



**Core
Competencies
of
Family
Leaders:**
*A Guide for Families
and Organizations*



Institute for Human Development

A University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD)

partnerships for effective social change



Core Competencies of Family Leaders:

*A Guide for Families
and Organizations*

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Core Competencies of Family Leaders: A Guide for Families and Organizations

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What are core competencies?

Core competencies are what you need to know to be successful as a family leader partnering to make change.

A core competency is fundamental knowledge, ability or expertise in a specific subject area or skill set.



Introduction

The family unit is at the heart of raising healthy, happy, and successful children. The family is central to the child's social, emotional, cognitive, and psychological development. The family loves, guides, supports, and nurtures its members unconditionally. Families possess unique knowledge and understanding of the needs of its members and how these needs should be met. Families are resilient and resourceful—growing, changing, adapting, and evolving as circumstances and conditions change.

The acknowledgement of the importance of the family unit has led to supports and services for children that are family-centered and family-driven. Each family's strengths are valued and accepted. Families must be involved in the identification of supports and services that are important to them, and are centered around the family's everyday routines and activities. Priorities, concerns, and cultural diversity of the family must be acknowledged and respected, and supports should be responsive and help build the family's capacity to meet their needs. Organizations and service systems that are family-centered recognize the importance of strong family-professional partnerships as well as the value of the experiences and expertise of the family in the development and delivery of their own supports and those of other families.

The past decade has seen a growing recognition of the need to involve families as partners in policy development and in the planning and delivery of services for children and special populations by national, state, and local programs and organizations. Current policies in health and education promote, and at times mandate, collaboration and partnership between professionals and family members. Federal and state policy makers and systems recognize the critical role of parent and family leaders in transforming and sustaining services and supports that better serve everyone.

Family-centered care

ensures the health and well-being of children and their families through a respectful family-professional partnership that includes shared decision making. It honors the strengths, cultures, traditions, and expertise that everyone brings to this relationship.

*Maternal Child Health
Bureau, 2011*

Families must be prepared to serve in these roles, as a voice for their own family, but also as a collective voice that advocates for organizational and policy changes that benefit all families. As we move into systems that are family-centered and family-driven, strong, well-prepared family leaders are key, both philosophically and in practice. Families are vital contributors at all levels of policy development. Families provide a perspective critical to the successful development of effective policies and practices. Families can identify gaps while suggesting possible solutions. Communities are strengthened when the voice of the family is heard and valued.

Even though each family's experience and perspective is unique, there are core skills or competencies that better enable the family member to be a strong leader and a collective voice for all families. Families serving in leadership roles are enhanced by the development of specific skill sets, knowledge, values, and personal qualities.

What Can This Guide Do for You?

Core Competencies of Family Leaders: A Guide for Families and Organizations can help family leaders identify areas in which they would like to receive training or build new skills. Similarly, organizations and systems can explore different ways they might want to include a family leader and identify possible training and skill development needs. It is not designed to provide “all the right answers” about family leadership, but rather to begin conversations to address issues and identify promising approaches.

This guide:

- Defines family leadership
- Identifies core family leadership competencies across several levels
- Identifies specific desired skill sets within each competency and level
- Describes how family leadership competencies might be used by a variety of audiences

For Family Leaders

This framework will help parents explore different types of family leadership and identify where to pursue training or self-growth activities. It is not to be construed as a list of prerequisites that parents must accomplish before engaging in family leadership activities, but rather it provides general guidelines and identifies helpful skills in becoming an effective family leader in each of the identified areas.

Current family leaders can use the guide to identify areas in which they would like to receive continuing education or leadership development. They can think about skills they would like to develop or enhance, and strengths to build upon to make them more effective leaders. Potential and current family leaders can use the framework to explore all the different opportunities to volunteer and make a difference in the lives of families.

For Organizations

This guide provides a framework with basic competencies that can assist organizations and systems in identifying family leaders that will share their experiences and assist in improving services. As mentioned earlier, these competencies are not to be construed as a list of prerequisites that parents must accomplish before engaging in family leadership activities, but rather provides general guidelines and identifies helpful skills in becoming an effective family leader in each of the identified areas.

Organizations can use the family leadership competencies as a guide to orient new family leaders, or to identify ongoing training for existing family leaders. The guide can also serve as a framework to help organizations think about the types of activities or functions they want a family leader to participate in, that best utilize their particular skills and strengths.



A Family Leader

is someone who has personal experience in using resources/services to strengthen his or her family and speaks and acts from their perspective as a family member. This person might serve as a role model or advocate for other families, sit on an advisory board, belong to a peer review team, testify at public hearings, or lead in other ways.

Parents Anonymous Inc., 2003



How it Started

The purpose of the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS) Project is to foster collaborative partnerships that support families and communities in developing children that are healthy and ready to enter school. State and local systems address this challenge through critical components of statewide systems that include access to health insurance and medical homes, mental health and social-emotional development, early care and education, parenting education, and family support. The ECCS Project includes an intentional focus to develop infrastructure for advancing parent leadership to support training, inform policy, advocate for children and families, and create mentoring opportunities.

ECCS recognizes the critical role of family engagement and leadership. To assist in ensuring that meaningful engagement both from the perspective of organizations/systems and the family leaders, it is important that family leaders understand the types of competencies that would assist them in different roles. It is also important that systems/organizations understand the types of skill sets that they are expecting from a family leader in order to fulfill the expectations of that role.

To develop this framework, ECCS partnered with the Missouri Family to Family Resource Center (MoF2F), housed within the UMKC-Institute for Human Development (UMKC-IHD), based on their extensive experience in supporting a cadre of family leaders in Missouri.

MoF2F serves as a statewide resource center that supports a statewide Family Volunteer and Leadership network, with over 500 family leaders across Missouri representing individuals with disabilities and family members. Family leaders are connected to such opportunities as serving on boards and committees, providing peer support to other family leaders, reviewing products and materials, or serving as trainers or presenters for such organizations as the Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council, Missouri Bureau of Special Health Care Needs, Missouri Community Service Commission, and the Department of Mental Health, Division of Developmental Disabilities.

What is ECCS?

The Missouri Early Childhood Comprehensive System (ECCS) Project seeks to improve early childhood outcomes throughout the state by promoting interagency collaboration and strengthening a sustainable statewide system infrastructure.

The Early Childhood Comprehensive System Project seeks to foster collaborative partnerships that support families and communities in developing children that are healthy and ready to enter school. Local stakeholder teams were identified or established in 12 communities to build capacity through increased community awareness and expanded and diversified funding. The ECCS Stakeholders team works closely with the Missouri Coordinating Board for Early Childhood to implement Missouri's Early Childhood State Plan.

For more information, visit health.mo.gov/atoz/eccs



How it All Came Together

The Family Leadership Framework (Guide) was developed through an inclusive process over a one year period, during which various constituency groups reviewed and provided input into the design and content. The intent was to provide a theoretical framework to guide organizations and policy makers as they search for family leaders. It is intended to support organizations in their efforts to become more “family driven” and improve how children and families are served. It is designed to assist parents as they explore what kind of family leadership roles they would like to pursue, and what kinds of skills and knowledge would be needed to fulfill them.

Literature Review

To facilitate the development of the framework, the next step was to create definitions of leadership roles and the domains in which those roles exist. A review of the literature was conducted to identify promising practices, research, and practical experiences in leadership.

The family leadership framework is based on models that existed for leadership in general and models specifically for family leadership across many disciplines and fields. Dividing the concept of leadership into levels is consistent with other organizations, such as the United States Coast Guard, San Diego City Schools Parent Involvement and Support Unity, and The Right Question Project (RQP). Each of these models identified leadership levels such as 1) leading self, 2) leading change at the organizational level, and 3) leading policy change.

A further review of the literature was conducted to identify the competencies and skills needed for each family leadership level. The Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Leadership Competencies and Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) Family Discipline Competencies provided a comprehensive list of skill sets which were further broken down into different training objectives. A number of competencies were adopted from MCH, including cultural competency, communication, negotiation, and conflict resolution. The Indiana Sunny Start Family Leadership Initiative and The Missing Piece of the Proficiency Puzzle (Kentucky Dept. of Education June 2007) also identified specific competencies for family leaders. In addition, the competencies were based on practices identified and endorsed by the National Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health and the National Association of Peer Specialists.

For a complete list of sources, see page 15.



What is the Missouri Family Leadership Network?

The Family Leadership Network is an initiative of the Missouri Family to Family Resource Center at UMKC-IHD, that establishes a clearinghouse of parents and family members that want to make change at all levels by providing information and resources on leadership to families; linking family leaders to tools and training they need to develop and enhance their leadership skills; and connecting family leaders to opportunities to put their skills and experiences into action.

The Family Leadership network also provides resources and technical assistance for building the capacity of organizations and systems to include family leaders in all levels of programming.

For more information, contact 800-773-8652 or visit www.mofamilyleadership.org



Who Helped Create the Guide?

Stakeholders

After reviewing the literature, UMKC-IHD staff worked closely with the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Steering Committee and the MoF2F Stakeholders group. These two statewide groups represented many disciplines, as well as family leaders throughout every phase of development. The MoF2F Stakeholders group, with membership representing over 35 different organizations and with 75% of the members identifying as a family leader, was engaged at every stage of the process. Using the world café process in December 2010, input was gathered on the specific competencies essential for being successful as a family leader at the different levels. Based on this discussion, additional competencies and skills were developed and included. At a subsequent meeting in March, the group reviewed and provided feedback for further refinement of the framework. The stakeholders provided both verbal and written recommendations to facilitate the development of the Family Leadership Guide. In addition, the Family Leadership Sub-Committee of the ECCS Steering Committee reviewed and provided input into the development and refinement of the Guide.

What is the Missouri Family to Family Resource Center?

For more than fifteen years, the Missouri Family to Family Resource Center (MOF2F), housed at UMKC-IHD, has been connecting individuals and families with developmental disabilities and special healthcare needs with family-friendly, evidence-based information that can assist them throughout their child's lifetime.

Today, MOF2F assists families, caregivers, and other supporters to become more informed and empowered by not only providing information but also peer support, and volunteer and leadership opportunities.

For more information, contact 800-444-0821 or visit www.mofamilytofamily.org



The MoF2F Stakeholders group, pictured here, meets quarterly. The group is comprised of individuals with disabilities, their parents, and professionals who support their families in Missouri.

For a complete list of ECCS and MoF2F stakeholders, see page 14.

How the Guide is Organized

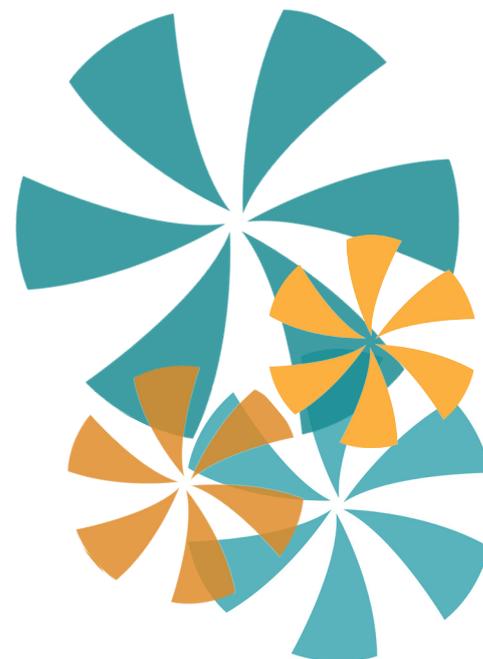
This guide is divided into three sections.

Fundamental Skills for All Leaders are the basic competencies, values, and skill sets that may be helpful to all family leaders in their efforts to make positive change for children and families. Families might use this section to engage in self-reflection and decide if they are ready and willing to move beyond leadership within their own family unit, and to think about what kind of training or skill building they might want to pursue to strengthen their leadership abilities.

Partnering to Support Others discusses skills for family leaders who want to support other families who might be experiencing circumstances or events that are similar to what they have experienced in the past. This might include activities such as one-on-one mentoring to another parent or family or starting or facilitating a support group. Current or potential family leaders will find this section useful to decide if they are interested in activities that support other families or parents.

Partnering for Quality Improvement includes skills and knowledge for family leaders who want to help organizations, service systems, or policy makers improve services to better meet the needs of families. This might include activities such as serving on a board or council, focus group, or sharing their family story with legislators or other decision makers. By reviewing the competencies and skill sets in this section, existing and potential family leaders can identify leadership activities in the wider community that build upon their current strengths, and discover new ways in which they can use their skills to help make organizations, service systems and policy makers better able to serve and strengthen families.

There are five competency areas with specific desired skill sets identified in each.



CULTURAL PROFICIENCY AND FAMILY DYNAMICS

recognizing and respecting diversity

NAVIGATION

knowing programs and organizations and how to access them

COMMUNICATION

expressing oneself and listening/responding to others

DECISION MAKING & PROBLEM SOLVING

recognizing and working through a problem

PARTNERSHIPS & RELATIONSHIPS

collaborating for change



FUNDAMENTAL SKILLS FOR ALL LEADERS

Parents and family members become natural leaders within their own families. They advocate for their own child in many different aspects of life – medical care, education, childcare, and much more. Eventually, many parents feel the desire to “reach back” and help other families and try to change services and systems to better serve all children.

The list below highlights some of the key competencies, values and skill sets that provide a foundation for all family leaders, whether they are advocating for their own family’s needs, supporting other families, or trying to change policies and systems, to make positive change for children and families.



- Views all people as valuable regardless of their abilities
- Accepts that each person has strengths and weaknesses
- Believes anyone can learn and improve
- Shows concern for others
- Identifies the needs and feelings of others
- Listens to others and asks for their perspective
- Respects others and doesn’t judge
- Expresses self clearly to others
- Shares personal experiences openly
- Embraces own strengths and weaknesses
- Makes decisions and solves problems for family unit
- Accepts risks and outcomes of decisions made
- Works with minimal praise or recognition
- Advocates for what the family needs
- Participates in and monitors the services provided for own family
- Maintains a positive attitude about professionals encountered while accessing services

The list of values and skills above and on the following pages of competencies and skill sets should not be considered “prerequisites” but rather a guide for family leaders, organizations, and policymakers as they strive to become more family driven. This is to say that family leaders develop and enhance skills as they participate in opportunities at all levels. Organizations and systems should not hesitate to recruit and utilize family leaders who may not have all the competencies and characteristics reflected in this guide but recognize that they must provide opportunities for family leaders to continue to develop new skills.

PARTNERING TO SUPPORT OTHER FAMILIES

Families want to help others in similar circumstances.

CULTURAL PROFICIENCY AND FAMILY DYNAMICS

- Remains mindful of the needs of others
- Respects the attitudes, choices, practices, and beliefs of others
- Responds appropriately to the needs, feelings, and capabilities of people with sensitivity to their cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds

NAVIGATION

- Helps others find and use resources and navigate systems of support
- Assists families and community members in identifying formal and informal supports, resources, and systems available to them
- Engages in grassroots level organizing

COMMUNICATION

- Uses own experiences as a guide to help families in similar situations
- Tells personal story effectively
- Uses active listening techniques
- Describes barriers/roadblocks to supportive communication
- Identifies and supports advocacy skills in other families

DECISION-MAKING & PROBLEM SOLVING

- Uses problem solving and decision-making processes to help others work through issues
- Utilizes personal experience to help other families learn to solve problems and make decisions

PARTNERSHIPS & RELATIONSHIPS

- Develops and maintains relationships beyond the family unit
- Networks with peers and associates to build constructive and supportive relationships
- Distinguishes internal values from collective values and sees the big picture



PARTNERING TO SUPPORT OTHERS

is providing one-on-one peer mentoring to another parent or family member with a similar life situation, exchanging information with other parents in person, hosting an online group or chat room, or facilitating a support group meeting.



PARTNERING WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS

is participating in focus groups, completing satisfaction surveys, reviewing products for an organization, serving on advisory boards or councils, providing professional development on issues from the family perspective, or serving in a staff role in an organization.

PARTNERING FOR QUALITY

Partnering within Organizations

Families want to improve how direct services are provided

CULTURAL PROFICIENCY & FAMILY DYNAMICS

- Recognizes how attitudes and values related to culture, ethnicity, and family affect partnerships and provision of services
- Promotes the use of resources that meet families' cultural needs

NAVIGATION

- Demonstrates knowledge of resources (formal and informal supports, resources, and systems available to families)
- Is able to describe how to run meetings, including Roberts' Rules of Order and parliamentary procedure
- Reads and interprets financial reports and the budgetary process of an organization

COMMUNICATION

- Shares expertise and specialized knowledge in a way that helps others
- Effective storytelling (able to shape/frame/tell family story in a way that is relevant to the needs of the organization)
- Recognizes the communication styles of others and how that interacts with their own style
- Uses information and documentation to provide information to help organizations understand the needs of families
- Advocates for evidence based practices within an organization

DECISION-MAKING & PROBLEM SOLVING

- Participates in making decisions when serving on boards, councils, etc.
- Demonstrates basic knowledge of decision-making process and techniques
- Balances the interests of the organization with those that they serve

PARTNERSHIPS & RELATIONSHIPS

- Develops and maintains positive relationships with stakeholders
- Distinguishes between effective and ineffective partnerships
- Supports organizations in their understanding of the family perspective and its importance to effectively serving families
- Distinguishes internal values from external values and sees the big picture
- Cultivates an environment where advocacy is accepted and embraced

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Partnering for Systems Change

Families want to improve the policies and systems that provide services

CULTURAL PROFICIENCY & FAMILY DYNAMICS

- Considers cultural preferences as they relate to the development of policies, procedures, and services
- Supports the development of services and delivery systems that meet the needs of varying family dynamics

NAVIGATION

- Identifies entities that serve families at the local, state, and national level
- Demonstrates understanding of the public policy process at the local, state, and national level
- Identifies legislation, programs, agencies, and initiatives that influence current systems and services
- Distinguishes between relevant and irrelevant information

COMMUNICATION

- Shares experiences, provides testimony to influence/shape the way systems serve families
- Able to meet a public official and discuss issues/concerns
- Drafts and delivers testimony at legislative hearings
- Confronts others skillfully and works towards win-win situations
- Uses advocacy skills to influence systems change
- Demonstrates knowledge of and applies Adult Learning Styles

DECISION-MAKING & PROBLEM SOLVING

- Manages conflict using conflict management/mediation techniques
- Frames problems and proposes policy change based on data, trends, and other evaluative criteria
- Formulates strategies to balance the interests of stakeholders

PARTNERSHIPS & RELATIONSHIPS

- Works together with multiple entities to influence policies that benefit families
- Engages in positive family-provider relationships
- Demonstrates understanding of the roles and relationships of groups involved in public policy process



PARTNERING FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

means sharing personal experiences with decision makers by providing testimony at hearings, meeting in person with legislators, or writing newspaper editorials or letters to the editor on systems or policy issues. A family leader might also run for public office, participate in a public awareness campaign, serve in advisory roles on statewide systems, or serve in professional leadership or management roles for systems.



Contributors

The Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Steering Committee and the Missouri Family to Family Stakeholders group were instrumental in providing guidance and feedback throughout the development and refinement process. The following is a list of organizations that are represented on these advisory boards.

ECCS Steering Committee

Child Care Aware of Missouri
 The Children’s Trust Fund
 Missouri’s Coordinating Board for Early Childhood
 Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education
 ○ School Improvement Division
 ○ First Steps
 Missouri Department of Mental Health
 Missouri Department of Social Services – Children’s Division

Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services
 ○ Division of Community & Public Health
 ○ MoHealthNet
 ○ Section for Child Care Regulation
 Missouri Head Start – State Collaboration Office
 United Way Success by 6 State Association
 University of Missouri Extension – Parent Link

MoF2F Stakeholders Group

Brain Injury Association of Missouri
 Cardinal Glennon Children’s Medical Center
 Children’s Mercy Hospital and Clinics
 Children’s Therapeutic Learning Center (TLC)
 Down Syndrome Guild of Kansas City
 EITAS Developmental Disabilities Services of Jackson County
 Epilepsy Foundation
 Family Bridges
 Head Start
 Mattie Rhodes Center
 Miller County Health Department
 Missouri Autism Report
 Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
 Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services
 Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services Partnership for Children and Youth with Special Healthcare Needs
 Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services: Bureau of Emergency Medical Services
 Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services: Bureau of Special Healthcare Needs

Missouri Department of Mental Health
 Missouri Families for Effective Autism Treatment (MOFEAT)
 Missouri Family Voices
 Missouri Governor’s Council on Disability
 Missouri LEND
 Missouri Parents Act (MPACT)
 Missouri Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities
 Missouri Protection and Advocacy
 Neonatal Intensive Care Unit Family Network
 Parenting with Special Needs
 People First of Missouri
 Priority Care Pediatrics, LLC
 Services for Independent Living
 Sickle Cell Anemia Association
 Spectrum Magazine
 The Arc of the United States- Missouri Chapter
 The Rehabilitation Institute
 United Way 211
 UMKC School of Nursing



Sources

We relied on many valuable resource documents, and reviewed a number of very useful leadership handbooks, training materials, and other documents in an effort to identify promising practices, research, and practical experiences in family and general leadership.

The following documents or sources were reviewed or used in the creation of this guide:

National:

- *Coast Guard Leadership Competencies*. United States Coast Guard. <http://uscg.mil/leadership/resources/competencies.asp>
- *Epstein's six types of parent involvement* by Joyce Epstein, PhD. <http://isd742.org/pbis/Epstein6.pdf>
- *Family Discipline Competencies*. LEND: Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities. <http://aucd.org>
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- The Right Question Institute, Inc. <http://rightquestion.org>

State:

- *Missouri Parental Involvement Laws*. Missouri PIRC <http://missouri-pirc.org>
- *Peer specialist certification basic training core competencies*. Missouri Department of Mental Health. <http://www.peerspecialist.org/>
- *Step up to leadership: A Curriculum for Developing Community Leaders (Participants' Manual)*. University of Missouri Extension. <http://extension.missouri.edu/p/M172>





For more information

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www.ihd.umkc.edu

Missouri Family to Family Resource Center
www.mofamilytofamily.org

Missouri Family Leadership Network
www.mofamilyleadership.org

Missouri Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (MO ECCS)
health.mo.gov/atoz/eccs





Missouri Family Leadership Network

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