

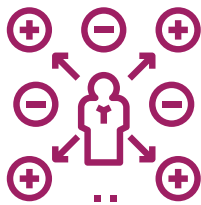
BUILDING SUPPORT NETWORKS TO REDUCE THE RISK OF ISOLATION FOR PARENTS WHO HAVE IDD

A companion to the TASP webinar by Tom Robinson

Defining Social Networks

- “Opportunity structures” (Forrester-Jones and Gant, 1997)
- Interpersonal relationships (Sullivan, et al, 2016)
- Comprise a range of people – family, friends, acquaintances, neighbors, professionals
- Offer benefits to self-esteem, quality of life and social inclusion
- Can enhance skills and identity
- Each person typically has a combination of formal (i.e., paid) and informal (i.e., present by their own choice) support people

Implications for People Who have IDD



“How many friends does one person need?”
Robin Dunbar, 2010

- Dunbar’s number is 150 for the average adult (e.g., Christmas card contacts)
- For people who have IDD, it was 22 (n = 213) (Forrester-Jones and Gant, 2016)
- Impact of social media
- Social experience through trial and error in childhood and teen years through education, leisure, athletics, hobbies, volunteering/employment – work and play
- Segregation and stigmatization may be impediments
- Loneliness and exploitation

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Inhibiting Factors for Social Support for Parents

Consider Social Determinants of Health:

- Indigenous status
- Disability
- Early life factors
- Education
- Employment
- Food Insecurity
- Health services access
- Gender inequality

Risk Factors for Social Inclusion In Remote, Isolated Communities:

- Transportation
- Poverty
- Climate
- Access to health care services
- Stability of professional resources
- Cultural barriers
- Housing
- Parenting supports to develop skills/capacity
- Education/literacy
- Social Access for work and leisure

Social Support Network

As an analogy, each person can be seen as a **tree**:

- **Roots** are family
- The **trunk** is our being, our identity
- The **branches** are our social connections: friends, acquaintances, co-workers, peer students, professionals, neighbors
- The **leaves** reflect the health of our relationships
- **Growth** is developmental and requires nurturing

Some relationships will blossom and flourish, others will wither and fall away.

Some are sustained, others are ephemeral. That is life.



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When Do Social Supports Gather?

The 3 C's –

- Celebration
- Crisis/Catastrophe
- Changes/Stress

Professional Supports

- May be transient
- Crisis Oriented or Problem focused
- Need to earn trust. Strangers in the beginning
- May be intrusive
- Teams may be “turf” based, fragmented by competing mandates
- Quantity over quality
- Time limited
- Role confusion

Informal Supports

Social isolation and loneliness can make parents vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Many parents who have IDD struggle with assessing risk to themselves and their children. Being assertive when addressing predatory behavior of social contacts competes with the need for acceptance and inclusion.

Motivators

- Social Acceptance (without judgement)
- Food security
- Financial security
- Shelter
- Transportation
- Child health care and safety

Identify potential community supports by linking them to personal motivators

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Brainstorm Possibilities:

- **Food:** foodbanks/co-ops, pregnancy outreach, community kitchens, Christmas hampers, etc.
- **Social:** churches, other faith-based groups, parenting groups, recreation/leisure activities, classes, community socials (e.g., feasts, socials)
- **Financial:** personal benefits, garage sales, thrift stores, personal services
- **Shelter:** temporary shelters, crisis centers, family, friends, Kith and Kin, legal aid
- **Transportation:** public, private
- **Child health care:** free walk-in clinics, public health, pregnancy outreach, regular health services

Formula for Building Friendships

- Common Interests
- Opportunity
- Frequency



Social access enhances the likelihood that a relationship will develop into a friendship.

Social isolation increases risk factors for parents and family.

Professionals and caregivers can have meaningful roles in facilitating a parent's personal support networks. Most people like to help and will welcome the opportunity, but don't always know when there is a need. Facilitation and linkages to others' social networks can generate social access. It doesn't just happen without history and experience.

It is a process and takes time, founded on earning trust. The outcome may last a lifetime and not only benefits the parent and family, but their community too, is enriched.

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