

DATA -INFORMED AND FAMILY-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING: EVIDENCE IS CO-PILOT

**NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN'S
MENTAL HEALTH
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*National Federation of Families
for Children's Mental Health*

INTRODUCTION

This guidebook is intended for family leaders in the children’s mental health arena. Others may find the material useful, but will have to make adaptations for the language that is specific to children’s mental health.

“Evidence is Co-Pilot” was launched in 2009 as a Learning Collaborative webinar series, which culminated in the creation of this guidebook. In 2014, an updated Learning Collaborative series, including the revised guidebook, was presented.

We hope the contents will be useful both in workshop or training sessions as well as for those individuals trying to improve their personal knowledge and skills. We encourage use of any parts of this guidebook but request that you acknowledge and give credit to the National Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health. We welcome feedback regarding this guidebook and are especially interested in learning how useful people may find it and what specific improvements should be made. Please send your comments to the National Federation of Families at www.ffcmh.org, by fax to 240-403-1909, or by telephone to 240-403-1901.

WHY IS THIS TOPIC IMPORTANT?

A core value of the systems of care is the value of family-driven practices. This is defined as “families have a primary decision-making role in the care of their own child, as well as the policies and procedures governing care for all the children in their community, state, tribe, or territory”.

“Family Leader”, for the purposes of this guidebook, is defined as “an individual who has experienced raising a child with social, emotional, or behavioral challenges, and who has knowledge of systems and resources and is prepared to speak for all children and their families”.

CHAPTER ONE: WHAT IS DATA-INFORMED, FAMILY-DRIVEN DECISION MAKING?

Chapter one defines key terms and explores where and how one participates in decision making.

- *Defining data-informed and family-driven*
- *Finding your sphere of influence and understanding how decisions are made within it*
- *Exploring the concepts of smart decision making*

Defining Data-Informed and Family-Driven:

Throughout this guidebook the phrases “data-informed” and “family-driven” are frequently used. In the context of this guidebook as well as the context of our work as leaders in the transformation of the children’s mental health system, the definitions for these terms are as follows:

FAMILY-DRIVEN is a term first used in *Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America*, the final report of the *New Freedom Commission on Mental Health* published in 2003. Subsequently, the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) contracted with the National Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health (National Federation) to engage in an inclusive process of defining the term. Today, the working definition embraces the concept that families have a primary decision making role in the care of their own child, as well as the policies and procedures governing care for all the children in their community, state, tribe, or territory.

The principles include:

- Choosing supports, services and providers
- Setting goals
- Designing and implementing services and supports
- Monitoring outcomes
- Partnering in funding decisions
- Determining the effectiveness of all efforts to promote the mental health and wellbeing of children and youth

DATA-INFORMED is a term that encompasses the conscious use of assessment, revision, and training to drive decision making. Data-informed differs from data-driven in that the data serve as one piece of a multi-faceted decision making process. The National Federation supports and

encourages this focus, understanding that developing our positions on various issues requires something far more thorough and systematic than relying upon the opinions, assumptions, or ideas of just a few people. Indeed, the credibility of advocacy organizations depends upon the ability to bring forth accurate, reliable and valid information. Data are collections of information produced from systematic processes that include many sources and apply scientific methods. The underlying premise is simple....the more informed by data, the better the decision.

Establishing Your Sphere of Influence and Understanding How Decisions are Formulated Within It:

As a family leader, where do you make a difference? Who listens when you speak? Where is it that your input has an impact on decisions that are made? In other words, what is your *sphere of influence*? Take a moment to think about your sphere of influence and in what arenas you currently have a voice in decisions that are being made about the children’s mental health system.

Family leaders may have influence in many areas, including:

- Advocacy organizations
- Local and state governance
- Local and state policy-making
- Educational settings
- Local and state legislative efforts
- Peer to peer programs
- Advisory boards



FOOD FOR THOUGHT!!

WHAT IS YOUR SPHERE OF INFLUENCE?

List the groups or arenas in which you believe you have influence.

Where do you believe you have the most influence and why?

Recall one important group decision that has been influenced by your input. List the reasons you believe your input was utilized.

Now that you have completed this exercise to identify your particular sphere of influence, think about how decisions get made in this arena.

- Who talks the most
- Does everyone get a chance to be heard
- Do people ask clarifying questions and seek to understand one another's perspectives
- What kind of information is considered
- Does the information go beyond personal opinions and preconceived ideas
- Is there truly thoughtful discourse prior to a decision being made
- What is the final decision making process
- Is there one person who has the "final say"
- Is there a vote

These important considerations will help you to prepare to participate in a truly meaningful manner.

Exploring What Goes Into Smart Decision Making:

Know and Acknowledge Your Own Assumptions

One of the biggest barriers to smart decision making can be our personal collection of assumptions. In fact, many people will go so far as to claim they have no assumptions when reality is that we all have them. Our views of the world, the things we believe to be true, are naturally laid upon how we interpret our observations and the results can become far from the truth. Sometimes the assumptions that get in our way are seemingly small. An example of an assumption might be *“all Pitt Bulls are dangerous dogs”*. While walking in the park, I observe a family happily playing with their beautiful, loving, well-mannered Pitt Bull puppy. This observation causes me to rethink my original impression of Pitt Bulls.

Decisions made without a clear examination of the underlying assumptions can be inaccurate, biased and lack credibility. For example if a family advocacy organization decides to limit their Board to family members only because they collectively assume that no one else will promote their mission, they may be missing incredible opportunities. Creating any structure based solely upon one criterion hinders sustained growth and development and limits the overall vision. If instead assumptions are acknowledged, facts are gathered, and options are carefully reviewed, organizations often discover some remarkable allies.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT!!

WHAT ARE YOUR 3 TOP ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT VIOLENCE? (NOT GOOD OR BAD, NOT VALUE JUDGEMENTS, JUST YOUR DEEPEST BELIEFS ABOUT VIOLENCE)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Are you aware of these assumptions whenever you approach information about the occurrence of violence? How can you validate your assumptions? Do you think these assumptions might impact some decisions you make without your awareness?

USING CRITICAL THINKING:

Critical thinking is the ability to carefully and consciously reason your way through your own personal beliefs, assumptions and prejudices to intentionally consider all available information before drawing conclusions. Generally, we make daily decisions, from what to eat for breakfast to which bus to take, to participation in community events, based on our own belief systems. How are our beliefs conceived? For example, why do we think a particular cereal is best for our cholesterol? Both personal and group decisions require critical thinking.

Critical thinking in group decision making:

- Make your own thinking transparent
- Share with others why you think what you think
- Ask others to explain their reasoning
- Focus on the places of real disagreement

USING EVALUATIVE THINKING:

Another important approach to supporting clear decision making is the process of evaluative thinking. Through evaluative thinking we build upon our personal experiences or observations with the same logic an evaluator uses. Let's explore an example:

1. I make an observation. I am driving on a country road and the car in front of me is going at a very slow rate of speed.
2. I check and acknowledge my own personal assumptions. I assume someone driving so slowly on a country road is just out to see the scenery.
3. I acknowledge the conclusions I draw based upon my assumption. This sightseer doesn't care that I am behind him and in a hurry. He is being disrespectful.
4. I gather more information. I see a sign saying "Emergency Animal Hospital – next right turn". I see the right turn signal begin to blink on the car in front of me.
5. I realize what I don't know. The care in front of me may be transporting a seriously injured animal to the emergency hospital.

This process of evaluative thinking creates awareness regarding how your ideas are formulated, helps to establish the limitations of what you know, and begins to identify new information and new resources needed to help you better understand the situation. Evaluator Michael Quinn Patton describes evaluative thinking as "thinking in terms of what is clear, specific, concrete and observable" rather than "thinking in terms of vagueness, generalities, and untested beliefs" (p 153). In the same textbook, *Utilization Focused Evaluation* (Sage Press, 2008), he outlines elements of evaluative thinking.

Evaluative thinking is critical to family leaders. In order to effectively solve problems, make decisions, or decide in a reasonable and reflective way what to believe or what to do, you must utilize evaluative thinking to truly achieve success. This way of thinking is critical to improving the quality of life for children, youth and their families. Here are some of the ways that evaluative thinking can help family leaders:

- Raise vital questions and challenges
- Frame questions and challenge assumptions clearly and precisely
- Assess relevant information
- Arrive at well-reasoned conclusions and solutions
- Think on a broader and more open-minded level

CHAPTER ONE: HIGHLIGHTS

- 1. Definitions of family-driven and data-informed**
- 2. Identification of the arenas where you participate in decision making**
- 3. Definitions of Critical and Evaluative thinking**
- 4. Exploring strategies to improve outcomes as decisions are being made in various contexts**

CHAPTER TWO: IMPROVED DECISION MAKING

Chapter two offers guidelines for decision making. It includes the following topics:

- *Points in the Decision-Making Process*
- *Three Elements of Effective Decision Making*
- *Three Tactics for Improving Decision Making*

POINTS IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS:

Building and sustaining systems that provide evidence-supported services and supports requires meaningful participation and input from a wide variety of stakeholders. A robust consensus building process is critical if we are to ensure that children, youth and families achieve the outcomes they desire and enjoy a substantial quality of life. As family leaders, we have a primary decision making role in the designing, building, evaluating and sustaining of successful systems. Our expertise comes from the experiences of raising our own child with his or her personal experience of social, emotional or behavioral challenges. Our expertise may also come from long term membership in the community and our knowledge of the culture, socioeconomic strengths and weaknesses and the history of our community. Our expertise may come from having transferred into the community from one with strategies that could inform this community. Typically our expertise includes an intimate working knowledge of multiple child, youth and family systems of services and supports. This expertise can and should inform local, state and community progress. This combined expertise and experience can and should inform many of the thousands of decision points along the journey of transforming children's mental health.

THREE ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE DECISION-MAKING:

- 1. Be Connected to a Large Network:** Strive to be connected and informed by a large network of culturally, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse families in your community so that you can speak from the collective experience and not just your own voice. This collective voice facilitates a strong sense of collaboration and maximizes the message of "not about us without us".
- 2. Be an Effective Listener:** Aim to thoroughly understand the points of views of all stakeholders before formulating a response. If you are not willing to listen to and consider other's perspectives, how can you expect them to listen to or consider yours? Remember the Golden Rule for great communication....."Listening is NOT waiting to talk".

3. Be Well Informed by Data: Decisions should be informed by data that explains the problem and supports the direction to be taken to resolve it.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT!!

Please conduct a self-assessment of your strengths and challenges in the three elements of the decision making process, as identified in this guidebook.

CONNECTED TO A LARGE NETWORK	EFFECTIVE LISTENER	INFORMED BY DATA
Strengths:	Strengths:	Strengths:
Challenges:	Challenges:	Challenges:

If you are working in a group, share your assessment with others and gather feedback about whether or not your team members concur with your assessment of your strengths and challenges.

THREE STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING DECISION MAKING:

- 1. BE COLLABORATIVE:** Being collaborative does not simply mean working together. It means working together effectively. Working together effectively includes listening carefully to others and suspending biases. Be open to new ideas and tactics. Always analyze the pros and cons of the situation and focus upon the bigger picture you are aiming to accomplish. Be a role model for the concept that we are all better together and that the greater good can only be attained through our collaborative efforts.
- 2. BE ACCOUNTABLE:** Be willing to be held accountable for the results. This is a process and it must come with credibility and stability. Take responsibility for this process, with strengths and weaknesses included.
- 3. STAY FOCUSED:** In order to be effective, a clear vision and razor sharp focus on the goals to be accomplished are critical. If focus is lost, the efforts of all stakeholders may be compromised.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT!!

Please conduct a self-assessment of your strengths and challenges in the three strategies for improving decision making.

COLLABORATIVE	ACCOUNTABLE	FOCUSED
Strengths:	Strengths:	Strengths:
Weaknesses:	Weaknesses:	Weaknesses:

If you are working in a group, share your assessment with others and gather feedback about whether or not your team members concur with your assessment of your strengths and challenges.

CHAPTER TWO: HIGHLIGHTS

1. Core competencies in effective decision making
2. Effective elements and tactics for decision making
3. Identification of roles in the decision making process

CHAPTER THREE: GARNERING STRENGTH THROUGH FAMILY NETWORKS

This chapter will focus on components that will strengthen the ability of family leaders to be family-driven.

- *Family-to-Family Network Analysis*
- *Re-examining the Network Analysis with a Cultural and Linguistic Lens*
- *Direct and Indirect Communication*
- *Decision Making Authority*

INTRODUCTION TO ASSESSING YOUR NETWORK

The following 5 pages will provide an in-depth overview and description of network analysis. You will need the following:

- Large piece of paper (flip chart works well)
- Red, blue and green pencils or markers

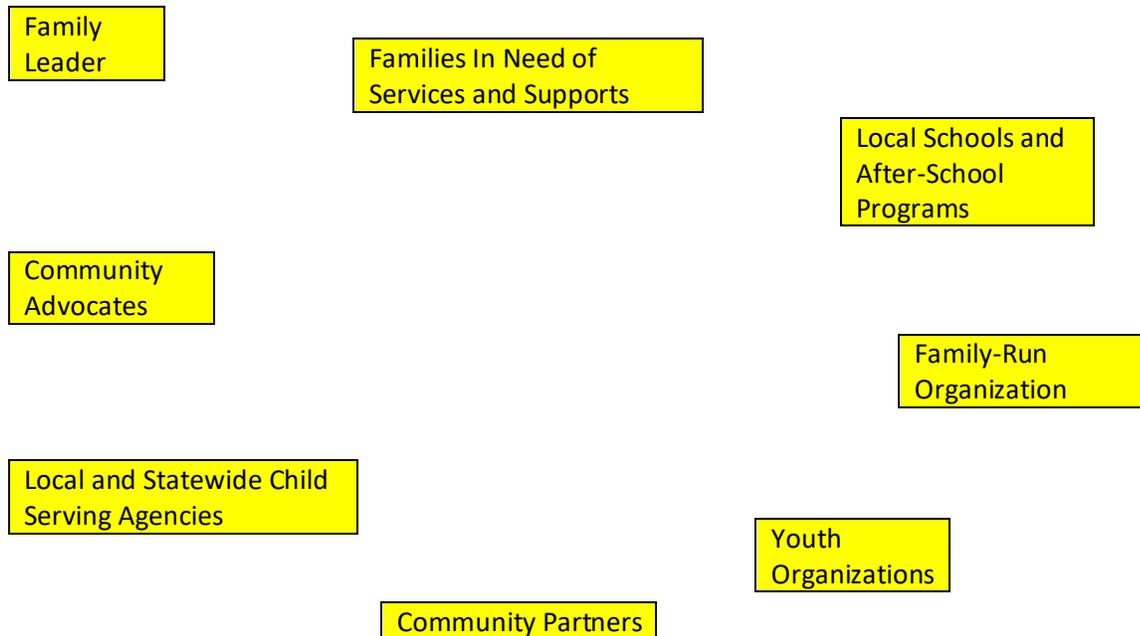
This exercise typically takes about 30 minutes to complete by yourself and additional time will be needed if this is a group exercise. We recommend that you keep the completed exercise as a reference point as you gather new partners or make revisions to the network you identify.

FAMILY-TO-FAMILY NETWORK ANALYSIS

This is a quick exercise to assess linkages between families and youth in various roles in your community. Weak or missing links can be identified and strategies can then be built to make stronger connections and improve the flow of information. Many of the examples use titles, roles and other entities from federally funded system of care communities. You can replace them with the ones that fit your community.

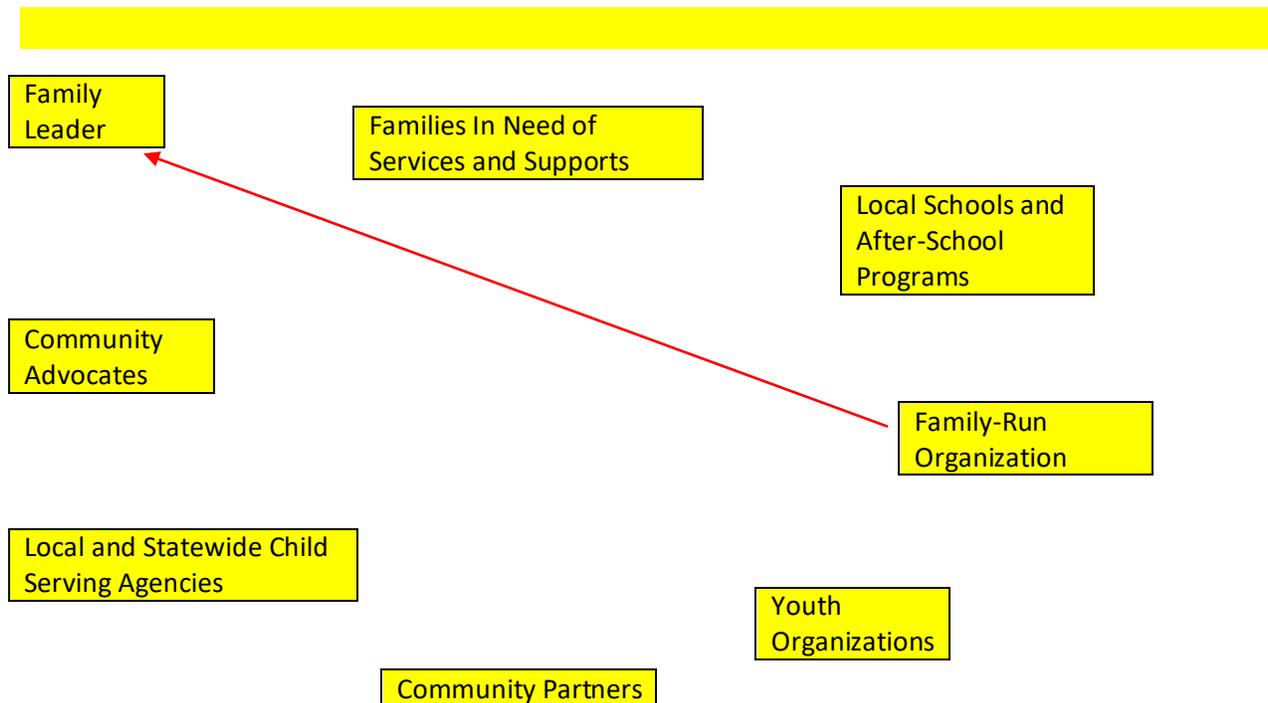
STEP 1:

List all of the groups in which families might have membership in your community, all the groups of youth, and all of the related agencies and other partners. On a large sheet of paper draw a circle or box with a label for each. This exercise begins with families, for simplicity's sake. You can add youth categories and missing family categories as needed to better represent your community.



STEP 2:

Using a **red** pen or pencil, draw arrows indicating the direct flow of information between families. For example, does the family-run organization share information and resources with the family leader?

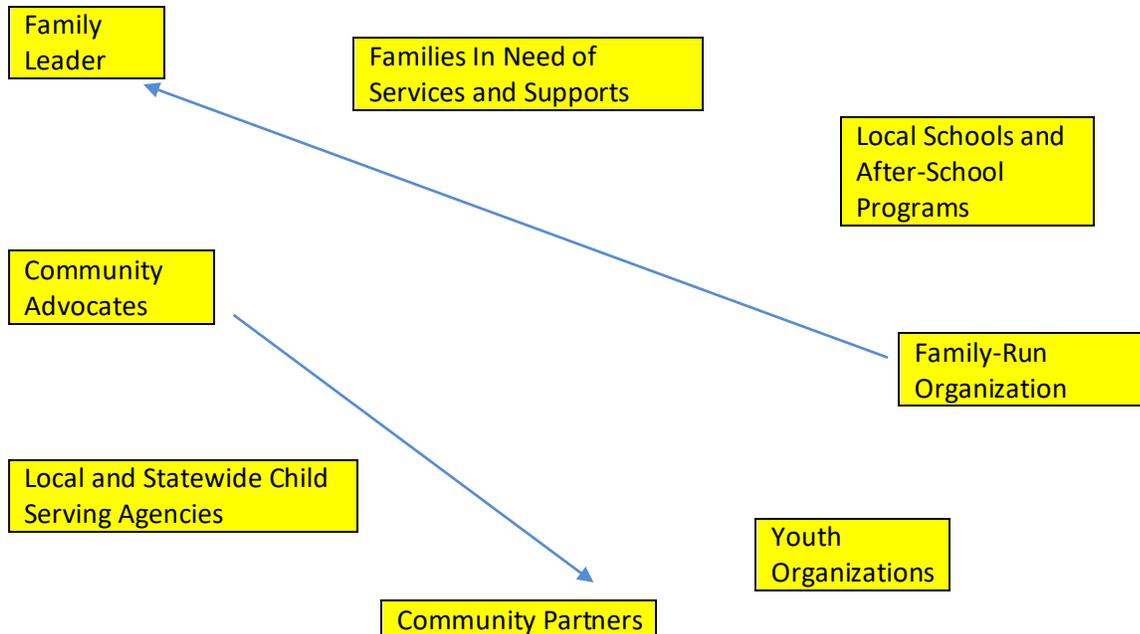


When you have completed this step, stop and review.....

- Where do direct communications occur?
- What strategies support the direct flow of information?
- Where are there no direct communications?
- What strategies could be used to create them?

STEP 3:

Using a **blue** pen or pencil, draw arrows indicating the *indirect* flow of information between families. For example, do the community partners make presentations or provide trainings that are accessible to community advocates?

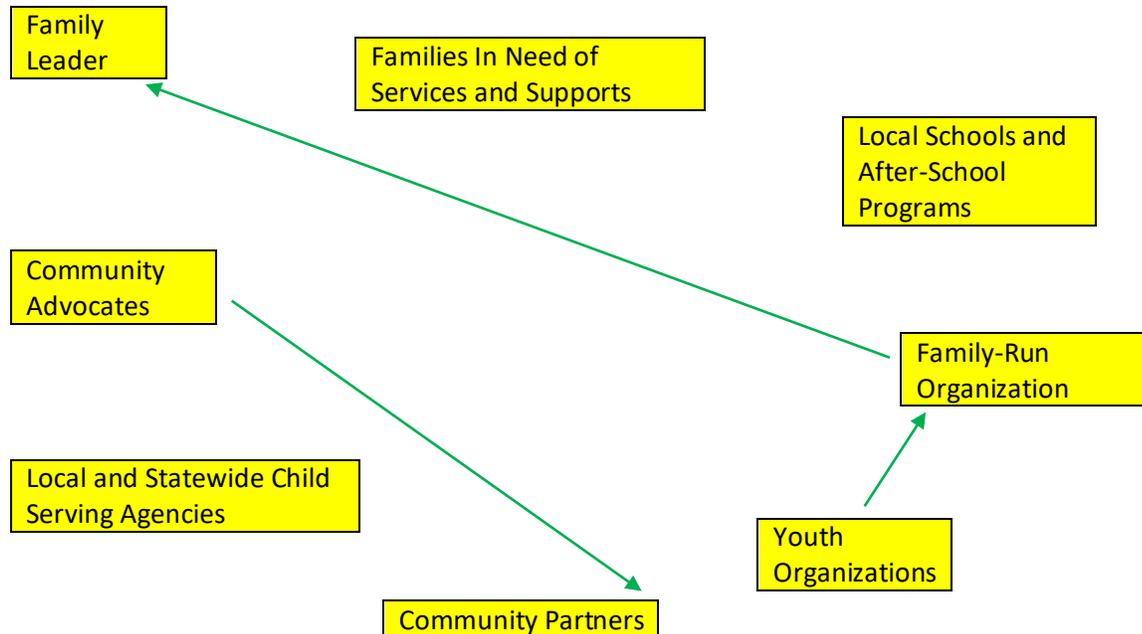


When you have completed this step, stop and study.....

- Where are there indirect communications?
- How effective are they for ensuring that all families who need to know are being given access to the information?
- Should direct communications be enhanced or are they currently sufficient?

STEP 4:

Using a **green** pen or pencil, draw arrows indicating the *direction of any decision making authority* that exists between these entities. For example, does the family-run organization have a role in the work being done by the youth organization?



When you have completed this step, stop and study.....

- Related to services, supports and funding, does any family role, group of families, or family organization have power over another? (Considering that decision-making authority can be power)
- Does such authority influence the flow of information about the systems and supports in any way?
- How can organizational dynamics be strengthened?

STEP 5:

After reviewing all information gathered during the previous four steps, answer the following questions.

1. Where are the strengths in your family-to-family network?

2. Where are the weaknesses in your family-to-family network?

3. What are the opportunities to turn weaknesses into strengths?

4. Are there threats that can be turned into opportunities?

CHAPTER THREE: HIGHLIGHTS

1. Introduction to a tool for realistically assessing the community network
2. Understanding the concepts of direct and indirect communication
3. Identification of strategies to determine the flow of communication

CHAPTER FOUR: RESOURCES AND PUBLICALLY AVAILABLE DATA SOURCES

In this chapter we explore data available to the public. This chapter will cover the following:

- *Types of Data*
- *Critical Questions to Ask of Data*
- *Finding Publically Available Data*
- *Creating a Reference List to Ease Future Explorations*

TYPES OF DATA:

There are multiple types of data. Depending upon the questions to be answered, differing data types may be utilized. Some types of data include:

- **Quantitative:** This type of data is utilized for measuring through numbers, occurrences, and frequencies. Examples of quantitative data results include “China produces more pigs than all other countries combined”. This data can be measured by counting the numbers of pigs produced and determining the result. Another example is “There are over 8 million lightning strikes on Earth each day”. Through careful measuring of the frequency of lightning strikes, this data can be determined.
- **Qualitative:** This type of data is more subjective and more anecdotal and allows researchers to draw conclusions. Satisfaction surveys are a great example of qualitative data. Some examples of qualitative data include “Women report higher satisfaction rates about marriage than men”. This data relies on an accurate reporting and satisfaction is difficult to measure.

MEASURES OF DATA:

While there are many measures of data, three that are routinely used are “reliability”, “validity”, and “generalizability”. Definitions for these measures include:

- **Reliability:** Will repeat measures of this evaluation or test produce the same results? An example of reliability would be “no matter who measures it, the sun comes up every morning”.
- **Validity:** The evaluation measures what it says it measures.
- **Generalizability:** The same results can be predicted across other groups or in other circumstances.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS TO ASK OF THE DATA:

Prior to conducting a search for relevant research, evaluation, or related data you must first be prepared with criteria for selecting data you will want to use. While finding data can be time consuming and challenging, the greatest challenge is organizing your data needs. Just like the researchers who produced the data, you have to do a little research of your own. Asking critical questions of the data will help you determine whether the data meet your need. Practice reviewing data sources with the following questions:

1. What question was this study intended to answer and by who's definition? (For example, if you are looking for studies of family empowerment, you will want to know how the researchers define the concept of family empowerment).
2. Who conducted the study and why were they asking the question? Can you determine anything about their perspectives, motivations, assumptions or funding sources? (For example, if you are looking to find good information about the side effects of a particular drug, do you want to rely solely upon research conducted by the company that sells the drug?)
3. How was the study conducted? Who was asked the questions? When were they asked? How many people were asked? (For example, if the study on prevailing fashion was conducted in 1968 and men in Australia provided the answers, would this answer your search for data on current fashion trends in the U.S.?)

FINDING PUBLICALLY AVAILABLE DATA:

Publically available data is produced from systematic processes that gather a lot of information from many sources and apply scientific methods to understand what it means and is more reliable and more valid than simple opinions. Remember our underlying premise in this guidebook...if we have good data, we'll make better decisions regarding the health and well being of our children, youth and families.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT!!

List the top three sources you rely upon for information and why you use them.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

When you find good information, utilize it responsibly:

- Never use personal or family stories without permission from the author
- Always use reputable sources of information
- Always give credit where credit is due. Provide proper citations.

Start with obvious sources:

- Social media sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram
- Internet
- Newspapers
- Other advocacy groups or governmental agencies focusing on similar issues

Social media sites offer a wealth of information and are invaluable when searching for public opinion on any topic. Sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram put you in touch with the world and allow you the opportunity to learn how others are approaching the same issues that are important to you. Through social media you can become involved in support groups, topical chat rooms, and a variety of other avenues for enhancing your knowledge on any topic.

Perhaps our most vibrant source of data is the Internet. This technology brings with it easy to use search engines such as Google or Bing. In fact, go to the search engine provided in the tool bar of your Internet provider's page. Type in "publicly available data" and be amazed at the list that comes up. In addition, each search engine has its own specialized approaches. For example, you can go to the Google website and download the tools for searching academic literature through Google Scholar.

Specialty websites, such as those found in the following list, are great resources that you might want to mark as favorites on your internet application:

www.PubMed.gov is sponsored by the National Institutes of Health and the National Library of Medicine and contains 18 million citations

www.childhealthdata.org is sponsored by the federal Maternal and Child Health Bureau and administered by the National Center for Health Statistics. Prevalence and impact data for a range of children's health issues are available based upon surveys from 2003 and 2007. The surveys include children ages 0 – 17 in 50 states plus the District of Columbia.

www.cdc.gov/YRBSS includes fact sheets, publications, data files, power point presentations and a do it yourself guide for developing presentations about youth risk behaviors. The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Systems (YRBSS) monitors priority risk behaviors among youth and young adults.

Many newspapers are available online. To use a newspaper as a source of information, be sure to go further with your search. What is the basis of their information? Is it someone's personal observation? Is it their opinion? Did they interview a researcher?

Historical searches of newspapers are great sources of information about previous community initiatives, successes, changes, and failures. They are perhaps not the best source for statistics about children's mental health unless they are citing a reputable source such as Data Trends.

Explore the work of likeminded advocacy groups and governmental agencies. These organizations typically have a wealth of data which can be utilized in formulating your position on critical decisions.

CHAPTER FOUR: HIGHLIGHTS

- 1. Strategies for formulating data questions**
- 2. Definitions of "qualitative" and "quantitative" research**
- 3. Definitions of "reliability", "validity" and "generalizability"**
- 4. Strategies for determining which data is pertinent to the identified need**
- 5. Potential tools to assist with the identification of publicly available data resources**
- 6. Identification of social media outlets and resources for exploring publicly available data**

CHAPTER FIVE: USING DATA TO SOLIDIFY YOUR MESSAGE

Are you determining the best strategies to assist in influencing a particular decision? How will you use data to deliver your message? In this chapter we will explore the following:

- *Clarifying your message and supporting it with data*
- *Responding to opposing data or arguments.*

CLARIFYING YOUR MESSAGE AND SUPPORTING IT WITH DATA:

Family leaders and advocates are most often attempting to share one of the following:

- This is the problem and this is who it impacts
- This is the cause of the problem
- This is a solution that has proven effective
- This is a strategy that has been used in the past that did not prove effective
- This is the cost

Family leaders and advocates are most often attempting to share these items with the following:

- Colleagues on influential committees and boards
- Service Providers
- Administrators
- Researchers
- Legislators
- Other family members
- The public in general

Communication is the cornerstone of civilization. Our communication may be verbal or nonverbal. It may be overt or subliminal. Depending upon the situation, we may be called upon to communicate to individuals or to large groups. Our ability to communicate effectively will often determine the success or failure of our efforts. Vast resources of information are available to assist in learning new and more effective communication strategies. While communication styles are often driven by personal characteristics, successful communicators tailor their styles to best meet the needs of their audience.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT!!

Create a list of communication tips that you have discovered. Example.....communication is not complete until it is heard and understood.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

With your own list of communication tips, let's look at how to include the use of data into your message. In years past, family leaders were told that the most powerful way to deliver a message or to influence a decision, especially a policy decision, was by telling personal stories of how children's mental health challenges and the lack of access to effective treatments had impacted their lives. In today's world, it is increasingly important to include empirical data, that is, data that comes from a scientific approach.

THE MESSAGE: USING DATA TO HIGHLIGHT THE PROBLEM AND ITS IMPACT

Most of us, as family leaders, begin with our personal information. Our ideas about what is wrong come from our personal experiences and those of the other families with whom we network. Finding data to support our ideas and perceptions is a great opportunity for a reality check. Have you ever been upset about a "problem" only to find out that no one else perceived the issue as problematic? Or, have you ever thought something is a problem only to discover that it is a much bigger problem than you had originally thought? Here is where the rubber meets the road for us as advocates. We need to properly evaluate situations to the greatest degree possible.

Around 1980, a family member decided the lack of seat belts on school buses was a problem. First, she talked with other parents at the bus stop. Some were equally concerned about this and others were adamantly opposed. The second group of parents was not convinced that seatbelts would prevent injury, but they were sure it would cost money and result in higher taxes. The local school department's administrative office responded to an inquiry saying that school buses were already safe because they were large and bright yellow. The next stop for this determined family member was the state school department, who stood by the local school administration's view that school buses were already safe enough. The state department of transportation said they didn't collect data about school bus accidents because there were

so few of them, however, a search at the local library of news reports about school buses in accidents turned up a different story.

If we pause here, we see that we have several audiences and several kinds of data needed to help highlight the issue.

WHO?	INFORMATION NEEDED?
Parents against seat belts on school buses	Data that prove seat belts save lives and perhaps data to underscore the need, such as information that demonstrates how many children are seriously injured in school bus accidents.
Local school department administrative office	Data that show the frequency of school bus accidents
State school department	Data that demonstrates that school buses are involved in serious accidents that reveals the number of children injured in these accidents

The priority “problem” has shifted. There were no seat belts on buses but the problem that needed to be addressed first was that no one thought it was an issue and no one had collected data. So, before tackling the seat belt issue, the first step was to address the lack of data.

The focus of this example is to demonstrate that searching for data to support any advocacy position can easily lead to problem clarification....is the problem what you think it is? Does clarifying the problem change the strategies to be used?

The identified problem will help to determine the best source for the data. What is your primary advocacy issue today? Where are the data to support this as a significant problem and to assist you in understanding the impact of the problem?

THE MESSAGE: USING DATA TO SHOW THE CAUSE

Once awareness is raised about a problem, we usually need to point to the cause to advocate for change that will eliminate or mediate the source. Cause and effect data requires the most rigorous research methods. Think about the ongoing debate about whether or not the United States should engage in warfare in distant nations. While everyone has an opinion on the moral issue, it is equally important to seek objective data to fully argue financial, humanitarian, and political aspects of this debate.

THE MESSAGE: USING DATA TO DEMONSTRATE THAT SOMETHING WORKS OR DOES NOT WORK

Imagine that it is the time of year when budgets are being developed and you, as a family leader, want to be sure that the services and supports that appear to be working in your community are preserved or that those that do not appear to produce positive outcomes are eliminated. What data do you need? Data demonstrating that services and supports work generally come from program evaluation and is called *outcome data*. Perhaps the task at hand is to ensure that your local family advocacy organization is funded. How can you prove it is effective and should be sustained? For example, can you find satisfaction levels of constituents?

YOUR AUDIENCE: CONTEXT AND CULTURE

Earlier in this chapter there was an exercise about communication tips. An example offered in that exercise includes the adage that the higher up in an organization, system or government agency a person is, the less time they will have to listen to your message. In addition to knowing how much time your audience has to listen to you, it is critical to know what is important to them. Ensure that your message and data are ***useful and relevant*** to the people you are talking with!

Above all, ensure that race, ethnicity and culture are considered as you craft your messages. Consider the race, ethnicity and culture from each of the following perspectives:

- Your own
- Those who will be impacted by the decision about to be made
- Those participating in this decision
- Those who developed the data you are using
- Those who were the subjects of any study producing the data you are using



FOOD FOR THOUGHT!!

DISCUSSION: WITH OTHER ADVOCATES IN YOUR ORGANIZATION OR GROUP, READ THE FOLLOWING SCENARIOS AND DISCUSS THE QUESTION: “WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF RACE, CULTURE AND ETHNICITY FOR EACH OF THE “PLAYERS” AND ON THE FINAL OUTCOME?”

SCENARIO: The Executive Director of a family run organization sits on the governance council of the local children’s mental health system. She is Caucasian, middle class. The council membership is 80% Caucasian, 15% African American, and 5% Hispanic. All members are middle class, highly educated professionals. An Evidence Based Practice (EBP) has been recommended to this community and the governance council has met to make a decision about purchasing this EBP. The EBP has been proven to reduce youth suicide. It was developed and tested with Caucasian adolescents in rural settings. The community is currently experiencing a high suicide rate among Native youth who live on a reservation and commute into this rural town for schooling.

SCENARIO: The Executive Director of a family run organization sits on the governance council of the local children’s mental health system. He is Hispanic, from a vulnerable socio-economic background. The council membership is 50% Hispanic, 25% African American, 15% Caucasian, and 10% Asian. The majority of members are members of the same community as the Executive Director. An EBP has been recommended to this community and the governance council has met to make a decision about purchasing this EBP. This EBP has been proven to reduce the incidence of substance abuse amongst adolescent African American girls in rural settings. This urban community is currently experiencing increasingly high rates of substance abuse amongst preadolescent, middle-class, Caucasian males.

WHICH COMES FIRST: THE MESSAGE OR THE DATA?

Throughout this guidebook, the approach has varied from discovering data and deciding who to tell to knowing your message and searching for data to support your position. A warning as we near the end of this guidebook...it doesn't matter which comes first, what matters is that your source is **credible** and that your understanding of the data is thorough. Find champions who can help. Include academicians and evaluators in your network. Use them to confirm that you are interpreting and using data correctly. **ALWAYS ENSURE THAT YOU HAVE A THOROUGH UNDERSTANDING OF THE MESSAGE THAT YOU WISH TO DELIVER!**

RESPONDING TO OPPOSING DATA OR ARGUMENTS

There are volumes in the library about engaging in debate, negotiating and resolving differing perspectives. For family advocates and leaders, we believe there are five basic steps:

- Listen, listen, listen
- Ask clarifying questions about the information or position others are putting forward
- Verify that you understand others' perspectives
- Seek the point where you have a common agreement, understanding or goal and acknowledge it out loud
- Choose your battles! You can continue to argue. You can suggest more data is needed. You can agree to disagree. You can compromise. Above all, be strategic with your energy and your influence. Choose your battles and choose them wisely.

CHAPTER FIVE: HIGHLIGHTS:

1. Strategies for clarifying your message and supporting it with data
2. Strategies for responding to data that opposes your position
3. Tactics for utilizing data to demonstrate effectiveness
4. Creating culturally responsive messages



FINAL TIPS FOR INTERPRETING DATA!

- ✓ **Organize the data into a table**
- ✓ **Graph the data if necessary**
- ✓ **Look for trends or patterns in the data. Different studies may reach different conclusions on the same topic.**
- ✓ **Make one or more inferences from the data, then compare the inferences with what you already know about the topic**
- ✓ **Review your work to determine if you've made any errors or need to examine more data**