quick Cut Discussion: Overcoming Fears and Resistance
 - 1.4 Quick Cut Discussion: Building and Sustaining the Program
 - 1.5 Quick Cut Discussion: Parent Partners: Personal Stories
 - Wrap-up Discussion
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Introduction

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Organization of the Video Segments and Discussion Guides

The video series explores two peer-to-peer family engagement programs developed under the Systems of Care initiative. For each program, there is a core video with a program overview and several “quick cuts,” which highlight specific implementation issues and personal stories.

Family Engagement in Child Welfare: Parents Helping Parents, Contra Costa County, CA

Core Video:

- Parents Helping Parents (8 minutes)

Quick Cuts:

- What Does It Take to Be a Parent Partner? (1.38 minutes)
- Changing the Culture of the Agency (1.46 minutes)
- Overcoming Fears and Resistance (2.07 minutes)
- Building and Sustaining the Program (1.50 minutes)
- Parent Partners: Personal Stories (3.31 minutes)

All 10 videos, the 2 discussion guides, and related resources are available online at www.childwelfare.gov/familyvideos.

Family Engagement in Child Welfare: Supporting Kin Caregivers, Clark County, NV

Core Video:

- Supporting Kin Caregivers (7.34 minutes)

Quick Cuts:

- What Does It Take to Be a Kinship Specialist? (2.45 minutes)
- Overcoming Fears and Resistance (2.47 minutes)
- Keeping Families Together: Personal Stories (4.16 minutes)

This discussion guide focuses on the first group of Parents Helping Parents (Contra Costa County, CA) videos, while a companion discussion guide addresses the second group of Supporting Kin Caregivers (Clark County, NV) videos. For each video segment, the discussion guides present:

- A short synopsis of key points and background information
- Questions for administrators and managers focused on program development and oversight
- Questions for supervisors and workers related to integrating family involvement into day-to-day practices
- Related resources for more information.



Organization of the
Video Segments and
Discussion Guides

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Tips for Using the Guides

The family engagement videos and discussion guides are intended to be customizable training tools and capacity-building resources. The series can be watched and discussed in its entirety, or videos can be selected to meet specific needs. For example, some audiences may be interested in a comprehensive overview of how to develop a Parent Partner Program and will watch and discuss the core Parents Helping Parents video and all five clips; other audiences may be specifically interested in overcoming the fears and resistance of frontline workers toward family involvement and will focus on the two related clips (one from each community). In addition, for some it may be more effective to begin with the overview and then view the clips as sequenced, while for others it may be more powerful to watch the personal stories first. Tailor your use of the materials to best meet your audience's needs and training objectives.

The guides present suggested questions for:

- Administrators and program managers
- Supervisors and caseworkers.

These questions offer a starting point for discussion. Feel free to mix and match questions, or modify or expand them, to generate thought-provoking dialogue and learning among your audiences.



Tips for Using
the Guides

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Training Objectives

As a result of watching the videos and responding to questions in the discussion guide, audiences are expected to:

- Develop a greater understanding and appreciation of the value and benefits (to families, social workers, and the agency) of peer-to-peer family involvement
- Increase receptivity and openness to the possibility of working with birth parents who have experience in the child welfare system in paraprofessional roles

- Identify strategies for overcoming common family engagement challenges and obstacles
- Improve capacity for program development, implementation, and sustainability.

Each trainer also may have their own specific objectives reflecting particular audiences and their needs.



Training Objectives

1.0 Core Segment Discussion: Parents Helping Parents



Key Points

- Parent Partners are consumers of child welfare who successfully navigated the system and now:
 - Mentor families currently in the system
 - Advocate for change in the agency
- Parent Partners provide parents new to the system with:
 - Help getting needed services
 - Development of service plans that make sense to them
 - Guidance in making good decisions
 - Counseling, advice, and encouragement
- Parent Partners help parents understand critical aspects of their experience with child welfare that can be confusing and frightening:
 - Child welfare system
 - Court system (dependency court as opposed to criminal court)
 - Critical timelines
- Outcomes of the Parent Partner Program include:
 - Empowered parents (they have developed their own supports, made productive changes in their lives)

- Enhanced parental views of child welfare agencies and workers
- Lower recidivism (parents don't come back into the system)
- Improvements in child safety
- Improvements in permanency



Background Information

- Parent Partners are life-trained paraprofessionals who have successfully negotiated the child welfare system.
- Parent Partner roles:
 - Provide mentoring to parents newly involved in the child welfare system
 - Educate parents about their rights and responsibilities in the system
 - Offer guidance and tips on issues such as appropriate dress and behavior in court and communicating with their case worker
 - Attend Team Decision-Making and mediation meetings
 - Help families connect to community resources (e.g., transportation)
 - Offer training to parents, co-facilitated with a social worker, on navigating the system



Core Segment
Discussion: Parents
Helping Parents

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- Conduct presentations on family involvement for case managers, court personnel, foster parents, and community members
- Serve on decision-making and planning committees and workgroups

Source: National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, *Family Involvement in the Improving Child Welfare Outcomes through Systems of Care Initiative*, Appendix F: Contra Costa, CA, Family Involvement Profile

- Local evaluation findings point to program effectiveness:
 - Families felt supported, informed, and empowered to make necessary changes
 - Parent clients viewed the Parent Partner Program as beneficial and necessary, noting the value of shared experiences, communication, and ongoing support
 - Allied professionals (social work managers and staff, attorneys and court personnel, others) were very positive about the program's value in inspiring behavioral change in birth parents, reducing parents' anxiety, and increasing parents' understanding of the child welfare system
 - Approximately 60 percent of the children whose parents had paired with Parent Partners reunified with their parents within 18 months of removal, compared to 26 percent of children whose parents did not have Parent Partners

Source: Anthony, E., Berrick, J. D., Cohen, E., & Wilder, E., *Partnering with Parents: Promising Approaches to Improve Reunification Outcomes for Children in Foster Care*

? Questions for Administrators and Program Managers

- Based on the various perspectives you heard in the video, what are the most valuable benefits that Parent Partners bring to an agency?
- How do participants define the success of the program? What would you consider success?
- Valerie says, *"We have to engage families, which means that we have to be willing to share our power in order for them to improve in their lives."* What steps need to be taken to prepare your agency to share power with families?

? Questions for Supervisors and Caseworkers

- Listening to the various perspectives presented in the video, what do you consider the most important pieces of the Parent Partner's job? How does the role of a Parent Partner differ from the role of a caseworker? How does it complement the caseworker's role and how could it aid in the work you do with families?

Section
1.0



Core Segment
Discussion: Parents
Helping Parents

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- David says, “We know who they [the families] are because we were those people.” How does personal experience help a Parent Partner to connect with families? How does a Parent Partner serve as a “cultural broker”?
- How do participants define the success of the program? What would you consider success?



Related Resources

- *Family Involvement in the Improving Child Welfare Outcomes through Systems of Care Initiative*. National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, 2010.
 - Full Findings Report. www.childwelfare.gov/management/reform/soc/communicate/initiative/evalreports/reports/FamilyInvolvement_Report.pdf
 - Appendix F: Contra Costa, CA, Family Involvement Profile. www.childwelfare.gov/management/reform/soc/communicate/initiative/evalreports/reports/FamilyInvolvement_Appendix.pdf
- *Parent Partner Job Description*. Contra Costa, California. www.childwelfare.gov/management/reform/soc/communicate/initiative/soctoolkits/resources/CA_ParentPartnerJobDescription.pdf
- *Partnering with Parents: Promising Approaches to Improve Reunification Outcomes for Children in Foster Care*. Evaluation Report. E. Anthony, J. D. Berrick, E. Cohen, E. Wilder, 2011. ccyp.berkeley.edu/activities/new_research.html

Section
1.0



Core Segment
Discussion: Parents
Helping Parents

1.1 Clip Discussion: What Does It Take to Be a Parent Partner?

Key Points

- Parent Partners:
 - Make indispensable human connections
 - Understand their role in their children’s removal and their responsibilities for achieving reunification
 - Help other parents navigate the system effectively

Background Information

- Parent Partners are mothers and fathers who:
 - Have first-hand experience with the Child Welfare system
 - Exhibited exceptional qualities in their own efforts to develop viable permanency plans for their children
 - Understand how the child welfare system works
 - Know what it takes to be successful
 - Possess personal qualities (such as a positive attitude, sincerity, and willingness to help others) that lend themselves to collaboration at various levels

Source: Contra Costa, CA, Parent Partner Job Description

- Contra Costa requirements for Parent Partners include:
 - Child welfare case successfully closed for at least 1 year
 - Clean and sober for at least 2 years
 - Recommendations from case managers
 - Interviews with Parent Partner Coordinator and current Parent Partners

Source: National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, *Family Involvement in the Improving Child Welfare Outcomes through Systems of Care Initiative*, Appendix F: Contra Costa, CA Family Involvement Profile

Questions for Administrators and Program Managers

- From what you heard in the clip, as well as from your own experiences, what qualifications and skills are needed to be an effective Parent Partner?
- Cheryl notes, *“It takes, parents who got it.”*
 - What does that mean to you and why is it important?
 - What questions might you ask a candidate for a Parent Partner position to see if they “get it”?
 - What else would you want to know in order to identify a strong candidate for a Parent Partner position?



Clip Discussion:
What Does It Take to
Be a Parent Partner?

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? Questions for Supervisors and Caseworkers

- From what you heard in the clip, as well as your own experiences, what does it take to be an effective Parent Partner?
- In the role of Parent Partner, why are making “human connections” so important?
- David describes the Parent Partner job as “...*taking that individual by the hand and walking them down the tunnel with the flashlight.*” How can a Parent Partner “help families through the tunnel?” How do families benefit from that assistance?



Related Resources

- *Parent Partner Job Description.* Contra Costa, California. www.childwelfare.gov/management/reform/soc/communicate/initiative/soctoolkits/resources/CA_ParentPartnerJobDescription.pdf
- *Parent Partner Interview Questions.* Contra Costa, California. www.childwelfare.gov/management/reform/soc/communicate/initiative/soctoolkits/resources/CA_ParentPartnerInterviewQuestions.pdf
- *Building Family Capacity for Family Involvement in Child Welfare.* Action Brief. National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, 2011. www.childwelfare.gov/management/reform/soc/communicate/initiative/actionbriefs/briefs/BuildingFamilyCapacity.pdf

Section 1.1



Clip Discussion—
What Does It Take to
Be a Parent Partner?

1.2 Clip Discussion: Changing the Culture of the Agency



Key Points

- Meaningful family engagement often coincides with an agency culture shift.
- The culture shift necessitates:
 - Hearing about and closely examining what’s working and what’s not working in a system
 - Undergoing a trust-building process
- As a result of this shift, workers start to view the families they work with differently.



Background Information

- Staff training and professional development are critical to preparing caseworkers for the culture shift of family involvement by:
 - Helping to dispel misconceptions about system-involved families
 - Addressing caseworker concerns and questions
 - Preparing staff to sit at the table with parents as partners, adopt a strengths-based approach, and actively listen to parents and youth

Source: National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, *Building Agency Capacity for Family Involvement in Child Welfare*



Questions for Administrators and Program Managers

- What changes in agency culture—that is, how the organization operates, with both the formal and the informal rules—would you expect from integration of family engagement? What needs to be done to prepare the agency and its staff for such a culture shift?
- How does a Parent Partner Program “change the face of the families we work with”? What is the value of such change?
- Why is the trust-building process so important in family involvement? What can be done to facilitate trust-building among managers and Parent Partners? Among frontline workers and Parent Partners?



Questions for Supervisors and Caseworkers

- How does a Parent Partner Program “change the face of the families we work with”? What is the value of such change?
- In addition to “watching what you say,” what other changes would be needed to work side-by-side with a Parent Partner?



Clip Discussion:
Changing the Culture
of the Agency

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- How else would you expect the agency culture—that is, how the organization operates, with both the formal and the informal rules—to change as a result of family engagement activities?



Related Resources

- *Building Agency Capacity for Family Involvement in Child Welfare*. Action Brief. National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, 2011.
www.childwelfare.gov/management/reform/soc/communicate/initiative/actionbriefs/briefs/BuildingAgencyCapacity.pdf

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1.2



Clip Discussion:
Changing the Culture
of the Agency

1.3 Clip Discussion: Overcoming Fears and Resistance

Key Points

- A common challenge in implementing family involvement programs is overcoming fears and resistance among frontline workers.
- Resistance can stem from:
 - Doing business in a new way
 - Bringing parents in to work alongside workers
 - Asking workers to collaborate with yet one more partner

Background Information

- Common concerns to address with child welfare staff during family involvement training and coaching activities:
 - Concerns that family representatives do not have the skills to work with other parents
 - Concerns that family involvement programs might result in greater workloads for case managers
 - Fears that family representatives cannot be trusted
 - Anxieties about speaking freely in the presence of family representatives

- Worries that family representatives will not maintain appropriate boundaries
- Concerns that participating family members will be prone to substance abuse relapse

Source: National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, *Family Involvement in the Improving Child Welfare Outcomes through Systems of Care Initiative*

- Positive relationships between Parent Partners and case managers in Contra Costa were facilitated by:
 - Co-location and close proximity, which create an atmosphere in which Parent Partners provide informal advice to case managers through casual conversation
 - Monthly family engagement meetings among Parent Partners and supervisors to discuss what is working and what is not working in the Parent Partners Program
 - Training for workers conducted by Parent Partners during new worker orientation

Source: National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, *Family Involvement in the Improving Child Welfare Outcomes through Systems of Care Initiative*, Appendix F: Contra Costa, CA Family Involvement Profile



Clip Discussion:
Overcoming Fears
and Resistance

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? Questions for Administrators and Program Managers

- Why might staff be apprehensive about working with Parent Partners?
- What can be done to allay fears and overcome resistance?
- What are some effective ways to “widen the circle” for one more partner?

? Questions for Supervisors and Caseworkers

- Why might staff be apprehensive about working with Parent Partners?
- What can help ease those fears? What can supervisors do to address worker concerns?
- What are the benefits of “making room at the table” for parents?



Related Resources

- *Building Agency Capacity for Family Involvement in Child Welfare*. Action Brief. National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, 2011. www.childwelfare.gov/management/reform/soc/communicate/initiative/actionbriefs/briefs/BuildingAgencyCapacity.pdf

Section 1.3



Clip Discussion:
Overcoming Fears
and Resistance

1.4 Clip Discussion: Building and Sustaining the Program



Key Points

Key elements in building a successful and sustainable Parent Partner Program:

- Program infrastructure and supports (guidelines, staffing, training, supervision, funding, etc.)
- A full-time dedicated coordinator
 - Thinks through program activities and lays a foundation for effective implementation
 - Supervises and supports Parent Partners
 - Serves as liaison between agency staff and Parent Partners
- Ongoing funding sources
 - Look at a variety of sources (Federal, State, county, foundation, other)
 - Partner with other entities
 - Be flexible and creative in thinking through pooled funding opportunities
 - Use outcome data to justify funding requests



Background Information

- Key action steps for building child welfare agency capacity for family involvement:
 - Designate staff to coordinate family involvement activities
 - Conduct research and needs assessments
 - Develop and communicate guidelines
 - Conduct staff training and outreach
 - Provide supervision and feedback mechanisms
 - Integrate family involvement into policies
 - Evaluate and refine activities

Source: National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, *Building Agency Capacity for Family Involvement in Child Welfare*

- Key action steps for engaging and supporting family members while implementing family involvement activities:
 - Develop clear requirements for families to participate
 - Recruit candidates and assess readiness
 - Communicate clear roles and responsibilities



Clip Discussion:
Building and Sustaining
the Program

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- Provide training and development for family members
- Offer compensation and reimbursement
- Provide routine supervision, feedback, and support

Source: National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, *Building Family Capacity for Family Involvement in Child Welfare*

- Parent Partner Coordinators play a vital role in developing, implementing, and overseeing peer-to-peer family involvement activities. Valuable characteristics for a coordinator:
 - Familiarity with the child welfare system (first-hand experience a plus)
 - Confidence
 - Creativity in responding to challenges
 - Problem-solving skills and steadfastness when things go wrong
 - Positive “can do” attitude

Source: Knittel, J., *What to Look for in a Parent Partner Coordinator: Musings from a Parent Partner Coordinator*

? Questions for Administrators and Program Managers

- What do you see as the necessary structural and logistical elements to building a sustainable Parent Partner Program?

- Why is a full-time coordinator so important to the program’s success? What would you look for in terms of experience and qualifications for a Parent Partner Coordinator?
- What funding sources could you use to build and sustain a Parent Partner Program? What strategies could be used to tap and/or blend available resource streams? What data could you use to help make your case for funding?

? Questions for Supervisors and Caseworkers

- What infrastructure changes (e.g., guidelines, training, changes to performance reviews) are needed to support staff in your agency to work effectively with Parent Partners?
- How can supervisors best integrate and support family engagement principles into practice? How can case workers best integrate family engagement principles into day-to-day work?
- How can you help “champion” a Parent Partner Program (both inside and outside the agency)?

Section 1.4



Clip Discussion:
Building and Sustaining
the Program

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Related Resources

- *Building Agency Capacity for Family Involvement in Child Welfare*. Action Brief. National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, 2011. www.childwelfare.gov/management/reform/soc/communicate/initiative/actionbriefs/briefs/BuildingAgencyCapacity.pdf
- *Building Family Capacity for Family Involvement in Child Welfare*. Action Brief. National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, 2011. www.childwelfare.gov/management/reform/soc/communicate/initiative/actionbriefs/briefs/BuildingFamilyCapacity.pdf
- *Systems of Care Infrastructure Toolkit: Finance*. National Technical Assistance and Evaluation Center for Systems of Care, 2010. www.childwelfare.gov/management/reform/soc/communicate/initiative/soctoolkits/

Section
1.4



Clip Discussion:
Building and Sustaining
the Program

1.5 Clip Discussion: Parent Partner Personal Stories



Key Points

The personal stories of parents involved in the child welfare system are complex and multifaceted.

- Parent Partners:
 - Are passionate about their work and about helping others
 - Draw on their own experiences to help others understand what will happen and what needs to be done (rights and responsibilities)
 - Offer encouragement and hope



Questions for Administrators and Program Managers

- What do the personal stories tell you about Parent Partners? About their potential roles in the agency?
- Hearing their stories, what benefits do you see of bringing Parent Partners into your workforce? (For the families? For the workers? For the agency?)



Questions for Supervisors and Caseworkers

- What do the personal stories tell you about Parent Partners? About their motivation?
- Hearing their stories, what benefits do you see of working with a Parent Partner?
- What role do Parent Partners play in offering hope and encouragement to parents? To caseworkers?



Clip Discussion:
Parent Partner
Personal Stories

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Wrap-Up

Key Points

- The Parents Helping Parents videos convey compelling footage on the potential impact of family engagement.
- Underlying theme: It's not always easy, but the results are worth it.

Questions for Administrators and Program Managers

- How did the videos change your perspective or understanding of Parent Partner Programs?
- Do you think a Parent Partner Program is a good fit for your agency? Why or why not?
- What are your agency's existing strengths/facilitators for implementing a Parent Partner Program? What do you expect to be the biggest challenges or barriers? How can you build on the strengths and overcome the challenges?
- What are the next steps in building an effective and sustainable Parent Partner Program in your agency? What role can you play?

Questions for Supervisors and Caseworkers

- How did the videos change your perspective or understanding of Parent Partner Programs?
- How can Parent Partners best be integrated into your workforce?
- What are the next steps for setting the foundation and overcoming obstacles for a Parent Partner Program in your agency? What role can you play?

Related Resources

- *Organizational Self Study on Family Engagement.* National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections. www.nrcpfc.org/fewpt/self_study.htm

For More Information:
www.childwelfare.gov/familyvideos



Wrap-Up