

# JOURNEY TO FAMILY LEADERSHIP

IMPROVING CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH  
SYSTEMS VIA FAMILY SUPPORT

*Guided by Texas Family Voice Network*

If you are a family member of a child or youth that has a mental or behavioral health condition and are interested in standing with other families to provide a united voice for systems change, visit [txfvn.org](https://txfvn.org) to learn more about Texas Family Voice Network.

## PREFACE



◀ *Family leaders across Texas attending the 2019 Texas System of Care Conference*

**W**elcome to the family leadership workbook. This workbook was created by families for families. We set out to create this workbook because we believe that with the right tools, families can make tremendous change in their communities, states, and nation! As a group of family members with over 300 collective years of experience, we have traveled the journey to becoming leaders and advocates. We have hit roadblocks along the way and sometimes learned difficult lessons. We want to share some of what we have learned on the leadership journey with you, in the hopes that you will find fewer barriers, travel a straighter path, and reach your destination sooner.

The development of this workbook content was led by the Texas Family Voice Net-

work (TxFVN). TxFVN is a collective of family leaders in children's mental health advocacy from across Texas. Members of TxFVN help drive decisions about children's mental health programs, policies, training, and evaluation. We come from all over the state of Texas, and represent families from many different backgrounds and cultures. We have also drawn from the knowledge of many skilled family leaders across the country who shared their advice and resources with us, and allowed us to share them with you.

We hope that this workbook inspires your own leadership journey and provides you with tools you can use along the way. Remember, there are many families traveling this journey with you, and we are stronger when we support and guide each other.

## FOREWORD

*Dear current and future family leaders and champions:*

Several service models and frameworks encourage family-serving organizations to promote the idea that families should drive the plan of care for their children and youth. In that same vein, there are models that promote youth and young people guiding their own plan of care or customizing their own service plan, as opposed to picking from the choices offered by an agency or organization. The guidance in this workbook will build upon those models, but will also take it up a notch.

In the system of care framework, one of the core values is that the service delivery is family-driven. We have been on a long journey in Texas to operationalize this value. Family-driven by definition means that families have a primary decision-making role in the care of their own children, as well as in the policies and procedures governing care for all children in their communities and states. In this case, the family is defined as the person(s) who provides love, guidance, care, support, and nurtures all members, especially children. The part of this definition that will be addressed in this workbook is the idea that families are decision-makers when it comes to policies and procedures that govern the care of children.

The hope is that you have been inspired in some way through your personal journey and are ready to serve in a leadership role for other families who are navigating behavioral health services among various systems. You are able to raise your perspective above

your family's current situation to have a positive influence on the system, and improve it through partnerships with other families and/or policy decision-makers. This influence may take shape through one-on-one relationships or in group settings.

Know that this guide, as well as any training or meeting you attend, cannot singularly take hold and declare you to be a family leader for children's mental health. This is a journey that takes time and effort. The road will likely be filled with set-backs and successes, along with the development of trusting and respectful relationships with people with whom you can strategize and empathize. Find those people — other families and leaders from agencies or organizations — to define your inner circle for guidance and support. And if you are not a "cheerleader" yourself, make sure there is one among you who can remind you to stop and take stock of successes that have been achieved. This is so important!

And one last bit of advice: Take good care of yourself. Flight attendants always say, "Secure your oxygen mask first before helping someone else." Practice good self-care.

So welcome to the world of leading the way for families who access and receive behavioral health services. We are counting on you — and so are the children and families of Texas!

Sincerely,



Sherri Hammack · Former Project Director, Texas System of Care

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**GETTING  
STARTED**

*“While raising my three grandchildren, I was inspired to get involved in helping my own family and others. I have learned that families in my community need help and support on a deep level. When families speak up about what is needed, we can come together to make change for future generations.”*

Vickey Carter · Crowley, TX

**F**amily leaders are born from personal lived experiences advocating for a family member. They may start by seeking help in the community, trying to understand a family member’s behavior, or researching the diagnosis, medication, or treatment recommended by a professional.

We do this most often to be able to make the right choices for our families. Some of us may do this to understand the choices that a family member is making for themselves. In this role of advocacy for another, leadership emerges. For example, you may find you need to step into a leader role when:

- ▶ Your child is disciplined in school for behavior they could not control.
- ▶ A doctor prescribes medication you already explained did not work for your child when it was prescribed last year.
- ▶ Your youth is left out of an event or activity they are looking forward to because of the youth’s unpredictable behaviors.
- ▶ You’re in public while working your child through a moment of crisis, and your neighbor comes over to chastise you (or worse, your child).
- ▶ A police officer arrests your family member for not complying with a command because they were so scared they couldn’t speak.
- ▶ Your parent tells you about an article they read that said one medicine your child started taking — the one that has made all the difference and brought peace to your home — causes liver damage and may kill them... while your child is standing right next to you.

These are moments when we begin to take a stand, with the passion and love in our hearts to protect our family members. We may want people to understand, or we may want the family member to be able to persevere beyond the stigma. This advocacy for our family members can lead us to want to help make the process easier for other families — to share what we have learned through these difficult moments.

## USING THIS WORKBOOK

**B**ecoming a family leader is much like taking a long trip across the country. You will want to plan out your path with your personal roadmap and pack your suitcase with tools you will need for effective leadership and advocacy. It is important to prepare for the detours and hazards you are likely to face, and to celebrate as you reach various markers. It is necessary to visit rest stops along the way, taking time to care for yourself and refuel for the miles ahead.

This workbook was created to help family members forge their own path to leadership. It can be used individually or completed as a group with other family leaders. It is intended for those just starting their journey, as well

as those who are experienced system change leaders. We hope that all family members can find helpful information and resources in these pages, as well as opportunities for self-reflection and growth. We hope to inspire more families to find their voice and use it effectively to inform systems.

This workbook is organized to reflect the path of the family leader experience, from finding and defining your voice, to learning to use your voice effectively, to expanding and amplifying your voice as a leader. Each section focuses on information and skills you'll need to learn and grow as a family leader, and provides helpful tools and resources to support your journey.

### 1. FINDING YOUR VOICE

Learn about the role that family members can play in improving child-serving systems, as well as the basics of leadership. Reflect on the type of leader you want to be and what tools you will need to grow in that leadership role.

### 2. USING YOUR VOICE

You have important knowledge and experiences that will serve you well as a leader. Explore skills for sharing your story, communicating to influence others, and caring for yourself along the way.

### 3. AMPLIFYING YOUR VOICE

Learn how to build on your leadership skills to impact mental health policies in your community, state, and country. Learn important tools and processes you can use to influence agency policy and practice, impact state or federal laws, and participate in decision-making bodies.



## USING THIS WORKBOOK

Building your leadership skills takes time and practice, and there are tools and activities throughout this workbook to guide you on this journey. Look for these icons to indicate a practice activity, a journal prompt, or a self-care tip:



### **PRACTICE**

The more often you practice new skills, the better you become at navigating a leadership role and handling barriers or detours that you may face as a family leader. The practice sign indicates an opportunity to practice skills connected to various points on your leadership journey.



### **JOURNAL**

One of the tools recommended is a leadership journal for notes and personal reflections. Much like pictures and souvenirs help you remember trips and vacations, journaling helps you note your successes and challenges along the way that strengthen your skills and increase your self-awareness in leadership roles. This sign indicates a good point for reflection along the leadership journey.



### **TAKE CARE**

An effective leader practices self-care, recognizing that resting or taking time for activities focused on fueling your body, mind, and spirit improves your ability to help others. Look for this sign throughout for tips and information on taking care of *you*.

# FINDING YOUR VOICE



**REV IT UP –  
START YOUR ENGINE!**

*“There was a time when I had become so convinced that the system knew what was best for my children and me, I had forgotten that my children and I were really the experts. With a lot of hard work and commitment, we have experienced systems and individual change. Keep the hope alive.”*

Stephany Bryan · Austin, TX

## **Who's Driving the Car?**

**T**hink about the best school experience you've ever had. Did you feel welcomed when you visited? Did you feel like you could ask questions of the administrators and teachers? Did you feel like the teacher understood your child and their needs? Research has shown that parent engagement in schools increases the success of students. Parent involvement is equally important in health and mental health care. Parents have more knowledge and experience and spend more time with their children than anyone, and it is critical that family members are full participants in all decisions about the care of their children. Families also have important insights about what services should be offered, what services and supports may be missing, and how providers can improve care. Therefore, when we are working to improve mental health care, we believe that families should be in the driver's seat.

## **What Does Family Involvement Look Like?**

- ▶ Needs of the child and family dictate the types of services provided
- ▶ Families are partners and therapeutic allies with providers
- ▶ Families have access to support from other families
- ▶ Families are empowered with decision-making authority at service and system levels

## **Benefits of Family-Driven Care**

When families are involved and drive decisions about treatment, programs, and even funding, they develop more positive feelings toward and ownership of their children's healthcare. Creating systems that are family-driven ensures that the work of programs, agencies, and communities are relevant and effective for those whom they serve. When families and community providers partner on improvements to the system, we see increased buy-in, support, and collaboration, leading to healthier children and families.

## YOUR FAMILY LEADERSHIP ROADMAP

If you want to take part in the family-driven movement, you will need to prepare your roadmap for the journey. There are several basic leadership skills to help you map the road ahead.

### Leadership from Any Chair

**W**hen we think about leaders, we sometimes think about politicians, CEOs, or local activists. But leadership is not about the position that a person is in. Instead, leadership is a personal decision that someone makes to use their skills, relationships, and experience to bring people together to achieve a shared goal. Ellen Kagen, an expert in leadership in systems of care at Georgetown University, defines it as “a process of envisioning and initiating change by mobilizing others to alter the status quo in response to an urgent challenge or exciting opportunity.” Each component of this definition is important, highlighting some of the critical behaviors of a leader, including:

- ▶ Seeing the opportunity for change and the vision of a better future;
- ▶ Bringing key people together and helping them recognize their common vision;
- ▶ Engaging key people in making concrete changes, so that it is no longer “business as usual;” and
- ▶ Recognizing and taking advantage of challenges or opportunities that arise.

Think about some of the most influential people that you know — people who inspire others to contribute, people who others listen to and seek guidance from, and people who make us strive to be better. Most likely, some of these people are in positions of authority, such as a pastor at a church, a principal in a school, or a manager in an office. But it’s likely that some of the people you thought of are informal leaders — individuals who step into leadership without formal authority. Informal leaders earn their role through their actions, their wisdom, and their engagement of others. Informal leaders have influence, even though they don’t sit at the head of the table.

### What Makes a Family Leader?

A family leader is someone who uses their personal lived experience to help guide and influence others. They may assist other families on their personal journeys by educating, empowering, and advocating for the family. They may use the experiences of family members to educate decision-makers and develop or evaluate programs. All of these leadership activities can have a greater impact when driven by the passion and lived experience that comes from raising a child, grandchild, or other family member with mental health challenges.



# FINDING YOUR STARTING POINT ON THE MAP

## Stages of Family Leadership

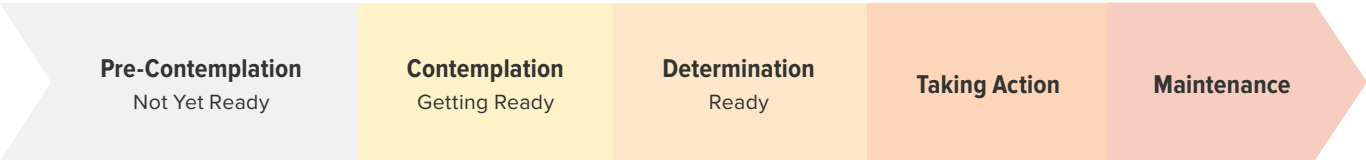
Think back to a time that you needed to speak up for your child, or perhaps a time that you reached out to assist another family member. Were you ever asked to provide your opinions or offer suggestions to professionals to improve the way families receive care?

You don't just wake up one day and say, "I want to be a family leader." To be successful in family leadership, you must know what leadership is, understand how leadership is different from other work that you do, believe that you can lead, and develop your leadership skills, habits, and behaviors. This journey comes in stages of discovery, usually by working with other families who have more or less experience than you at understanding the system. It may begin with assisting

a friend with her child's school individual education plan (IEP), being asked to serve on a committee, or working as a family peer support provider.

The road to family leadership begins with the desire to share your story with someone to help them understand what life is like raising a child with mental health concerns. As you gain confidence in your journey, there will be opportunities to be a change agent. If you make the personal decision, you can step into the role of family leader, engaging individuals in creating a different future.

Becoming a leader occurs in stages. The diagram below illustrates the stages of leadership development that you'll go through on your journey.<sup>1</sup>



The **Pre-Contemplation (Not Yet Ready)** stage involves recognizing yourself as the expert of your child, but generally deferring to professional opinions. In the **Contemplation (Getting Ready)** stage, you are starting to weigh the pros and cons of speaking up, to question the recommendations or actions of professionals and to try to learn more and gather information. When you reach the **Determination (Ready)** stage, you have decided that you need to understand and participate in all treatment decisions, and realize that your experiences, both good and bad, can help others. In the **Taking Action** stage of development, you are actively using your voice to influence change and learning ways to grow your leadership skills and opportunities. Finally, in **Maintenance**, you are staying on a leadership path. You are comfortable using your voice and are ensuring balance through self-care.

# Where Are You On Your Leadership Journey?



Take a moment to reflect on the following questions and journal your thoughts and responses. Use additional paper if necessary.

On the arrow below, make a mark where you feel that you are in terms of readiness as a leader. It is okay to be between stages of development!



**Pre-Contemplation**  
Not Yet Ready

**Contemplation**  
Getting Ready

**Determination**  
Ready

**Taking Action**

**Maintenance**

- ▶ Why did you mark that location? What will you need to move further down the arrow? How can you access the supports, training, etc. that you need?
- ▶ What experiences have led you to consider leadership? Who are your supports for this journey?

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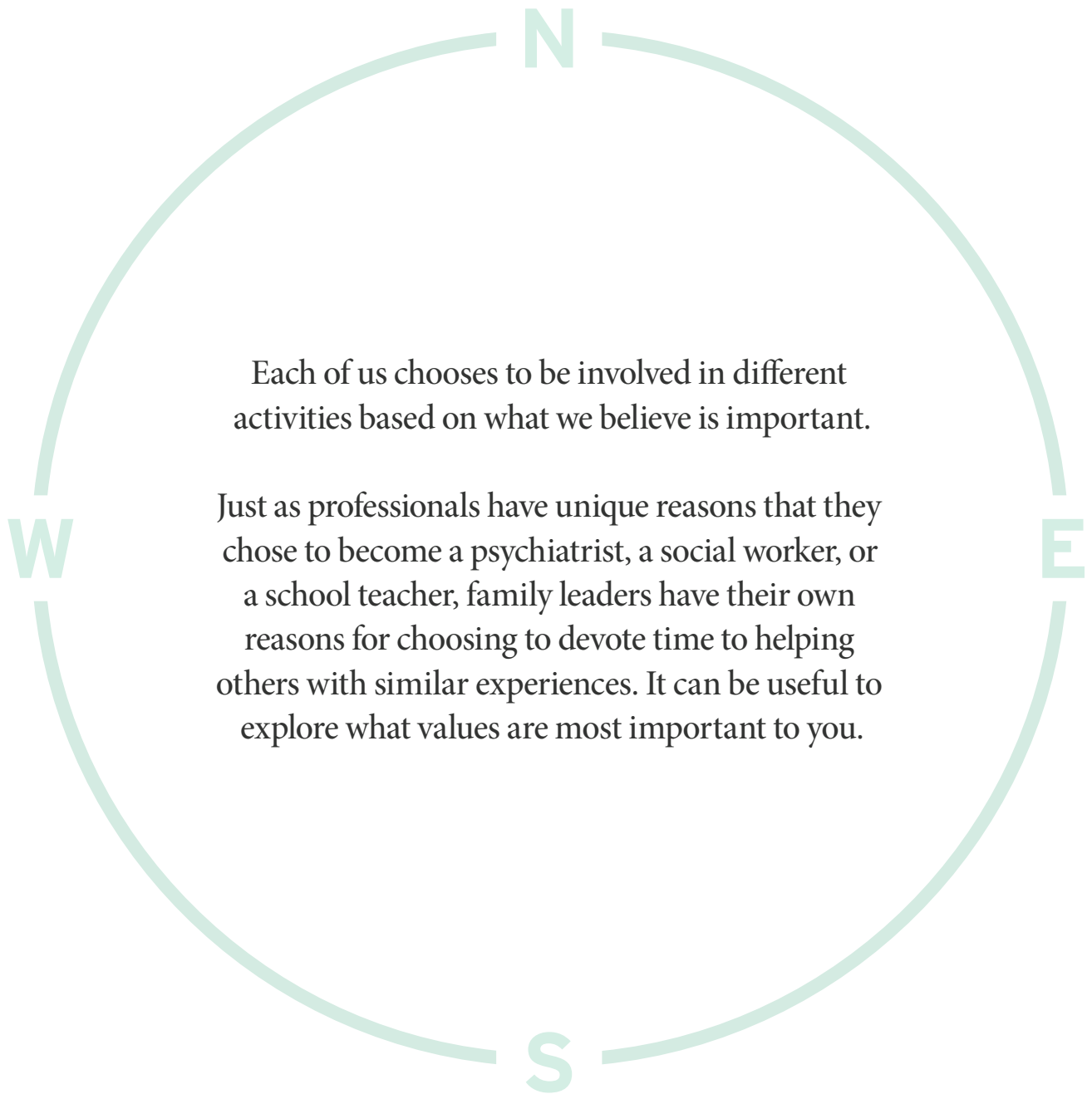
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Each of us chooses to be involved in different activities based on what we believe is important.

Just as professionals have unique reasons that they chose to become a psychiatrist, a social worker, or a school teacher, family leaders have their own reasons for choosing to devote time to helping others with similar experiences. It can be useful to explore what values are most important to you.



# Finding Your Values



From the following list of values (both work and personal), select ten that are most important to you as guides for a way of life.<sup>2</sup>

Please feel free to add a value if it is not represented below.

- |  |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Achievement               | <input type="checkbox"/> Creativity           | <input type="checkbox"/> Inner Harmony        | <input type="checkbox"/> Quickness      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Acquiescence              | <input type="checkbox"/> Curiosity            | <input type="checkbox"/> Integrity            | <input type="checkbox"/> Rationality    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Action                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Decency              | <input type="checkbox"/> Intellect            | <input type="checkbox"/> Recognition    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adaptability              | <input type="checkbox"/> Decisiveness         | <input type="checkbox"/> Involvement          | <input type="checkbox"/> Relationship   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advancement & Promotion   | <input type="checkbox"/> Democracy            | <input type="checkbox"/> Job Tranquility      | <input type="checkbox"/> Reputation     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adventure                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Dependence           | <input type="checkbox"/> Joyfulness           | <input type="checkbox"/> Responsibility |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Differences          | <input type="checkbox"/> Justice              | <input type="checkbox"/> Security       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aesthetics                | <input type="checkbox"/> Direction            | <input type="checkbox"/> Kindness             | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Respect   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Affection (Love & Caring) | <input type="checkbox"/> Ecological Awareness | <input type="checkbox"/> Knowledge            | <input type="checkbox"/> Serenity       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Affirmation               | <input type="checkbox"/> Economic Security    | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership           | <input type="checkbox"/> Sophistication |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alliance & Allegiance     | <input type="checkbox"/> Effectiveness        | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning             | <input type="checkbox"/> Spirituality   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Balance                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Efficiency           | <input type="checkbox"/> Liberty              | <input type="checkbox"/> Stability      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beauty                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Ethical Practice     | <input type="checkbox"/> Liveliness           | <input type="checkbox"/> Status         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Being                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Excellence           | <input type="checkbox"/> Loyalty              | <input type="checkbox"/> Tact           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Belongingness             | <input type="checkbox"/> Excitement           | <input type="checkbox"/> Mastery              | <input type="checkbox"/> Tenacity       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Benevolence               | <input type="checkbox"/> Expertise            | <input type="checkbox"/> Maturity             | <input type="checkbox"/> Thoroughness   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Betterment                | <input type="checkbox"/> Faith                | <input type="checkbox"/> Meaningfulness       | <input type="checkbox"/> Tolerance      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bravery                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Fame                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Merit                | <input type="checkbox"/> Truth          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Brilliance                | <input type="checkbox"/> Family               | <input type="checkbox"/> Modesty              | <input type="checkbox"/> Uniqueness     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Candor                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Fast Living          | <input type="checkbox"/> Naturalness          | <input type="checkbox"/> Unity          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Capability                | <input type="checkbox"/> Fast-Paced Work      | <input type="checkbox"/> Neutrality           | <input type="checkbox"/> Usefulness     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Financial Gain       | <input type="checkbox"/> Normality            | <input type="checkbox"/> Valor          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Change                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Freedom              | <input type="checkbox"/> Objectivity          | <input type="checkbox"/> Variety        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chaos                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Friendships          | <input type="checkbox"/> Openness             | <input type="checkbox"/> Versatility    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Choice                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Generosity           | <input type="checkbox"/> Optimism             | <input type="checkbox"/> Vision         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coalition & Collaboration | <input type="checkbox"/> Goodness             | <input type="checkbox"/> Order (Tranquility)  | <input type="checkbox"/> Wholeness      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commitment                | <input type="checkbox"/> Growth               | <input type="checkbox"/> Personal Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Willingness    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Harmony              | <input type="checkbox"/> Pleasure             | <input type="checkbox"/> Wisdom         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Competence                | <input type="checkbox"/> Helping Other People | <input type="checkbox"/> Power And Authority  | <input type="checkbox"/> Worthiness     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Competition               | <input type="checkbox"/> Honesty              | <input type="checkbox"/> Privacy              | <input type="checkbox"/> Youth          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Complexity                | <input type="checkbox"/> Humility             | <input type="checkbox"/> Public Service       | <input type="checkbox"/> Youthfulness   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Independence         | <input type="checkbox"/> Purity               | <input type="checkbox"/> Zeal           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cooperation               | <input type="checkbox"/> Influencing Others   | <input type="checkbox"/> Quality              | <input type="checkbox"/> Zest           |

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR COMPASS

### Values “Fender Bender”

Everything we do is driven by our values. How we perceive the values of others determines how we respond. We need to understand why someone’s values drive their actions. We shouldn’t be afraid to inquire about those values if we think they may come into conflict with our own. Listening with understanding provides for open dialogue. This may alleviate a value “fender bender.”

Just as important is to recognize when those “fender benders” happen. For example, using tact when talking with others may be an important value to you. You may have learned that this is how you show respect to others. However, the person you are talking to may value forthright and direct communication. While you may experience that person as disrespectful, they may actually be striving to provide their most “real” thoughts.

As another example, let’s say you are in a meeting with a group of people on a Friday afternoon. You want to share a concern you and others have about services in your community, but the meeting is scheduled to end soon. You are happy to stay later because you are driven by the desire to help others and see this as your chance. However, several others seem eager to leave. Is it that people don’t care or don’t want to hear you out? Perhaps you should consider some of the values

that may be important to them. Perhaps they strongly value the time they have in the evening with their families, and this is leading to their impatient behavior. Recognizing this may lead you to suggest setting another meeting time to finish the discussion, rather than feeling dismissed or frustrated.

Our ability to keep ourselves in check emotionally will move the process forward. A good rule of thumb is to acknowledge our differences and build on our strengths to find common ground. This means you and the people you are working with need to not only recognize your differences, but discuss them with each other and come up with a plan for when your values do come in conflict (because they likely will). Being proactive will help you to avoid hurt feelings later down the road. Focus on each other’s strengths, skills, and common goals, knowing you have been brought together for a common purpose.

Remember, you can only control your own actions. It is important to find a way to work with them toward the common goal. In the example above, another possible solution is to bring the concern up and then ask for it to be placed as an important agenda item for the next meeting. This alleviates the assumption that others don’t value your concerns.

*Acknowledge our differences and build on our strengths to find common ground.*

# Prioritizing Your Values



From the values checklist (p. 12), list the five values that are the most important for you:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

How do you currently react when you meet someone with values that are different from the five you listed above?

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To be an effective family leader, you must learn to handle these “fender benders” in your leadership journey. You will be working with others who will have different sets of values, and you must find the best way to engage and collaborate with them. Below, identify three strategies you can use to respect and work with those holding different values from you.

Strategy 1:

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Strategy 2:

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Strategy 3:

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## **PRACTICING SAFE DRIVING: *Reading the Signs and Avoiding the Hazards***

Talking about our family, actively being part of others' families, and pursuing personal passions all carry risks. Below are some of these risks — some personal, some professional.<sup>3</sup>

### **SHARING REMORSE**

Sharing remorse is wishing you hadn't said so much, or feeling like you were pushed to say more than you meant to share. Now you are worried about negative reactions (which do sometimes happen).

### **JUDGMENT ABOUT YOUR CREDIBILITY**

Sometimes people who listen to our stories may dismiss us as too emotionally involved and assume that we can't be objective or professional. Some people are not comfortable with emotion or stories, preferring hard facts and data. These judgments about credibility can affect working relationships, opportunities, and even jobs! Other times, when we feel judged, we may simply be misinterpreting the other person's interest or intentions.

### **BEING LABELED**

We all want to be respected for the experience, knowledge, and education we bring. When we share personal information, we risk being labeled or, as previously stated, considered too emotional. By sharing, we risk exposing that we're part of a stigmatized group in our society.

### **PAINFUL MEMORIES**

This impacts both us and whomever is listening. Emotions we thought we had dealt with may unintentionally come up, or memories we thought we had buried may resurface.

### **PEOPLE ONLY HEAR WHAT THEY WANT TO HEAR**

"People only hear what they want to hear" means they don't always want to hear the entire story! Many just want the success story with the fairy tale happy ending, not the challenges associated with the journey.

### **IMPACT ON FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS**

Keep in mind that what we share about members of our family affects them too! In the age of social media and the internet, we must keep in mind that what we say could impact them personally today or later in life. Always discuss what you plan to share with those you are mentioning in your stories. Make sure you know what they are okay with and what they aren't. Leave out personal names and pay attention to the repercussions of what you are sharing — for both you and them.

To ensure we minimize these risks, we must be careful and targeted in what we choose to share, who we share with, and how we relay the information.

# Understanding Your Personal Signs and Hazards



What worries or scares me most about being a leader?

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Despite these fears, why might it still be worth it for me to begin or continue my leadership journey?

*Potential impact on my family:*

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*Potential impact on other families:*

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*Potential impact on my community, state, or country:*

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What can I do to address my fears and worries?

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## RECOGNIZING THE REWARDS: *Scenic Paths and Vistas*

**W**hether you are advocating for your own family, another family, or working to influence systems and policies, family leadership at its best is empowering, uplifting, and fulfilling. As in all things, there are both risks and rewards on our path to leadership and in sharing the story of our journey with others. Sharing our own stories and challenges is always very personal and makes us vulnerable. However, it is our experiences that give us a unique perspective and a more powerful ability to influence change than any doctorate degree without that experience would. Below are some of the rewards of sharing our experiences and family leadership.<sup>3</sup>

### RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

Sharing our experiences helps build relationships with each other and decreases the isolation so many of us have felt.

### INFLUENCE CHANGE

Stories influence public opinion and policy. They are so effective that news reporters and politicians search for people to put a face on stories and issues. Stories are remembered and can touch the heart, not just the mind.

### SELF-EMPOWERMENT

Family leadership lifts us from shame and embarrassment to pride and empowerment!

### REDUCE STIGMA

Sharing reduces stigma (when someone judges a person negatively based on a personal trait/experience) by normalizing our experiences and disproving negative beliefs and presumptions.

### FIGHT FOR OUR RIGHTS

Sharing empowers us to relay, negotiate, and assert our own goals, needs, and rights. It allows us to make informed decisions for our own families and shape the decisions made by professionals and in systems.



### TAKE CARE

Identifying and celebrating the positive impact that you can have as a leader is a great way to refuel and maintain your leadership focus. Some leaders find it helpful to start their day with celebrations and counting the positives to energize them for the journey ahead! Take a moment each day to recognize a positive aspect of the work you are doing, to appreciate a relationship you are building, or to notice the steps accomplished toward a larger goal.

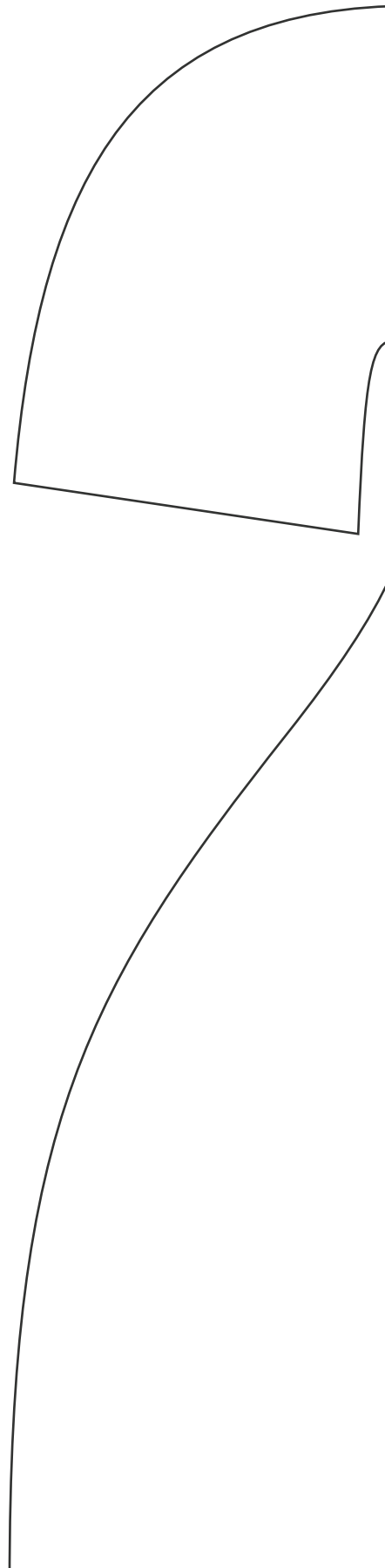
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# USING YOUR VOICE

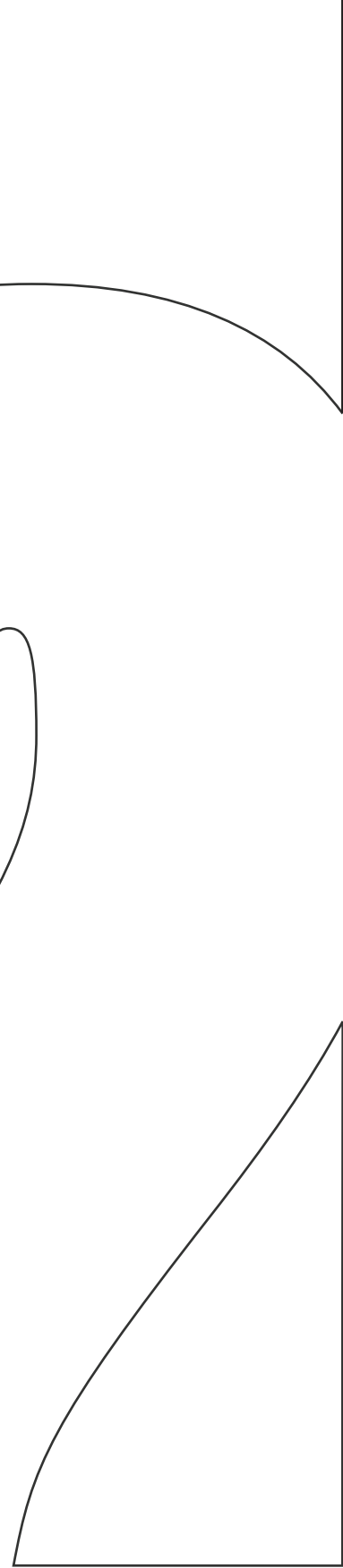
## GETTING ON THE ROAD!

*“As a foster mom and a mother of eight adopted, special needs children, we have had quite a journey. When we started foster care 15 years ago, I began to realize that I would need to become a voice for these precious children. I became educated, found resources along the way, and met some amazing mentors to guide our family. Through these experiences, we have been able to define legislation, make changes, and help many children in our community. Now I have the opportunity to help other foster and adoptive families through my work as a Certified Family Partner. My goal is to continue to make changes and help to serve the mental health needs of children in our community.”*

**Shana Wheeler** · San Antonio, TX







**F**amily leaders usually begin their leadership by speaking out or advocating for our children, our families, and ourselves. Our voices are how we use our passions and strengths to make positive differences in the systems, services, and supports that affect our loved ones. Soon, we may see how our voices and experiences can benefit others. We begin building networks of mutual support and sharing the lessons we learned with other families to help them define their voices. We may become active in advocacy efforts related to community policy-making, perhaps providing public comments at board meetings, writing letters to the editor, or requesting meetings with local agency leaders.

### **Strategic Sharing**

Others can learn from our experiences and the wisdom we have gained as family leaders. Telling our stories is the most powerful way to influence others. Through the sharing of our experiences, we can build relationships, motivate and inspire others, educate and inform, and create a vision for a better future. However, our stories can also be very personal, emotional, and difficult to tell. It is important that you learn to share your story and experiences strategically by identifying *what* to share with *whom*, and then *how* to effectively share it.

## PACKING THE CAR AND CHOOSING TRAVEL COMPANIONS

### Identifying What to Share and with Whom

A family leader can hit a very bumpy road when carried away with the personal details of their story. They can run into the pitfalls of oversharing, which can lead to regret and guilt later, and lose the main message behind telling the story. The goal is to find the perfect balance between telling enough of your story to be impactful and helpful to the message and goal. Mastering this skill takes practice. Different levels of intimacy are appropriate for different audiences and messages. It is helpful to put information about you and your family in one of three categories, and with whom you share information from each of the categories depends on what is safe and comfortable for you and your family. Use the *Red/Yellow/Green Light* strategy:

*“First: Listen, listen, listen. Second: Share your lived experience in a purposeful way (when it fits). Third: Listen some more. Fourth: Suggest possible solutions or next steps. Fifth: Help families make informed decisions and then support them in the decisions they make.”*

Stephany Bryan · Austin, TX



### Using “Escape Routes”

When asked a personal question, you are not required to respond if the question makes you feel uncomfortable or uncertain. This is true even if you have felt comfortable a hundred times before with this same question! If your gut instinct tells you no, listen to your inner voice and feel confident in avoiding the question. Try redirecting the conversation to a general topic, or even just telling the person that you would prefer a less personal question. Plan ahead! Map out standard responses to use when you are uncomfortable or do not wish to share certain information. Think about who you will be talking to or interacting with, and identify if this is a person with whom to share red, yellow, or green light information.

# Strategically Sharing Information



Take a moment to consider the types of information you would share in each of the *Red/Yellow/Green Light* categories and with whom. Why would it be important to be careful about what you share or who you share certain information with? How do you choose when and who to share with?

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Now consider how you can avoid oversharing or providing too much information to the wrong person or audience. What strategies can you use as “escape routes” to be diplomatic in avoiding such situations? Who would you need to use these routes with and why?

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### Effectively Sharing Your Story

Successfully telling about your experiences requires planning to ensure that your message reaches the intended audience, and that you feel comfortable with what you have shared. The Children's Research Triangle developed four key steps for developing and preparing your family story.<sup>4</sup>

1. **IDENTIFY** who will you be sharing with and what will they most likely care about. What are you hoping to accomplish by sharing?

2. **THINK AHEAD** by asking yourself:

- ▶ How can sharing help me reach my goal?
- ▶ Why would they be interested in what I say?
- ▶ What if they don't respond the way I expect?
- ▶ What do I feel safe sharing? How will it affect my family?
- ▶ How might I feel after I share? Who'll be there to support me?

3. **SHARE** by following a logical format and outlining what you'd like to say.

- ▶ Explain what you hope to accomplish
- ▶ Share only what you are comfortable with and prepared to share
- ▶ Recap your points and purpose for sharing
- ▶ Close by thanking people for their time

4. **NEXT STEPS** include identifying how you will keep in contact with those supportive of your goal and being sure to follow up with your support person to debrief your experience and how you feel after sharing.

### Strategically Sharing Your Message

Each individual's story is very unique, and it's up to you how you'd like to share your experiences. The list below offers a way to structure a strategic sharing message.

#### 1. GOAL

- ▶ What do I want individuals or the group to do differently?

#### 2. AUDIENCE

- ▶ What is important to my audience?
- ▶ What will be meaningful to individuals or the group?

#### 3. MESSAGE

- ▶ What is the key message I want to convey?
- ▶ How do my experiences bring this to life?

#### 4. CHANNELS

- ▶ What is the best way to communicate my message?
- ▶ Letter/email, presentation, one-on-one conversations?

You can use this format to get started in planning your message, as well as tailoring your message and strategically selecting what to share for specific audiences. It can be also be helpful to practice speaking in front of a mirror or recording yourself to improve your presentation. Practicing with another family leader or a trusted friend can provide you with helpful feedback to strengthen your message.

# Strategic Sharing



Being strategic in what you share about your experiences takes planning and practice. In the three exercises below, begin to craft and practice your message.

## Exercise 1

Identify a topic and experience that you'd like to share and write the goal(s) for sharing, your potential audience and what is important to them, the message you'd like to convey and how (channels), and how you will know that your message was heard.

My goal(s):

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My audience:

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Things that are important to my audience:

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My message:

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Channels or ways I will communicate:

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How I will know if I am successful:

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## Exercise 2

Now, using the prompts below for developing your message, begin outlining or writing your message in your journal.

1. **EXPLAIN** what you hope to accomplish
2. **SHARE** only what you are comfortable with and prepared to share
3. **RECAP** your points and purpose for sharing
4. **CLOSE** by thanking people for their time

## Exercise 3

Practice your message with a family member or a trusted listener. Ask the person listening to provide feedback using the prompts below.

**TO THE LISTENER:** Put yourself in the role of the intended audience (e.g., a school principal, city councilman) as you listen to the family leader’s message. Use the following prompts to provide constructive feedback. How can you help them strengthen their sharing to have an even greater impact?

- ▶ What part of the message was most impactful to you? What were you most moved by?
- ▶ Was it clear what the speaker wanted the listener/you to do? How might they make their request more clear, specific, and actionable?
- ▶ Did the message connect with values and/or goals that would be meaningful to me (in the intended audience role)? Are there additional or more impactful goals or values that should be addressed?
- ▶ How did sharing of their personal experiences affect the message?
- ▶ As the listener, what emotions did the personal aspects of the message raise (e.g., empathy, connectedness, frustration, anger, defensiveness, hopefulness)? Will these emotions help or hinder the family leader in reaching their goal?

Listener comments:

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### Navigating Conversations About Painful Events

Painful memories can impact both us as individuals and those listening. Emotions we thought we had dealt with may unintentionally come up, or memories we thought we had buried may resurface. This may also trigger feelings and emotions in the person to whom we are speaking, and you will need to listen, validate, and reassure that person. As a family leader, navigating painful conversations and situations will at times leave you emotionally exhausted or raw. You need to be prepared for encountering unfinished roads and construction zones in this journey.



#### TAKE CARE

Keep in mind that the story you are sharing is not just your own, but your entire family's story. Your story evolves as your children grow into adolescents and adults; it becomes their history and story, and they may no longer be okay with you sharing it. Be sure to check in with them on what they are comfortable with you sharing and not sharing, and respect their decisions.





### Wandering Into “Construction Zones”

Wandering off into the rocky unfinished areas, or “construction zones,” of your story can make you feel that you’ve shared too much or that you are not ready to be in a leadership role. *This is normal.* It is human to experience these feelings and does not mean that you cannot continue your leadership journey. Sometimes telling our stories can be a form of reliving past experiences, opening old wounds and feelings related to traumatic experiences. We will also be faced with others who may be triggered by what we share, and we need to be prepared to support them as well.

To get past the rocky roads, it’s important to practice self-awareness by knowing areas that are painful for you and how you react to talking about them. Have a plan for when these feelings arise, such as taking a break from your current activity or debriefing with a designated person who can provide you support. Take care of your own needs so that you are able to continue to be supportive of others that may need you.



#### TAKE CARE

Being a support person for someone dealing with difficult circumstances can in itself be distressing and overwhelming. Sometimes this can even result in “secondary trauma” (feeling the effects of the trauma yourself). Give yourself permission to do the little things that nurture you and bring joy as you provide support to a person with emotional needs. Use your self-care strategies to navigate these situations and feelings and to return to a state of equilibrium. Establish a plan that includes the activities you enjoy, scheduled time to focus on yourself (e.g., 10-minute walks, an afternoon at the park, or a day with your best friend), and boundaries around work time (e.g., calls, emails).

### Ownership of Our Role and Sharing Power

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network created a tip sheet for service providers on how to share power with family members.<sup>5</sup> It highlights the benefits and provides tips on how to combine the training and knowledge of a service provider with the lived experience of families receiving service. Enhanced participation, combined expertise, and honest connection all result in a higher team success rate, and are more likely to happen when service providers share the power.

As family leaders, we must take true ownership over the importance of our role and always advocate for shared power in our community. In a friendly, goal-oriented, and assertive manner, we are paving the way for future family leaders and successful teams in our community. Our goal is to always serve our community, and although being assertive can be uncomfortable, it's a skill we must recognize and practice.



### Confusing Passion with Leadership

Passion coming from life experience can resemble leadership because people listen to and sometimes follow it. Passion reflects strong feelings and sometimes serves as a driving force for a leader. However, leadership is much more complicated than simply being passionate about something. Leadership involves building relationships and being a role model, along with enlisting, empowering, and strengthening others to act.

Passion and leadership are quite different. *Passion alone cannot sustain a leadership position.* Leaders need an overarching view and must have the ability to create distance to gain perspective.<sup>6</sup> Gaining distance does not mean they have to lose passion — they just have to get a clear perspective. One can have passion without being a leader, but it's more difficult to be a leader in this work without passion. The best family, youth, and community leaders have both.<sup>7</sup>

As family leaders, our work starts from home. We are unique in that our passion is sparked by experiences that are so deeply personal. These experiences give us fire in

our bellies. Like with any journey, the first step is realizing our destination. In this case, it's making a difference in children's mental health because of our personal experience.

In our leadership journey, we must shift focus from a more internal view of mental health to a sweeping view — one that sees how stigma and systems impact our experiences. To develop as a leader, you must move past individual advocacy to be effective in both leading and influencing decision-makers, agencies, and others. The trick is to always check back into your personal story for inspiration and guidance.

Family leadership means identifying ways that you can be a change agent in fighting stigma and a champion for children's mental health. As a change agent, we recognize our own strengths and leverage our experiences and personal connections to create change in our communities and beyond. Advocacy and passion can get you through the door, but a different set of behaviors is required to be an effective leader once you are in the room. You have to be assertive without being aggressive.

#### ASSERTIVE

- ▶ Confident
- ▶ Gentle/diplomatic
- ▶ Friendly
- ▶ Makes eye contact
- ▶ Listens to others
- ▶ Collaborative leadership

#### AGGRESSIVE

- ▶ Defensive
- ▶ Forceful/dominant
- ▶ Demanding
- ▶ My way or the highway
- ▶ Always knows best
- ▶ Hierarchal leadership

*“Play the game. You can catch more flies with honey. Work with, not against.”*

**Shana Wheeler**  
San Antonio, TX



### Communicating for Impact

Using good communication skills is paramount for a family leader and is the key to strong family voice and leadership. You should choose your words and approaches to issues and situations for impact, effectively engaging others in understanding the family perspective and truly hearing the information, message, or solution you want to convey. Strive for the following in your communications:

#### BE ATTENTIVE

Don't listen to respond. Listen to hear.

#### LISTEN CAREFULLY

Sometimes people want to process through their thoughts and feelings by talking to someone. Conversations can be easier if they are with someone with similar experiences.

#### WAIT TO RESPOND

Let them finish what they want to say. Do not respond too quickly. Get comfortable with a pause in conversation. Give time for their next thought before you speak.

*Choose your words and approach to issues and situations for impact, effectively engaging others.*

#### REFLECTIVE RESPONSE

Restate what the person has said back to them. Sometimes it is appropriate to ask a clarifying question.

#### POSITIVE FEEDBACK

Everyone wants to feel validated. Everyone wants to feel respected. People feel validated when they feel they are heard.

#### CULTURAL LANGUAGE

Ask yourself, "What language would be best in which to communicate?" Ultimately, we all speak the language of love for our children.

# What is the Best Way to Handle Difficult Situations?

As a leader, you will encounter situations that require that you stand your ground or directly address a behavior, an inequity, or inaccuracy. You must be assertive and steadfast, yet diplomatic, if you want to be heard and have an impact on the situation. This requires that you inform, share your perspective or alternative view, and offer solutions rather than confronting someone. It's not *what* you do, but *how* you do it. A few tips for addressing these difficult situations:

- ▶ **Consider their perspective, interests, fears, and positions.** How do they see the problem? What do they want? What are they afraid will happen if they give me what I want? What is their bottom line?
- ▶ **Be a negotiator and know what you will and will not compromise on.** Listen more than you talk. Clarify the perspective and position of the other side. Meet in neutral locations. Always treat other people with respect, even if you disagree with or dislike them personally.
- ▶ **Be solution-focused.** Be factual and use documentation. Seek common ground to build on.
- ▶ **Avoid the deadly sins for negotiators.** Avoid blaming and shaming; criticizing and finding fault; sarcasm, scorn, and ridicule; judging, patronizing, and bullying.
- ▶ **Model collaboration and problem-solving for all involved.** This can be achieved through the following behaviors: being mindful of your tone of voice and choice of words; using opportunities for perspective-taking; reminding others of shared goals; choosing respectful language; and placing emphasis on the parent perspective.

## IT'S ABOUT WHO YOU MEET ON THE JOURNEY

**T**hroughout our daily lives, we come in contact with many people, and we have the potential to influence each of these individuals. We interact with peers, service providers and their organizational administrators, state agency representatives, elected officials, and other decision-makers. The graphic on the right illustrates this concept of the circles of influence that you have, beginning with family and friends, then growing outward to encompass peers and colleagues, and organizations, agencies, and decision-makers.

Each of these relationships impact our journey in different ways, and each relationship offers opportunities to engage others in our work — and therefore influence their behavior toward children, youth, and families. In fact, every interaction you have when you're in a leadership role is an opportunity to implement change in the way that parents are viewed and treated, how systems work with families, and even your own view of and work with other professionals and decision-makers. That is why it is important that leaders build strategic relationships within each circle that support their leadership skills, opportunities, and journeys.





### Building Strategic Relationships (Your “Travel Companions”)

Leaders build relationships *before* they need them. These relationships serve different purposes. Some are supports for you individually on your journey, and others are strategic for your role as a leader to make an impact on the issues that are important to you and that you represent. Leaders commit to strategic alliances and partnerships, recognizing when relationships need to be strengthened to do so. Leaders also identify which relationships bring them energy or bring them closer to desired outcomes. These are the relationships to invest in. It's important to also recognize when a relationship is draining you of energy or negatively affecting progress toward a goal, and to take steps to minimize that relationship or its impact on your energy.

There are multiple types of strategic relationships, and an effective leader identifies and builds upon these at specific points throughout their journey.

#### RELATIONSHIP TYPES

- ▶ Allies (including formal and informal alliances)
- ▶ Formal leaders and co-leaders
- ▶ Confidants
- ▶ Mentors
- ▶ Collaborative relationships and coalition partners
- ▶ Network/organization members
- ▶ External networks
- ▶ Resistors
- ▶ Others

# Building Strategic Relationships

Use the following two exercises to begin identifying who is within your circles of influence, who you should begin developing strategic relationships with, and the purpose of those relationships.

## Exercise 1

Using the graphic on the right, identify 3–5 individuals you currently interact with who are important as companions on your leadership journey as supports or strategic partners.



Organizations, agencies, & decision-makers:

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Peers & professional colleagues:

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Family & friends:

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## Exercise 2

Using the table below, begin identifying strategic alliances, partnerships, and relationships. List the different relationships and links that you depend on for your work in the **Relationships** column, considering the types of relationships listed in the previous table (p. 36) and drawing upon those in your circles of influence. In the **Type** column, mark if these are *strategic (S)* in your leadership work, *task-oriented (T)* in accomplishing a project, or *oppositional (O)* relationships that are challenging to you in a leadership role. Note which relationships bring you *energy (+)* and which are *draining (-)* in the **Energy** column.

RELATIONSHIPS	TYPE (S/T/O)	ENERGY (+/-)

Now look at your list of relationships. Are there gaps (relationships that you need to build)? With whom or in what area? How can you develop these?

Relationships I need to build:

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How will I develop these?

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### Nurturing Relationships

People want to help other people that they know and like. Your voice will have a greater impact if you build strong relationships with others, whether you are engaging with other family members, school teachers, or your city mayor. Keep these relationship techniques in mind as you embark on influencing others.

- ▶ Listen actively.
- ▶ Connect around things you have in common and be interested in them personally.
- ▶ Connect around shared goals.
- ▶ Remember relationship building takes time and effort.
- ▶ Offer to help out.
- ▶ Invite them to help out.
- ▶ Express your gratitude.

Relationships require maintenance and care to run smoothly. Maintain your credibility and build trust as a leader by following through on what you say you will do and holding both yourself and others accountable in roles and responsibilities. Stay focused on your role and be a connector for others as you network and travel along the leadership road.

***Relationships require maintenance and care to run smoothly.***



## TRAVELING WITH OTHERS: *Working in a Group*

**L**eadership is not about the position you hold or a title before your name. It is a set of behaviors, skills, abilities, and knowledge combined in order to influence change on behalf of others. Leadership is a means of solving problems through collaboration with those affected by the issue. It is something to be shared. Leadership is a skill, not a genetic trait inherited by few people. Most importantly, leadership is the ability to influence others through your words, actions, and skills, and this means that you do not work in isolation. You will have companions on your leadership journey and will consistently work with others in groups, task forces, advisory councils, and more. Roles will vary from group to group, as well your responsibilities as a leader. To effectively participate as a team member on any group, you will need to engage a number of leadership skills:

### **IDENTIFYING YOUR PURPOSE AND ROLE IN THE GROUP**

There will be times when you lead the team, and others when you follow. It is important to identify your role, the expectations of your role, and your purpose for being part of the group.

### **UNDERSTANDING GROUP NORMS AND RULES**

All groups have norms and rules. Some are established by the group formally, while others are unsaid or evolve as the group works together. If you did not participate in establishing group rules, ask another member about how the group operates, makes decisions, and interacts with one another.

### **BEING ABLE TO LEAD FROM ANY CHAIR**

Even if you are not an authorized leader (e.g., group chair, team supervisor), you will still employ leadership skills in many ways. Learn to lead from whatever role you may have in working with others, whether it is sharing in decision-making or bringing information to the group that impacts the group direction.

### **EFFECTIVELY SHARING YOUR PERSPECTIVE**

Everyone learns and takes in information differently. Practice using your story strategically and sharing your perspective in different ways, including speaking, using data, providing written information, and sharing stories from other family members.

### **USING A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH**

Teams are only effective when they work together. Employ a collaborative approach in working with others, including taking all perspectives and needs into account, being strengths-based and solution-focused, finding common goals and shared values, and choosing your battles wisely. Support others with whom you work and establish the expectation that they will support you as well.

### Influencing Change Through Leadership

Most importantly, you will need to practice adjusting your leadership style to facilitate positive working relationships with others.

Have you heard the saying that every issue looks like a nail if you only have a hammer? Your style cannot be to approach others in only one way and with only one tool. Each person you interact with will have their own perspective, ways of approaching issues, and preferences for handling situations. Effective leaders will create a match between their style and the situation. You must be flexible, adjusting your approach and observable behavior (tone, manner) to complement theirs to ensure that your perspective, experience, and information is received in the way that they understand it best. You need to keep a full toolbox in your trunk on this leadership journey to handle whatever comes your way!

#### WHAT IS LEADERSHIP?

- ▶ An attitude and a behavior, not a position
- ▶ Positive problem-solving
- ▶ Something to be shared
- ▶ Collaborative (groups of people working together)
- ▶ Skills that can be learned

**Leadership is the ability to influence others.**





## TAKING TIME FOR SELF-CARE: *Planning for Rest and Refueling Stops*

**P**racticing self-care is important for all of us, and even more crucial for family leaders. There will be times that you feel overwhelmed or when you are tired and frustrated along the journey. Plan for times to rest and refuel by establishing self-care strategies and scheduling specific times to focus on re-charging yourself. Your self-care plan should include all areas of your life — physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental health. Suggested ways to nurture yourself that you can incorporate into your everyday life are detailed below.<sup>8</sup>

### 1. PHYSICAL HEALTH CARE

- ▶ Be kind and loving to your body and appreciate it.
- ▶ Nourish your body by eating healthy and energizing foods that make you feel great.
- ▶ Get enough sleep and drink plenty of water to stay hydrated.
- ▶ Exercise to replenish your energy and manage stress.

### 2. EMOTIONAL CARE

- ▶ Have a heart-to-heart with a close friend or mentor.
- ▶ Ditch self-criticism and judgmental thinking about your actions and thoughts.
- ▶ Seek out support from a therapist, coach, social worker, peer, or counselor.
- ▶ Journal — write down your feelings and thoughts.
- ▶ Go on a fun date with your partner or organize a monthly night out with friends.

### 3. SPIRITUAL CARE

- ▶ Take time to be by yourself to think or write.
- ▶ Take a walk in a park or out in nature.
- ▶ Meditate, pray, or just reflect on what you're grateful for.
- ▶ Do something creative, like painting, drawing, dancing, or singing.
- ▶ Volunteer for a cause you're passionate about.

### 4. MENTAL HEALTH CARE

- ▶ Read a good book or see an intellectually stimulating movie.
- ▶ Learn a new hobby or skill.
- ▶ Sign up for a class, group, or workshop on a topic that is interesting to you.
- ▶ Challenge yourself within your community or at work to learn something new.

Being a strong family voice in the community advocating for children's mental health can quickly and easily become overwhelming, but resilient family leaders recognize the need for balance in their lives. When the work gets to be too much, delegate. Just like we tell all the families we work with, it is okay to ask for help! The same is true for us. Watch your self-criticism and don't be so hard on yourself. Do the best you can with the tools you have right now. Listen to your body and mind and take care of them to keep your leadership engine in shape. Find more self-care resources on the [Resources](#) page at the end of the workbook.

# Caregiver Self-Care

Take a moment now to complete the following caregiver self-care assessment.<sup>9</sup> Score each item on how frequently you do each one. Then notice areas where you are neglecting your self-care (those scored as 0 and 1). These are the areas where you should set goals to improve and identify first steps to work on them.

	0 NEVER	1 RARELY	2 SOMETIMES	3 OFTEN
<b>PHYSICAL SELF-CARE</b>				
Eat regularly (e.g., breakfast, lunch, and dinner)				
Eat healthy meals				
Get regular medical check-ups				
Obtain medical care when needed				
Take time off to rest and recuperate when you are sick				
Get a massage				
Exercise/engage in a physical activity you enjoy				
Get enough sleep				
Take vacations				
Other:				
<b>PSYCHOLOGICAL SELF-CARE</b>				
Take a day trip/mini-vacation				
Make time away from your phone/office				
Make time for self-reflection — listen to your thoughts, beliefs, feelings				
Read books or magazines unrelated to your work				
Allow others to know different aspects of who you are				
Ask others for help/support when you need it				
Say “no” to extra responsibilities sometimes				
Try a new activity at which you are not an expert or in charge				
Other:				
<b>EMOTIONAL SELF-CARE</b>				
Spend time with people whose company you enjoy				
Stay in contact with important people in your life				
Provide yourself with praise for your accomplishments				
Love yourself				
Find things that make you laugh				
Make time to play and/or relax				
Other:				



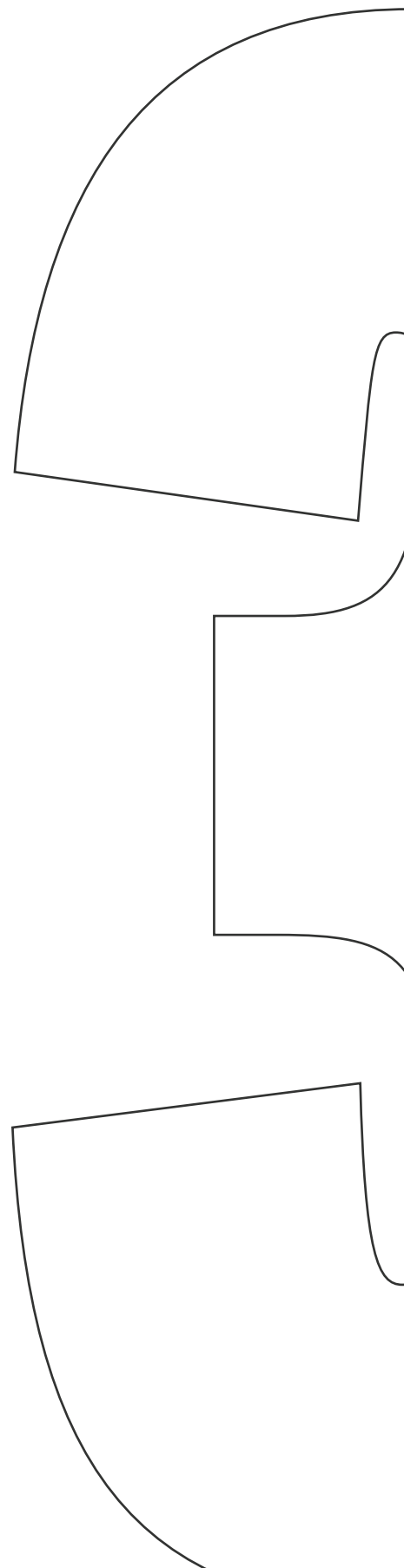
	0 NEVER	1 RARELY	2 SOMETIMES	3 OFTEN
<b>SPIRITUAL SELF-CARE</b>				
Make time for reflection				
Find a spiritual connection or community				
Be open to inspiration				
Cherish your optimism and hope				
Be open to not having all the answers				
Identify what is meaningful to you and notice its place in your life				
Meditate				
Pray				
Sing				
Contribute to causes you believe in				
Listen to music				
Other:				
<b>WORKPLACE OR PROFESSIONAL SELF-CARE</b>				
Take your fully allotted time for lunch/breaks				
Take time to chat with co-workers				
Make quiet time to complete tasks				
Identify projects or tasks that you find exciting and rewarding				
Set limits with colleagues and those you serve				
Balance your workload so that no one day or part of a day is “too much”				
Arrange your work space so it is comfortable and comforting for you				
Get regular supervision or consultation				
Have a support group with peers/colleagues				
Negotiate for your needs (e.g., benefits, pay raise, time off, etc.)				
Other:				
<b>BALANCE</b>				
Make efforts to have balance in your professional life and work day				
Strive to achieve balance among work, family, friends, play and rest				
Other:				

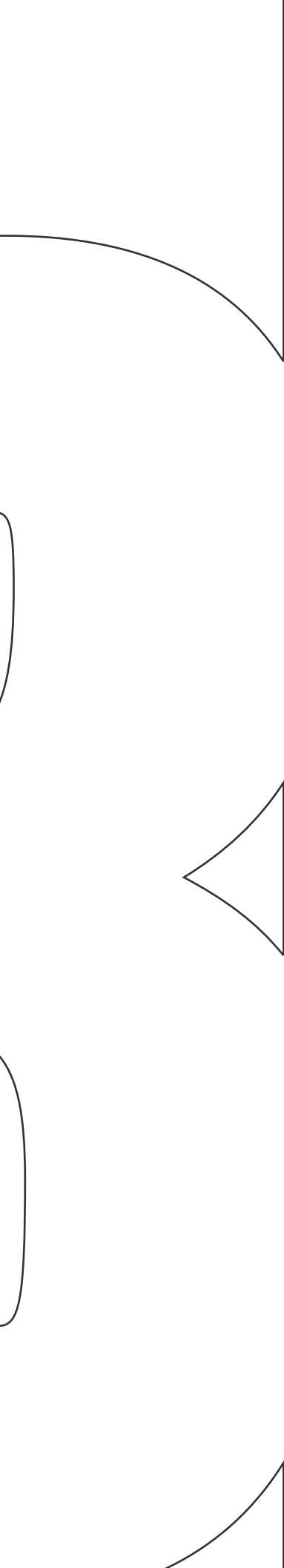
# AMPLIFYING YOUR VOICE

**YOU ARE NOW IN  
THE DRIVER SEAT!**

*“Being a family leader in my community has afforded me the opportunity for my voice to be heard in many different ways. This role has allowed me to be transparent about the struggles and successes that I have experienced on my journey. Through sharing my story, it has also given me the opportunity to offer support and hope to other families. Lastly, I am able to provide honest feedback to agencies that serve families. All of these things, in my opinion, make family leaders an integral part of bringing about change within our communities.”*

**Shequita Burrell** • Fort Worth, TX





**T**here are multiple systems in our communities, states, and country that have been created to support children and their families, including schools, social services, and health care services. It is critical that decisions about these programs, as well as new ones, are influenced by the children and families they are intended to serve. As a family leader, you can play an important role in ensuring that decision-makers understand what families need, how best to provide services to families, and what should be the priorities for funding in your community. Some leaders want to boost their voices even more, working towards positive change on the state or national levels. This section provides some guidance on ways to broadcast the power of your lived experience and local advocacy, amplifying your voice to effect change on state and national levels.

You can learn more in-depth strategies in this workbook's companion guide, *“Amplify Your Voice: Advancing Your Skills as a Family Leader.”* A link to this guide and related resources can be found at the end of the workbook on the [Resources](#) page.

## USING YOUR EXPERIENCES: *Change Lives in Your Community*

**I**t can feel a little scary to use our experiences as a springboard to help others in our community, but there are lots of different places to start. Consider your areas of interest and expertise. Do you like to organize events? Work with others? Are you a writer or a speaker? Whatever your skill set, there is a place for you to use your unique experiences and skills to benefit other families. Try the following:

*“It can be intimidating, but when you speak from the heart, your passion replaces the fear.”*

Lynne Friese · New Braunfels

### **WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR OR AN OP-ED**

If there is an event or article that makes you think about an issue that is important to you, consider writing a letter to the editor of a local newspaper or magazine.

### **VOLUNTEER**

Volunteer to work with other families or to help with events like Children’s Mental Health Awareness Day or a conference.

### **SPEAK**

Submit proposals to speak at conferences to share your experiences with conference attendees.

### **REVIEW PROPOSALS**

Reach out to organizations, funders, and agencies and offer to assist in reviewing documents, signage, policies, proposals, or budgets to ensure they align with what is important to families.

### **HOST ACTIVITIES**

If you are associated with an organization, offer to coordinate an event to welcome families and talk about the services, supports, and resources available. Establish a planning group and design, develop, and host a family resource fair.

### **CREATE A COMMUNITY FAMILY COUNCIL**

Reach out to other families in your community and together create a family council that can help connect families to resources, give feedback to providers, and make recommendations to local and state policymakers about family needs.

### **ADVOCATE THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA**

Use YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and more to build an audience to talk about mental health issues. Write blogs, share informative articles, and host livestream events. Using the technology and social media available today, you can host your own web-based talk show or news channel.

## USING YOUR EXPERIENCES: *Change the Policies and Rules of State Agencies*

**Y**ou don't have to be a state employee to make a difference in state policy. Your lived experience provides you with a level of expertise that will enable you to create positive change. There are ways to review and provide input on rules and policies, attend public meetings or hearings, request information, and apply for appointments to boards, commissions, or workgroups:

### PROVIDE INPUT ON RULES AND POLICIES

Any proposed changes to state code (legislatively mandated rules for state agencies and commissions to administer and carry out the law) are published for public review and comment. Sometimes there are public meetings to discuss changes and garner public support for or against the changes. These are opportunities for family leaders to provide written or verbal feedback on how the proposed law or changes to the law impacts families.

### MEETINGS WITH DECISION-MAKERS

Sometimes scheduling a meeting with agency decision-makers can provide the time and opportunity for you to ask questions, provide additional input or feedback, or to share with them your experiences and recommendations. Building a relationship with decision-makers is an important role for family leaders.

### APPOINTMENTS TO STATE-LEVEL COMMITTEES

Many state agencies have workgroups or committees that include stakeholders external to the agency. Depending on the workgroup or committee, becoming a member may be as simple as asking the chairperson if you can participate. Other committees require people to apply for membership, and there are certain committees that require appointment by the Governor. Your participation in state-level committees brings family voice to the table and can inform how policies, processes, and funding decisions are made.

### REQUEST INFORMATION

Leaders need to have accurate, timely data to inform their advocacy efforts. The Public Information Act provides channels (e.g., mail, fax, email, in person) to request information from public entities at the state and local levels, including state agencies, state or local boards, and local mental health authorities and school districts.



# Influencing Change



Reflect on the experiences you've had as a parent in navigating systems, advocating for your child and family, and what worked/was helpful or what didn't work/was not helpful. What pieces of your experience could be used strategically to influence change at a state agency or in state policy-making? How could you use those experiences to promote solutions or ideas for change?

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### TAKE CARE

Being a leader and advocate in your own community and state can impact both you and your family. This impact can be positive, such as being recognized for helping to develop a new family-friendly space at the school for parents, or being seen as someone who can be trusted to tackle difficult issues that affect families. However, there could be negative consequences to consider, such as being labeled a trouble-maker for speaking out at a town hall meeting or your teenager being taunted by friends for your persistence in trying to address an unfair behavioral policy at school. In your community — especially if it is a small one — spouses, children, and family members are often affected by family leaders' efforts. Be mindful to check in with your family about how your efforts in the public impact them at school, with peers, at work, and in the community.



## USING YOUR EXPERIENCES: *Make Changes in State Laws*

**Y**ou can make a powerful impact and improve the lives of children and families by sharing your experiences and recommendations with legislators. Legislators are more likely to listen and take action on a bill if they hear from their constituents that it is important. **Your voice matters.**

To meaningfully participate at the state level, you must educate yourself on how the legislature operates, how a bill becomes a law, and the ways in which you can use your experience to make a difference. You need to know who your legislators are and build a relationship with them. You also need to know the bills that are being considered, when the legislative committees are considering them, and how to provide effective testimony. Building a positive working relationship with your elected official is an important part of being an effective change-maker. There are several ways to build positive relationships with your elected officials, including contacting their offices, scheduling in-person visits, inviting them to a group meeting, attending town hall meetings, or testifying at committee hearings.

Emailing your legislator is a first step, but not the best way to engage them. Let the legislator know of exciting events happening in their district. Invite them to participate in events or to speak at your group meeting. Schedule meetings with the legislator and their staff in the district office. Be specific. Do you want them to support a bill? Author new legislation? File an amendment to an existing bill? This is your time to let the member know what you need. Consider providing them with a small, unique “leave behind” — a creative way to remind them of your issue and your main points.

*“Hearing from real people about the potential impacts of bills on their lives is important when we are discussing bills and budgets. Your voice makes a difference.”*

**Rep. Richard Peña Raymond**  
Texas House of Representatives



### TAKE CARE

Many leaders are plagued by their self-doubting internal dialogue, and this can impact their confidence in their leadership skills. Paying attention to our thoughts during these moments, we can see how negative and self-defeating they are to our confidence. Take control of your inner dialogue so you can be on your side in moments that count:

- ▶ Think best case, not worst case.
- ▶ Ask yourself: If not you, then who?
- ▶ Recall all the accomplishments you've achieved in life.
- ▶ Do not let your emotions rule your thoughts or behavior — control the impulse to react emotionally.
- ▶ Replace self-defeating language with empowering statements.
- ▶ Take along a friend or mentor who brings you strength.

## USING YOUR EXPERIENCES: *Change Lives Across the Country*

Using your voice and expertise as a family leader with lived experience at the national level can impact the lives of children, youth, and families across the country. More and more often, there is recognition of the need for family input in the development of system regulations, service funding, and standards of practice in the child-serving systems. There are several ways in which you can use your leadership skills at the national level and participate in system improvement, including:

### CHANGING LAWS

Much of the work done to track bills and change state laws is very similar to the work needed to change federal laws. Reach out to your elected officials and let them know your thoughts and opinions about the bills and issues that matter to you. Schedule a meeting with them or their staff members when they are in the district. Attend any meetings they hold. Invite them to events that may be useful to their work or that will help them and their staff get to know you and your organization.

### REVIEWING GRANT APPLICATIONS

The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) chooses peer reviewers based on their knowledge, education, and experience. If you have program experience, education, and the skills and abilities to analyze grant applications, you may qualify to become a Peer Reviewer. Peer Reviewers read and score grant applications sent to SAMHSA for federal funding for substance use treatment, mental health treatment, or recovery services and supports. Time commitments vary, but generally the role requires a concentrated focus over a fairly short period of time. Reviewers usually receive taxable compensation for their services.

### BEING A PUBLIC SPEAKER

Use your voice as a means of sharing your experience, strength, and hope with others by becoming a speaker at conferences or events. Start by speaking at conferences in your local area, refining your presentation and speaking skills, and then take advantage of opportunities to host workshops or speak at state and national conferences or meetings. Many conferences send out a “Call for Papers” or a “Call for Presenters” with specific requests for presenters to submit an application.

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Whether you choose to use your voice to influence policies and opinions at local levels by attending local board meetings, or whether you provide testimony at legislative committee hearings, your voice matters. Harness your passion and energy and use your voice to change policies, laws, and rules to benefit children and families.

# Identifying Important Issues



Consider the needs or issues of the children, youth, and families in your community, state, and across the country. How can you as a family leader address these needs and support change that benefits families at the community, state, or national level?

Below, list a few of the needs or issues that are important to you. Brainstorm ways that you can become involved and identify what you need or who you can talk to in order to get started.

<b>What need or issue do you want to address?</b>	<b>What action can I take as a leader and at what level?</b>	<b>What do I need or who can I contact to get started?</b>

**CONCLUSION**

*"I am a mother of two children who have mental health challenges, and I am not ashamed to share that information. I joined the Child Advisory Committee with our local MHMR because I want services for all children and families struggling with mental illness. You can feel so alone. It's easy to shut down and shut the door to people in your life. However, when you speak about it, you release it. You receive help, and you have the opportunity to help others. I have been told that I am a leader. It sometimes feels like I am an explorer just trying to navigate this journey."*

**Heather Parker**  
Fort Worth, TX

**O**ur passions and life experiences drive our actions. Children's mental health needs warriors with heart who are willing to be the voice for the most vulnerable in our communities. As caregivers of children who have experienced mental health challenges, our journeys may not have been exactly what we planned when we started. May you safely navigate the twists and turns of those winding roads that make up what we call life, and provide hope to someone else along the way.

There have been many who have gone before us, lighting the path. Our hope is through the journey of this workbook, you will be able to take what you have learned about yourself and use your story to continue to be a beacon of light for those coming behind you. Let the passion that has been ignited make the world a better place for our children.

The purpose of this workbook is to give you knowledge, tips and confidence, but also to let you know that you are not alone. There are many family leaders in Texas and across the country, and we truly believe that together we can make a difference. We have a strong voice empowered by our own stories.

Wherever you are on your journey, we applaud you for taking the next steps to becoming a family leader. We need and appreciate you. Now that we are reaching the end of our journey in this workbook, we would like to ask you to always let your story guide you. Please take care of yourself, and travel safe!

# SPECIAL THANKS

## Contributors

**Barbara Granger** · *Family Engagement Specialist*, Texas System of Care, Texas Institute for Excellence in Mental Health

Barbara is responsible for helping communities identify and cultivate strong partnerships between families and systems. She also helps family members strengthen their leadership skills to create a more united voice to impact system change, ensuring family voice is heard throughout the state of Texas. As Texas' lead family contact for children's mental health, co-lead of the Texas Family Voice Network, and co-chair for the Children and Youth Behavioral Health Subcommittee, she was instrumental in planning and bringing this workbook to fruition, and served as a contributing writer.

**Candace Aylor** · *Former Co-Chair*, National Child Traumatic Stress Network's Partnering with Youth and Family; *Health Policy & Systems Consultant*

Candace is a mother, nurse, consultant, and fierce advocate. She uses her lived experience, knowledge, skills, and passion to improve children's mental wellness. Candace has focused her advocacy efforts to elevate the value of family and youth voices in the systems transformation process. Candace was a contributing writer and leader for this workbook.

**Veronica Martinez** · *Founder*, Better Beehive Project

Veronica's inspiration for all of her projects always stems from the families she has served in the past and continues to serve in children's mental health for Travis County. Veronica was a contributing writer and leader for this workbook. Visit [betterbeehive.org](http://betterbeehive.org) for more about Veronica and her projects.

**Rebecca Marquez** · *Training Specialist*, Human Dynamics and Management Team, Texas Workforce Commission

Before coming to TWC, Rebecca was the wraparound implementation specialist for the Texas Institute for Excellence in Mental Health. She is a member of the Texas Family Voice Network, a mission which she is passionate about. Rebecca holds a Master's degree in Education and a Bachelor's degree in Social Work. Rebecca was a contributing writer and leader for this workbook.

**Millie Sweeney** · *Deputy Director*, Family-Run Executive Director Leadership Association (FREDLA)

Millie has over twenty years' direct experience in navigating systems with and on behalf of families, advocating at both the individual and policy level, and building collaborations with professionals and systems. Leveraging both her professional and personal experiences as a parent, she specializes in grant and program development, staff supervision and training, family leadership, parent peer support and family engagement, curriculum development, and systems of care. She holds a Master's of Science degree in Clinical Psychology and resides in middle Tennessee.

## Partners

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**  
[samhsa.gov](http://samhsa.gov)

**Texas System of Care**  
[txsystemofcare.org](http://txsystemofcare.org)

**Texas Institute for Excellence in Mental Health**  
[sites.utexas.edu/mental-health-institute](http://sites.utexas.edu/mental-health-institute)

**Texas Family Voice Network**  
[txfvn.org](http://txfvn.org)

**Family-Run Executive Director Leadership Association (FREDLA)**  
[fredla.org](http://fredla.org)

## Acknowledgments

**Stephany Bryan** · *Senior Program Officer, Consumer & Family Liaison*, Hogg Foundation

**Donna Fagan, CFP** · *Community Education and Outreach Coordinator*, Bluebonnet Trails Community Services

**Cara Santucci** · *Communications Strategist*, Texas Institute for Excellence in Mental Health

Design by **Jameson Cardenas** · *Communications and Social Marketing Lead*, Texas Institute for Excellence in Mental Health

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# RESOURCES

## General

### ★ Amplify Your Voice: Advancing Your Skills as a Family Leader

[txfvn.files.wordpress.com/2018/12/TxFVN-Amplify-Your-Voice-20181213-1.pdf](https://txfvn.files.wordpress.com/2018/12/TxFVN-Amplify-Your-Voice-20181213-1.pdf)

### The Power of Telling Your Story

[fredla.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Power\\_of\\_Your\\_Story.pdf](https://fredla.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Power_of_Your_Story.pdf)

### Balancing Your Life at Work and Home

[ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2790668](https://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2790668)

### Stress Management: Know Your Triggers

[drugs.com/mca/stress-management-know-your-triggers](https://drugs.com/mca/stress-management-know-your-triggers)

### Developing Your Support System

[socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit/additional-self-care-resources/developing-your-support-system.html](https://socialwork.buffalo.edu/resources/self-care-starter-kit/additional-self-care-resources/developing-your-support-system.html)

### State Advocacy Toolkit

[aacap.org/aacap/Advocacy/How\\_to\\_Be\\_an\\_Advocate/State\\_Advocacy\\_Toolkit.aspx](https://aacap.org/aacap/Advocacy/How_to_Be_an_Advocate/State_Advocacy_Toolkit.aspx)

### Civic Engagement Toolbox for Self-Advocates

[autisticadvocacy.org/policy/toolkits/civic](https://autisticadvocacy.org/policy/toolkits/civic)

### Influencing Policy Development

[ctb.ku.edu/en/influencing-policy-development](https://ctb.ku.edu/en/influencing-policy-development)

### Lobby Day Toolkit

[socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=--pBgNuwBVg%3D&portalid=0](https://socialworkers.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=--pBgNuwBVg%3D&portalid=0)

### Advocacy Toolkit

[pta.org/home/advocacy/advocacy-resources/Advocacy-Toolkit](https://pta.org/home/advocacy/advocacy-resources/Advocacy-Toolkit)

To learn about your elected officials and track bills at the national level, see GovTrack ([govtrack.us](https://govtrack.us)). Register and log in to create a bill tracking docket that will provide you with the latest information on the bills you are tracking. Visit [govtrack.us/congress/bills](https://govtrack.us/congress/bills) to find specific bills, and visit [govtrack.us/congress/members](https://govtrack.us/congress/members) to find out who represents you in Congress and what bills they have sponsored.

To learn more about becoming a peer grant reviewer for SAMHSA, visit [samhsa.gov/grants/review/grant-review-opportunities](https://samhsa.gov/grants/review/grant-review-opportunities).

## Texas-Specific

### Texas Administrative Code

[texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac\\$ext.viewtac](https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.viewtac)

### Texas Register

Current and previous 12 months: [sos.state.tx.us/texreg/index.shtml](https://sos.state.tx.us/texreg/index.shtml); Older than 12 months: [texashistory.unt.edu/explore/collections/TR](https://texashistory.unt.edu/explore/collections/TR); Search the Texas Register option on the homepage ([sos.state.tx.us/texreg/index.shtml](https://sos.state.tx.us/texreg/index.shtml))

### Texas State Government

The Governor's website ([gov.texas.gov/organization/appointments/positions](https://gov.texas.gov/organization/appointments/positions)) provides a list of all appointment positions.

To be considered by the Governor's Office for a special appointment to a committee, visit [gov.texas.gov/organization/appointments/process](https://gov.texas.gov/organization/appointments/process).

To learn how a bill becomes a law in Texas, visit [house.texas.gov/about-us/bill](https://house.texas.gov/about-us/bill).

To find your Texas representative, visit [fyi.capitol.texas.gov/Home.aspx](https://fyi.capitol.texas.gov/Home.aspx).



