

# THE POWER OF PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES

*Providers are considered subject matter experts in what they were trained to do. Families get to contribute lived expertise and claim their own journeys. They become the subject matter experts of their families and their experience. The **sum** of the combined expertise is powerful.*

## BENEFITS OF PARTNERING

- “Importance is placed on partnering and the leveling of power differences... Healing happens in relationships and in the meaningful sharing of power and decision-making.”<sup>1</sup>
- Partnering fosters trust building between the system provider and families. It allows for more open-minded discussions.
- When lived experience is counted as another source of expertise — and is combined with the provider’s experience and training — the sum of what the partners have to offer leads to greater and more lasting change. That powerful combination is put to work at every point in the partnership, but especially when it comes to setting goals and evaluating progress.<sup>2</sup>
- When creating written materials or preparing for trainings meant to be seen/heard and reviewed by families, having families be a part of the planning from the start will set the tone of the language to be understandable, non-clinical, and more from the family’s perspective and knowledge.
- When a mutual understanding of the needs and possible limitations of both the providers and families are initiated from the beginning of a project, a stronger partnership is established.

## HOW TO PARTNER

- Professional development involves content expertise but also a willingness to learn about self and others. When partnering with families, this requires a recognition that each family and family member is unique and has something to teach, and can give, as well as receive, within the relationship. Approaching each family with “cultural humility” also lets providers expand their knowledge about themselves and others. They carry this knowledge in the form of wisdom that benefits their own lives and those of families they work with in the future.<sup>2</sup>
- “Meaningful partnerships with families and youth require concerted attention, dedicated resources, and capacity-building across all parties.”<sup>3</sup>
- Communication for family input should be enlisted from the beginning of project planning. Consult with families for their recommendation (ask families what they think, what do they suggest, what ideas they may have for improvements), then, based on collaboration, implement their suggestions.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTNERING

- Partner with families with lived experience to participate in project planning from the beginning.
- Enhance partnerships with families by inviting multiple perspectives on your project. This avoids tokenism.
- Youth and families participate as partners at all levels of program design, development, and implementation. They are integral partners in the delivery and evaluation of services. This is true shared leadership.
- Co-present with a family representative to provide an authentic, meaningful presentation.
- Invite families to train (from their perspective) on topics of their lived experience expertise.

Are you a family member of a child or youth that has a mental or behavioral health condition? Are you interested in standing with other families to provide a united voice for systems change? If so, please contact us to learn more about Texas Family Voice Network.

### WEBSITE

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### SOURCES

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3. Pires, S. (2002). *Building systems of care: A primer*. Washington DC: National Technical Assistance Center for Children’s Mental Health, [https://gucchd.georgetown.edu/product/s/PRIMER\\_CompleteBook.pdf](https://gucchd.georgetown.edu/product/s/PRIMER_CompleteBook.pdf), p.151