Expanding Natural Support Systems to Address Behavioral Health Needs

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Objectives

- Understand the value of natural supports
- Utilize tools to assess natural support
- Practice skills to enhance natural support
- Learn new techniques to expand natural supports to address behavioral health needs
About Me

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What if I told you that I have the magic formula for...

- Increased life span (decreased the risk of premature death by 50%)
- Lower stress (and triggering the release of stress-reducing hormones)
- Better cardiovascular health and reduced risk of death from cardiovascular disease
- Increased immunity (resistance to illness)
- Decreased risk of substance abuse and mental health conditions (including depression and anxiety)
- Helping you think faster
- Better psychological and physical well-being
Studies show that when we don’t have support in our lives, the effects are:

- Increased risk of heart disease
- Have the physical effects of smoking 15 cigarettes a day when we don’t even smoke
- Increased risk of dementia and slows your brain functioning
- Worse than obesity on your body
- Have increased anxiety and depression

Seppala, (2014)
Activity: Natural Supports

Think of the biggest crisis in your life…
Who did you turn to for help with a big crisis?

- Family
- Friends
- Faith
- Paid professional with an advanced degree
Activity: Who are your Natural Supports?

Who do you work with?
Who lives in your neighborhood?
Who is part of your friend circle?
Who were the last three people that came to visit your home?
What shows do you watch on TV?
Who do you pray with?
Video: Risk and Protective Factors

https://youtu.be/9sz0N8Yo2mY

RISK & PROTECTIVE FACTORS

WITH

Jessica Hulsey Nickel
Let’s Talk Protective Factors

- Resilience - managing stress and functioning well when faced with challenges.

- Social Connections - relationships that provide emotional, informational, instrumental, and spiritual support.

- Concrete Support in Times of Need - Access to concrete support and services that address a person's needs and minimize stress.

- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development - Understanding development and parenting strategies that support physical, cognitive, language, social, and emotional development.

- Social and Emotional Competence - interactions that support the ability to communicate, recognize and regulate emotions and establish/maintain relationships.

What are Natural Supports?

Social connection is the experience of feeling close and connected to others. It involves feeling loved, cared for, and valued, and forms the basis of interpersonal relationships.
The Benefits of Natural Supports

Research documents a direct, positive association between social relationships and mental and physical health (including lower mortality)

- Social relationships have been found to have stress-buffering effects on mental health by:
  - Promoting lifelong good mental health
  - Enhancing self-esteem
  - Improving health choices
  - Improving motivation

According to the American Psychological Association:

The Components of Natural Supports

Includes emotional support, instrumental support and informational support:

• Social Integration (quality of social relationships)
• Social network structure (network ties)
• Relational content (emotional caring and concern)
• Social influence/comparison- guidance on norms and behaviors
• Social control on how social network members monitor and encourage adherence to positive practices
• Behavioral guidance, purpose, and meaning (mattering)
Potential Sources of Natural Supports

- Family
- Friends
- Co-workers
- Clubs and social organizations/civic
- and professional organizations
- Recreation centers
- Volunteer opportunities
- Education opportunities/schools and students/childcare providers
- Transportation resources
- Online communities
- Religious and spiritual communities
- Sports and hobbies
- Political parties and organizations
- Other parents at events (school, sports, etc.)
Ideal Natural Support/Formal Services Ratio

- 75% Natural Supports
- 25% Formal Services
Defining Natural Supports

Natural supports are the people in a person’s life who support them as part of a reciprocal relationship, not for money.

Each person has their own natural supports, and they have many different roles and functions for the person.

Many natural supports are there for the person for an extended period, resulting in sustainable natural support systems.

For many individuals, the concept of Go-to-People is easier to understand than natural supports.
Why Natural Supports?

• Formal supports are usually temporary, natural supports can be lifelong
• Creates lasting relationships and support
• Is the key to sustainability of the plan
• Individuals gain confidence when they have meaningful relationships and community connectedness
• Individuals with a strong support network are more resilient
• Helps ensure culturally competent care
Let’s Assess – Social Support Survey Instrument

https://www.rand.org/health-care/surveys_tools/mos/social-support/survey-instrument.html
So How Do We Help Build Natural Supports?
Video: How to Develop an Awesome Social Support System

https://youtu.be/e1jtVFc_1IU
Sample Questions to Help Youth Identify Social Connections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Additional Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who do you trust? Who does your child trust?</td>
<td>Tell me about them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you have neighbors, friends, or family members who are aware of your</td>
<td>Tell me about them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>situation and can help you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are there any activities in the community for your child? What about for</td>
<td>Tell me about them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you? Tell me about them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you involved in any spiritual or religious activities? What kind and</td>
<td>Tell me more about that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>how often? Tell me about that.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Who is your emergency contact? Tell me about them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If your car breaks down, who will you call? Tell me about them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who helps you now? Who helped you in the past? Tell me about those</td>
<td>Tell me about them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>people.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who helps you with your kids? Tell me about them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who do you call when you need to vent or are sad about something?</td>
<td>Tell me about them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tell me about them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who do you have fun with? Tell me about them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who are the last 5 people you called or texted.</td>
<td>Tell me about them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Building Natural Supports

- Attend to existing relationships
- Take social risks
- Increase community involvement
- Attend Support Groups
- Use Professional Support
- My Five
- Reciprocity - what can you do for others?
- Identify your interests
- Others?
Using Circles to Identify Supports and Connections

**Eco-Gram**
- Family in inner circle and lines attach to people connected to family

**Concentric Circles**
- Inner circle is for immediate family and caregivers
- Second circle is for trusted friends
- Third circle is for other people in their lives
Ecogram and Natural Supports
Communication Circles

- In the first circle identify what you **MUST** know about the family
- In the second circle identify what you **SHOULD** know about the family
- In the third circle identify what would be **NICE TO KNOW** about the family
Activity:
Developing Social Connections

1. Identify a Need
2. List strengths associated with this need
3. Brainstorm at least 10 community options that would meet this need while building on the strengths and culture (use resources available in your community). Circle the one you think the individual would pick.
4. Who could help them get involved in the option you selected?
5. Complete the action plan.
Bryan is a 17-year-old in the 11th grade in ESE classes. He lives with his mother Mary and two younger brothers Jack and William. Bryan enjoys computer games and plays with his neighbor. He also likes to walk the dog. Both brothers are in elementary school. Mary is working from home due to COVID-19. The family has been receiving services for 5 months and was making progress until Bryan stopped showering, began spending more time in his room, and neglected his schoolwork. Mary has her hands full with working from home and trying to help her younger children with school. Bryan was participating in virtual wellness groups until he stopped attending, communicating with staff, and is just now saying he wants to speak to his therapist. Mary is worried that if he continues to withdraw, he may attempt to harm himself like he has done in the past.
Points to Consider:

- Relationships are dynamic and people may change roles in our lives.
- It is often through shared activity – groups, clubs, shared passions, schools, even workplaces – that new relationships are formed.
- People often have lives which are heavy with people providing economic exchange, and can be lacking people who are friends – thus people may be vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation.
- Promoting better lives for people includes an intentional focus on genuine participation in the community at all levels.
- Small gestures lead to big things. (Ex: waving at your neighbor everyday may lead into a friendship).
Activity: Find My 5

Who are the 5 people you can count on when you need support?

Favorites

1
2
3
4
5
A person in need of support looks a lot more like a person in need of treatment than a person that has support.
References


Slide 9- Addiction Policy Forum video https://youtu.be/9sz0N9Yo2mY


Slide 11- What are Natural Supports https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2013-35884-013

