FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM
UNC School of Social Work

The need for family support, especially for families of individuals with severe disabilities, has been on the rise. With more families being called upon to provide care giving in their homes, an estimated 78% of all individuals with developmental disabilities now live with family members. Policies to promote family support rely on research showing the effectiveness of family support activities; that research rests on a foundation that specifies the operational definition of family support.

- In January 2003, the National Goals Conference, sponsored by the ARC of the United States, stated that the main policy goal of family support is to support the care giving efforts and quality of life of all families so that families will remain the core unit of American society (Kyzar, Turnbull, Summers & Gómez, 2012).

- There is a positive relationship between family support and building healthy family outcomes in family units of individuals with ID/DD. Studies show that family support provides an enhancing effect to family's quality of life, family overall functioning capabilities, and family satisfaction. Moreover, family support, when implemented correctly, shows a reduction in family stress (Kyzar et al., 2012).

Definition of Family Support:

1. **What exactly is Family Support?** Family Support is defined as a set of strategies directed to help the family unit but ultimately benefiting the family member with intellectual and developmental disabilities (Kyzar et al., 2012). These strategies are intended to assist family members who play a key part in the support and guidance of another family member with ID/DD.

2. **What does Family Support aim to address?** Family support's mission is to address the emotional, physical, and material well being of an entire family, as they navigate the process of having a family member with ID/DD. More importantly, family support strategies are designed in a flexible manner to help meet the needs of the family (National Agenda on Family Support Summit, 2011).

3. **Why is defining Family Support so important?** Defining family support and its intended activities is important because it creates a research agenda of testable scenarios, with outcomes that can be monitored over time to show the effect of the intervention activities. Measurable effects can help to influence policy, and promote family support as a means to improve family outcomes.

What Activities are considered "Family Support"?

4. **Formal Systems.** Specific examples include early intervention programs, which can be found in the likes of non-profits, state agencies, or grant funded programs. These programs and designed, funded, and implemented in a flexible manner. All of these formal systems work to support families caring for a family member with intellectual and developmental disabilities. These systems are usually publically funded.

5. **Informal Systems.** Specific examples include peer support and creating social networks for families to feel/gain adequate emotional support. This can be found through the likes of Parent-to-Parent matching, outside community support groups, telephone support, and other inclusive community supports. All of these informal systems work to create family support and assistance for families impacted by their child's disability. Showed to be very helpful as a source of support.

Who can provide these supports?

Family Support can come from different sources. Some sources are institutional, where the provider is a trained professional. Others are informal.

- **Family**
- **Friends**
- **Professionals** (physicians, health care providers, counselors, outside professionals, etc).
- **Outside sources** (neighbors, co-workers, social groups, church members, daycare, etc).

Types of Family Support:

6. **Emotional Support:** This type of support pertains to feelings or affective considerations of the family. This support can be found in both formal and informal networks; with support groups acting as a great example towards providing this type of family support. Whether it's through a meeting or a phone call, parents and families who are emotionally supported can feel they are not alone in navigating the process of having a family member with ID/DD, which can help to reduce stress.

7. **Physical Support.** This type of support pertains to the health and or daily living activities of the family. The physical act behind caring for a family member with ID/DD can be particularly demanding on the health of a caregiver, and often physically exhausting. With many individuals with ID/DD having increased energy, there is a significant and increased need for physical support both in and outside of the home.

8. **Material/Instrumental Support**: This type of support pertains to the financial resources and assistance with carrying out tasks or responsibilities of the family. It has been found that the financial burden on families who have a family member experiencing a disability can be very high. Care is expensive and can interfere with the caregiver's earning ability, so this material support is essential.

9. **Informational Support:** This type of support pertains to access to knowledge and navigating systems. Whether it is through networking, community referrals, telephone assistance, or website information, gaining knowledge about family support and its intended uses is extremely important for families who are learning more about the process of caring for a child or family member with ID/DD.

Outcomes for those who participate in Family Support:

Increased family functioning	**Higher level of family satisfaction**
Increase in family quality of life	**Decrease in family stress Level**

Kyzar, K.B., Turnbull, A.P., Summers, J.A. & Gómez, V.A. (2012). The relationship of family support to family outcomes: A synthesis of key findings from research on severe disability. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities 37*, 31-44, 2012.

National Agenda on Family Support Summit. (2011, March). Retrieved from www.familysupportagenda.com.
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