

# BRIDGING COMMUNITY INTEGRATION



**T**he Core Team engages in an ongoing process of exploring, discovering, and strengthening interests, relationships, connections, and supports in the youth and family's environment who can celebrate with the youth/family in good times, comfort them through difficult times, contribute to a sense of belonging, remain unconditionally committed, and may also provide tangible assistance. They may be extended family, friends, faith community, neighbors, people from school or work, or acquaintances and other natural supports who play a positive role in the youth's/family's life. They may also be places where the youth/family can volunteer, play, learn, worship, socialize, and build resiliency. They involve naturally occurring community resources and supportive people that align with youth's/family's interests, support the youth's/family's goals, and carry them beyond the reach of formal services. The Core Team thoughtfully uses flex funds to support and build

family and youth's interests and resources. The Core Team helps family members consider ways to involve natural supports and include them in Family Team meetings and interventions (as agreed upon with the youth/family). The Core Team collaborates with the youth and family to help them connect to and sustain connections with naturally occurring relationships, resources, and supports.

Please see the following matrices for additional information regarding bridging community integration:

- Collaborative Treatment Planning and Care Coordination
- Supporting Life Transitions
- Practicing Cultural Relevancy
- Continuity with Higher Levels of Care
- Strengthening Wellbeing through Respite

**IDEAL PRACTICE****DEVELOPMENTAL PRACTICE****UNSATISFACTORY PRACTICE****EXPLORING NATURAL SUPPORTS**

- » Explores (ongoing) with youth/family their current sources of social, emotional, and practical support. Validates the basic, essential and universal human need for support that comes from family, neighbors, friends, faith community, support groups, coworkers, etc. (natural supports).
- » Uses brainstorming, ecomap, timelines, or other tools for robust discovery of youth/family support networks. Asks curious conversational questions about the people with whom the family interacts on a daily basis (e.g., curious inquiry about photos hanging in the house or people with whom they exchange gifts, favors, babysitting, etc.).

- » Brainstorms with the youth/family ways of developing support from people they know (neighbors, friends, faith community, support groups, coworkers) as well as ways of discovering and connecting to new individuals for emotional, practical, and/or social support.
- » Discusses possibilities for cultivating a reciprocal supportive relationship with natural supports to help prevent burnout.

- » Identifies/validates natural supports in a limited manner. Gives a narrow description of what natural supports are. Explores one type of natural support (e.g., only asks about friends, not neighbors, family, coworkers, faith community, etc.).
- » Ignores or is unable to recognize unique natural supports for the family.
- » Only explores natural supports during assessment phase, not ongoing.
- » Proceeds with exploration but is not in tune with family readiness to brainstorm (e.g., moves forward with brainstorming when family expresses need to talk about other things instead).
- » Uses limited, non-creative techniques to explore supports. Asks closed-ended questions that solicit names but doesn't continue exploring the ways in which those people are/could be supportive.

- » Conducts limited, surface-level exploration of developing supportive relationships.
- » Asks closed questions that limit discussion about what a reciprocal relationship means or looks like to the youth/family.
- » Accepts barriers that the family raises without exploring them.
- » Doesn't research, explore, or share ways family can connect with new people/potential supports from existing/new activities.

- » Uses the term "natural supports" without explaining the working definition.
- » Discounts the need for community involvement as a means to leading a fulfilling life.
- » Explores supports within home/family only.
- » Expresses own opinion/options in a manner that shuts down conversation rather than opening it up.

- » Takes note of supports listed in paperwork received but doesn't inquire about those people with family.
- » Involves Family Team members instead of brainstorming who/how natural supports could help.
- » Doesn't consider family's culture of reciprocity/helping one another out.
- » Echoes negative comments family make about challenges to helping others.

**IDEAL PRACTICE****DEVELOPMENTAL PRACTICE****UNSATISFACTORY PRACTICE****EXPLORING NATURAL SUPPORTS**

- » Assists youth/family in identifying important relationships that have been lost or damaged and their wishes or needs for healing, reconnection, or reconciliation. Assists youth and family in repairing relationships with each other and with natural supports. Considers with youth/family ways of rebuilding and strengthening natural supports when family feels they have too few/none due to isolation, conflict, damaged relationships, or burnout, which may occur on either side of the relationships.
- » Helps youth/family share progress made, how things are different, what has been learned and their new ways of relating and coping.

- » Explores natural supports but doesn't inquire about important relationships that have been lost or damaged and youth's/family's wishes or needs for healing.
- » Fails to foster an environment that promotes healing/repairing of relationships.
- » Omits exploration of ways to cultivate a reciprocal relationship to prevent burnout.
- » Jumps into problem solving or brainstorming without acknowledging/validating family's feelings of isolation, shame, worry, etc. about reconnecting with natural supports.
- » When engaging family in repair work with others, doesn't acknowledge the strengths of all parties.

- » Moves forward without permission from the natural support (i.e., underestimates the history of events that have impacted the relationships).
- » Invites natural supports without consideration of need to repair relationship with youth/family first.
- » Explores past and current supports but doesn't explore the need for repair work.
- » Uses judgmental language rather than respectful curiosity about the barriers or experiences in the past.

**IDEAL PRACTICE****DEVELOPMENTAL PRACTICE****UNSATISFACTORY PRACTICE****INCLUDING NATURAL SUPPORTS IN MEETINGS AND INTERVENTIONS**

- » Has ongoing discussion with youth/family members regarding how their natural supports could be included in Family Team meetings and in interventions. Explores practical solutions to the question, “what would it take?” for each of these natural supports to be included.
- » Explores the type, extent, and benefits of involvement that identified persons could contribute (e.g., respite care, phone support, occasional shared activity, good ideas, etc.).
- » On a routine basis, revisits family readiness (sometimes expressed as reluctance, fear, worry, shame, etc.) to bring natural supports into the Family Team meeting and interventions. Uses tools such as a scaling question to identify “what would it take?” for youth/family to include natural supports.

- » Collaboratively creates actionable steps with youth/family to engage natural supports, including who will contact and follow up with each person. Uses urgency and persistence in reaching out to natural supports (consent permitting) and is not deterred when these individuals do not respond to initial engagement efforts.
- » Invites and welcomes natural supports to Family Team and Family Team meetings and/or interventions. Invites participation according to an established plan that has been developed with youth/family. Includes natural supports in face-to-face and/or virtual Family Team meetings and in ongoing communication, as established with family.

- » Maintains ongoing discussion about including natural supports but doesn’t explore “what would it take?” for each of these natural supports to be included.
- » Limits options for the type of support natural supports can provide. Only focuses on concrete or traditional definitions of support rather than a wide range of various types of support that identified persons could provide.
- » Explores natural supports for youth or parent/caregiver but not both.

- » Discusses plan to contact supports but lacks next steps and concrete planning regarding who will follow up with each person and what the purpose of the contact will be.
- » Lacks urgency/persistence; is easily deterred by a lack of initial response.
- » Doesn’t address disconnect between family’s identified natural supports and barriers to using those natural support (e.g., DCF restrictions regarding specific persons).
- » Only discusses with youth/family once without ever revisiting.

- » Demands that natural supports be included.
- » Doesn’t consider any options for ways to include natural supports.
- » Schedules meeting times when natural supports are not available.
- » Describes pre-contemplation or reluctance as resistance.

- » Consistently excludes natural supports from meetings or interventions.
- » Ignores opportunities to reach out to and/or include natural supports.
- » Dismisses the importance of warmly engaging and welcoming the natural support.

**IDEAL PRACTICE****DEVELOPMENTAL PRACTICE****UNSATISFACTORY PRACTICE****EXPLORING AND STRENGTHENING INTERESTS**

- » Explores with youth/family members who and what interests them, brings them joy, and helps them meet their basic needs and/or make life a little easier or fuller. Explores hobbies, activities, faith, and culturally-based events and people that bring them enjoyment. Asks what they like to do on the weekends, after school, after work, and during vacations. Asks what they like to do as a family and on their own.
- » Explores youth's/family's use of old, current, and potential new community activities and resources (local community center, community theater, other community groups, diversity and cultural clubs, youth sports league, Boys & Girls Club, lessons, classes, clubs, parent support groups, sibling support groups/activities, adult sports leagues, food pantries, etc.) that match their interests, strengths and needs.
- » Explores youth's and family members' level of current access to and need for connection to these activities and resources.
- » Accesses OT consults during the process of exploring youth/family strengths/interests.

- » Proposes a generalized list of activities without exploring interests and considering individual needs of youth/siblings.
- » Overlooks youth or family not identifying activities/interests.
- » Limits exploration to old, current, or new potential community activities but not all. Limits exploration to traditional activities without recognizing relevant alternative or cultural activities that the youth/family might enjoy.
- » Fails to recognize need to explore new ideas/activities during times of transition (e.g., when starting high school).
- » Does not explore accessibility or feasibility of identified activities (issues such as location and transportation).
- » Uses a narrow range of strategies to solicit interests from youth, family, and siblings. Does not consider OT consult.

- » Ignores or supports continued hobbies/activities that are maladaptive, illegal, or emotionally/physically harmful.
- » Places judgment on interests identified by youth/family. Offers ideas solely based on own personal interests. Dictates ideas/activities to youth/family.
- » Suggests activities that are not appropriate for the youth/family culture, values, and norms (e.g., only suggests gender-normative activities for family that values gender non-confirming activities).
- » Lacks follow-through or planning with youth/family around to accessing opportunities to explore interests they have identified.
- » Signs youth/family up for activities without consent.

**IDEAL PRACTICE****DEVELOPMENTAL PRACTICE****UNSATISFACTORY PRACTICE****LINKING YOUTH/FAMILY TO INTERESTS/RESOURCES**

- » Makes a plan with family that identifies how Core Team will “do for, do with, or cheer on” youth/family in researching, contacting, enrolling, and participating, in community activities. Coaches family on needed skills to engage in activities.
- » Revisits plan regularly. Follows up with youth/family in ongoing discussion to see if activities meet social, emotional, and practical needs/goals or if additional skill building coaching/support is needed.
- » Continues to support family in coordinating youth’s participation in these continued and new community activities during and after group-home stay.

- » Brainstorms with family and Family Team around needed resources (flex funds, scholarships, free activities, etc.) to help youth and family explore, discover, and/or develop interests in an activity that supports their social and emotional growth and wellbeing.
- » Collaborates with youth and family to identify what activities and resources will be short-term and which will need to be sustained for a longer period of time.
- » Plans with parent/caregiver around timeline for stopping or a shifting funding source.

- » Doesn’t ascertain the level of support youth/family members need to engage in an activity (i.e., doesn’t distinguish among “do for,” “do with,” and “cheer on”).
- » “Does for” or steps in to make application, etc., for the family rather than first discussing the approach with them and considering whether this is an opportunity to “do with” in order to develop their skills.
- » Makes connections to activities but doesn’t help family consider the process to engage in them (e.g., how to enroll/apply, anticipating what the first meeting will be like, and transportation/drop off location).
- » Develops an initial plan with youth/family but doesn’t revisit it and adjust it as needed.
- » Doesn’t anticipate and resolve barriers to participation.

- » Limits brainstorming to activities that can be sustained after the use of flex funds.
- » Overlooks the need to include family in the shared decision of whether an unsustainable activity is still a good one-time enrichment experience (e.g., exposure to and/or participation in a one-time art class or a brief gym membership).
- » Neglects to explore sustainability all together.

- » Focuses on completing the task of connecting family to resources/activities and ignores the need to help family benefit from the experience of participating in these tasks.
- » Determines family’s role in tasks without discussing with them.
- » Lacks follow-up and exploration of youth/family experience/participation in new activity.

- » Isn’t transparent about or doesn’t clarify access to or duration of flex funds. Doesn’t consider flex funds as an option.
- » Tells family which activities must be sustained by them and which will be one-time enrichment events.
- » Tells family they don’t have the resources to support an activity rather than exploring whether they do.

**IDEAL PRACTICE****DEVELOPMENTAL PRACTICE****UNSATISFACTORY PRACTICE****LINKING YOUTH/FAMILY TO INTERESTS/RESOURCES**

- » Collaborates and coordinates with youth, family, Family Team, OT consultant, and others to create opportunities for youth to participate in everyday, typical enrichment experiences (recreational, creative, vocational, employment) that sustain and promote community integration and friendships with peers in the community. Facilitates parent/caregiver/family in playing key roles in connecting youth to these opportunities—involving them in selection of, registration for, transportation to, and staying in communication with sponsors/leaders of these activities.
- » In partnership with OT, youth, and family, coordinates with individuals from a community activity to develop and carry out any needed adaptive strategies for integrating youth into that community activity. Considers use of flex funds for adaptive tools to support participation in activities.
- » Coaches youth on skills needed to engage in the activity.

- » Explores activities with youth but doesn't recognize or discuss adaptive needs.
- » Collaborates with family/youth on identifying activities but fails to recognize how OT can consult around adaptation to make activities successful.
- » Doesn't explore ways to make room in youth's schedule for natural and community-based activities.
- » Discusses with parent/caregiver/ family ways they can play a key role in connecting youth to opportunities but doesn't provide the level of assistance or support the parent/caregiver/family needs to follow through.

- » Takes on expert role and tells youth and/or assigns youth community activities vs. discussing and exploring options with youth.
- » Discusses concerns or adaptive strategies with individuals facilitating activities without consent or involvement of parent/caregiver.
- » Tells family what role they will take in connecting youth to opportunities rather than exploring which roles they see themselves taking and what support might be needed to take them.