

**Lessons from the Field:
What Helps in Utilizing Family Strengths in
Wraparound**

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A major principle in the wraparound process is the use of identified family strengths as part of the strategies to reach desired treatment goals and outcomes set by the family.

This presentation presents summarized data collected from wraparound specialists and family members who have participated in a wraparound project throughout the State of Idaho.

The lessons learned from the field in this study suggest that the use of family strengths in the wraparound process requires constant vigilance and advocating on the part of all team members.

Strengths Based:

Services and supports are based on identified strengths of the child and/or family and/or community. This means that strengths of the child, family and community are assessed, noted, appreciated, and reflected in the design of interventions and supports.

Strengths relate to family and individual and community strengths, cultures, preferences and values.

6 Major Service Premises:

1. All families have unique strengths based on their culture, ethnicity, and community.
2. Absence of particular competencies is not a failure.
3. Families with problems are not broken and needing to be fixed.
4. Families are not out of compliance when a particular strategy may not work.
5. The goal of intervention is to create less dependency on professionals.
6. Professionals are not viewed as experts able to solve the family's problems.

Idaho Building on Each Other's Strengths Wraparound Process

Wraparound Planning/ Review Summary

GROUND RULES FOR CHILD AND FAMILY TEAM MEETINGS

1. Keep the meeting strength based (no negative comments).
2. Avoid professional jargon.
3. Everyone will be heard and people are expected to share their good ideas.
4. Everything discussed here will be confidential and is not to be discussed with anyone outside of the meeting.
5. One conversation at a time.
6. Meetings should be kept to one hour.
7. The team must work together for the best interest of the child.
(This also means that we will not dwell or blame others for the past, but rather work together for the future.)
8. The team must try to be here on time (out of respect to everyone's schedule).
9. _____

When Strengths are Used:

- "I feel validated, like I've been trying my best and it's not my fault."
- "I feel appreciated for how hard I try."
- "I feel hopeful, it helps me look forward rather than look at all the past problems."
- "It means my son gets to do things he likes to do while working on his goals."
- "It helps me and my family find good things to talk about between meetings."
- "A plan built around things a child and family like and are interested in is a plan that has a better chance of succeeding."

The Family Perspective

What are some of the things that happen in a wraparound team meeting that help you use your family strengths as part of the wraparound process?

- Just hearing from others that you do have strengths
- People help keep the big picture in perspective
- Hearing that not everything is bad; good things are happening too
- Lots of positive vibes, Conclusions: **Strengths Based:**
The meeting is like a beam of light; the past was not present
- The team members brought hope
- When you don't have to explain the past because they already know it

The Wraparound Facilitator Perspective

What do family members do that helps keep a strength based approach?

- Refuse to take things personally
- Able to recognize how realistic different plans are for their family
- They relate positive stories or characteristics of family members
- Defend their child; give examples of good things about child
- Identify strengths that professionals haven't noticed
- Talk about family culture, traditions, and values
- Accept feedback and support from both formal and informal supports

Wraparound Specialists Perspective

What helps - Youth

- Youth
- Come to the table and be willing to be assertive as well as to listen
- Be honest
- Making an effort to be at meetings and to participate
- Talk about what they do well
- Take ownership of the plan
- Talk about friends and interests
- Willing to openly participate in the process

Wraparound Specialists

What Helps: Natural Supports

- Willingness to help with initial small and immediate tasks
- Able to see family from a different perspective - can recognize strengths family may not know
- Can help point out strengths to family
- Stay optimistic and supportive regardless of the circumstance
- Stay focused on outcomes
- Add to what parents and youth say
- 24-7 support, particularly in crisis

Wraparound Specialists

What Helps: Professional Service Providers

- Listen and respond in a calm manner
- Focus on improving situation by improving skills
- Able to recognize progress family may not be aware of
- Adapting services to the strengths
- Attend meetings
- Aware of family strengths, aware of history, of what works and doesn't
- Point out tasks completed

Wraparound Specialists

What Helps: Parent Advocates

- Give examples without telling the family what they should do
- Share stories about their own personal experience
- Be available at meetings, but also at other times to bolster parental strength
- Help parents identify strengths in themselves and child

Family Perspective

Barriers to Utilizing Strengths

- When it feels judgmental
- Pointing fingers at us
- Asking: what have you done?
- All the questions, like "Is dad in the home?" Makes us feel bad right from the start
- Somebody wanting to know what caused this
- Asking the child: "are you still failing?"

Wraparound Specialists

Barriers to Utilizing Strengths: Family members

- Expect professionals to change their child
- Not see beyond the present
- Point out everything wrong
- Get stuck in old behaviors and communication patterns
- Negative attitudes; problem focused
- Not committed to wraparound process; see themselves as victims
- Focus on what went wrong, not what went right

Wraparound Specialists

Barriers: Youth

- Reject what others have to offer
- Don't speak
- Don't follow through
- Rebel and fight treatment through manipulation
- Don't accept responsibility for change
- Focus on the trouble in the home

Wraparound Specialists

Barriers: Natural Supports

- Align with either parent or youth in a way that is critical of the other party
- Don't follow through with promised support
- Don't show up
- Can talk too much about the crisis situations
- Been there, done that attitude toward family
- Become unavailable

Wraparound Specialists

Barriers: Professional Service Providers

- Think and act in terms of hooking family into available services instead of hearing what family needs
- Focus on family deficits
- Holding to pat answers when too busy to think outside of the box
- Forgetting that parents are the expert on their child
- Refuse to look outside their own treatment modality or services
- Standardize strengths
- Use threats for behavior modification
- Not attend meetings

Wraparound Specialists

Barriers: Parent Advocates

- "This worked for me, you should do it this way"
- Not involved
- Share from only limited experience with family rather than their own wider experience
- Don't show up
- Don't keep constant contact with family

Parent Perspective

Suggestions: The wraparound facilitator

- Have the resources available at the table; don't tell me where to get them or who to call; dial the phone for me
- Don't tell me what to do - help me do it
- Don't give too much information; we can only handle so much
- Don't call someone about our child; bring them to the table
- Give us explicit directions; there is so much going on daily that we forget
- Use the minutes from the last meeting to help us focus on what has been accomplished
- Ensure that team members get trained in values of wraparound

Wraparound Specialists

Suggestions: Parents/caregivers

- Insist that every meeting start with positive observations of progress
- Report each meeting what went right
- Let go of history
- Be willing to adapt to proposed changes in plans
- Understand the process and how strengths are related to outcomes
- Talk realistically about strengths and not having too much or too big goals to meet
- Review strengths with family outside of formal meetings

Parent Perspective Suggestions: **Natural supports or friends**

- Help the parent follow stay positive; follow any negative with a positive
- If you're feeling critical - stay home
- Examine your own beliefs about MH
- Help keep the meeting culturally appropriate
- Help parents translate deep issues into their own language or experiences. What do MH words actually mean to the family? Is illness a bad thing because some type of neglect caused it?

Wraparound Specialists

Suggestions: Natural Supports

- Assert observations and positive historic events
- Keep on track at meetings
- Trust that the team support can create change for the family; move beyond frustration and skepticism
- Realize the capacity they have in changing child's life
- Think of positive situations the family has dealt with and add to that
- Help identify strengths

Parents Perspective

Suggestions: **Professional service providers (including PSR)**

- Learn first of all about the culture of the family
- Learn where the family comes from; not just where they are now
- Keep an open mind; learn from the family
- Don't think you know it all or us, or that your services are the only fix
- Don't make up your mind about the family before the meeting
- Forget about the statement: "You have to hold them accountable."
- Forget about the statement: "He knows wrong from right."
- Work with us, don't try to change us

Wraparound Specialists

Suggestions: Professional Service Providers

- Be open to learning about other systems and working toward joint options
- Share what has been successful
- Make a point to not speak negatively
- Think outside the box
- Help identify strengths
- Help the family create the plan with guidance
- Bring new creative angles on strengths
- Continuously identify new strengths

Parent Perspective

Suggestions: Parent advocates

- Have resources available and be prepared to walk the family through it
- Make sure you have the resources before hand; don't tell us what is available - bring it
- Remember, if we didn't want to have things happen, we wouldn't be at the table
- Stay calm
- Get training
- Keep in touch with families between meetings
- Find out if the family is comfortable with all the persons present
- Help keep the kids involved in the discussions

Wraparound Specialists

Suggestions: **Parent Advocates**

- Observe for family friendly ways of replacing negative directions
- Explain strengths and how it has helped them
- Share successes of others
- Share success stories of own life
- Encourage family to review strengths

Strength Based Wraparound: Where the past is not the present!

Conclusions:

1. Personal orientations and beliefs on the part of parents/caregivers and professionals, not diagnosis or illness, are the main barriers to families experiencing strength based services.
2. There are positive steps that individuals can take to more effectively utilize strengths in treatment implementation.
3. Utilizing strengths is a multi-systemic approach that requires careful planning and facilitation as a separate and equally important part of the treatment process.