



National Research Center for Parents with Disabilities
Parents Empowering Parents
Padres Empoderando a Padres

Partnering with Parents & Families to Promote Positive Outcomes

Joanne Nicholson, PhD

May 16, 2022

jnicholson@brandeis.edu





Acknowledgements

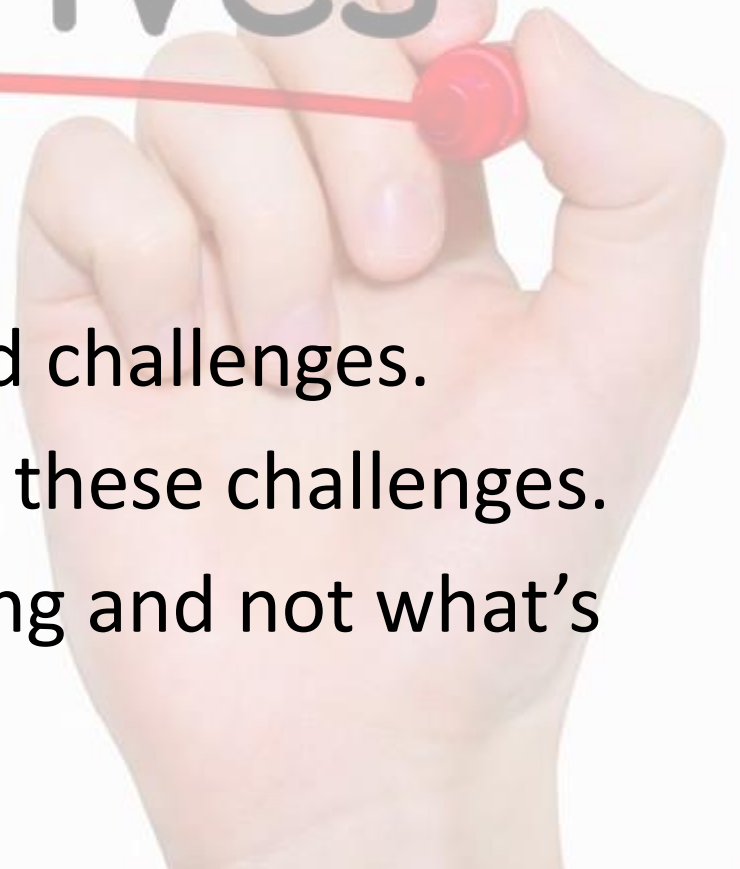
- Funded by the National Institute for Disability, Independent Living, & Rehabilitation Research (#90DP6E0001-001-00).
- Key Partner - Massachusetts Department of Mental Health.
- The statements & conclusions in this presentation are solely ours & should not be construed as representing or being endorsed by NIDILRR, the federal government or MA/DMH.
- No conflicts or disclosures.





Objectives

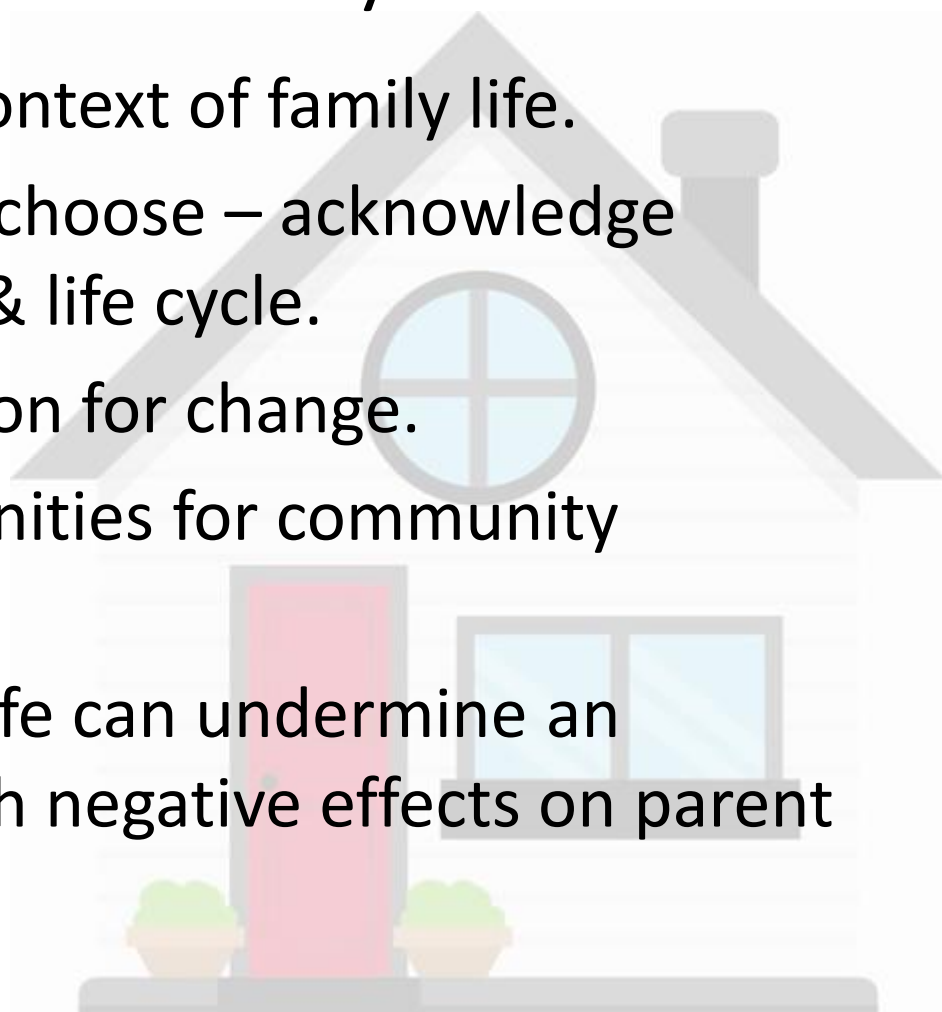
- To give parents a voice.
- To identify key issues and challenges.
- To suggest ways to meet these challenges.
- “To focus on what’s strong and not what’s wrong...”





Why parenting, wellness & family life?

- Recovery occurs in the context of family life.
- Family is whomever you choose – acknowledge diversity across families & life cycle.
- Family provides motivation for change.
- Parenting offers opportunities for community participation & inclusion.
- NOT considering family life can undermine an individual's recovery, with negative effects on parent & child.





Important Questions

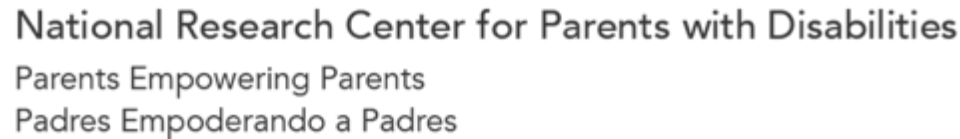
- Why is it so difficult for parents to have conversations with practitioners?
- Why is it so challenging for practitioners to talk about parenting?





Key Issues for Parents

- Stigma, shame → attitudes of parents & others
- Social isolation
- Competing demands & needs of children of diverse ages & challenges
- Stressful family relationships
- Communicating about difficult topics
- Readiness, timeliness
- Gaps in supports & resources – issues of access



Challenges for Practitioners

- Lived experience of parenting and family life
 - Sharing with thought & intention
 - Previous trauma → triggers
 - Insight, recognition & self-care
 - Boundaries & limits
 - Role clarity
 - Training, coaching, support
 - Generic + specialized training
 - Engaged supervisors
 - Organizational supports
- 





Feelings

- It makes me anxious.
- It might make my client sad.
- We just seem to move from one crisis to the next – it's overwhelming.





Perception of Skills & Mandate

- I'm not trained in child work.
- I'm not a parent myself.
- We already do this.
- Not my job.





National Research Center for Parents with Disabilities

Parents Empowering Parents

Padres Empoderando a Padres

The Work Flow

- No time to have the conversation.
- Parenting goals don't fit into service or billing categories.
- Not familiar with resources.





Overcoming Practitioners' Challenges

- Provide rationale & motivation - enhances the work & promotes parent's recovery.
- Draw from skills already have.
- Fit into the work flow.
- Provide training, coaching & ongoing support
- Cultivate a family-friendly culture





National Research Center for Parents with Disabilities
Parents Empowering Parents
Padres Empoderando a Padres

Implementation Challenges: The Organization

- Agency culture is not family-oriented.
- Policy & paperwork “misfits” or gaps.
- No child-friendly physical spaces.
- Challenges in staff selection & hiring.





Organizational Context and Capacity

- Identify & support leaders & champions
- Strategize to get organizational & staff “buy in” → marketing
- Integrate talking about parenting & family life into staff routine
- Develop relevant policies & procedures



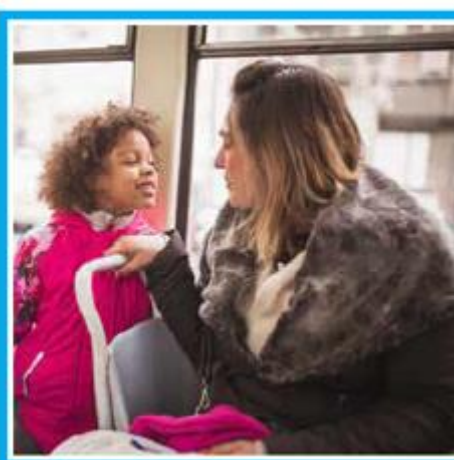


National Research Center for Parents with Disabilities
Parents Empowering Parents
Padres Empoderando a Padres

The ParentingWell® Practice Approach

- Parent's mental health → children & family
- Children & family → parent's mental health
- Parenting and family life as a routine part of any conversation
- Parents of any age with children of any age





ParentingWell

PRACTICE PROFILE





ParentingWell – Core Elements

- Engage: relationship-building
- Explore: understanding parent & self
- Plan: problem-solving & goal-setting
- Access & Advocate: resources & supports

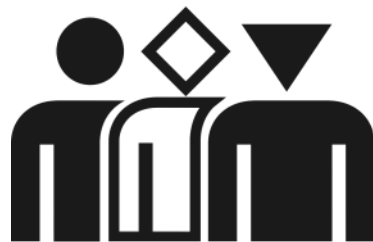




National Research Center for Parents with Disabilities
Parents Empowering Parents
Padres Empoderando a Padres

ParentingWell - Practice Principles

- Family-focused
- Culturally-sensitive
- Strengths-based
- Trauma-informed





Potential Parent Outcomes

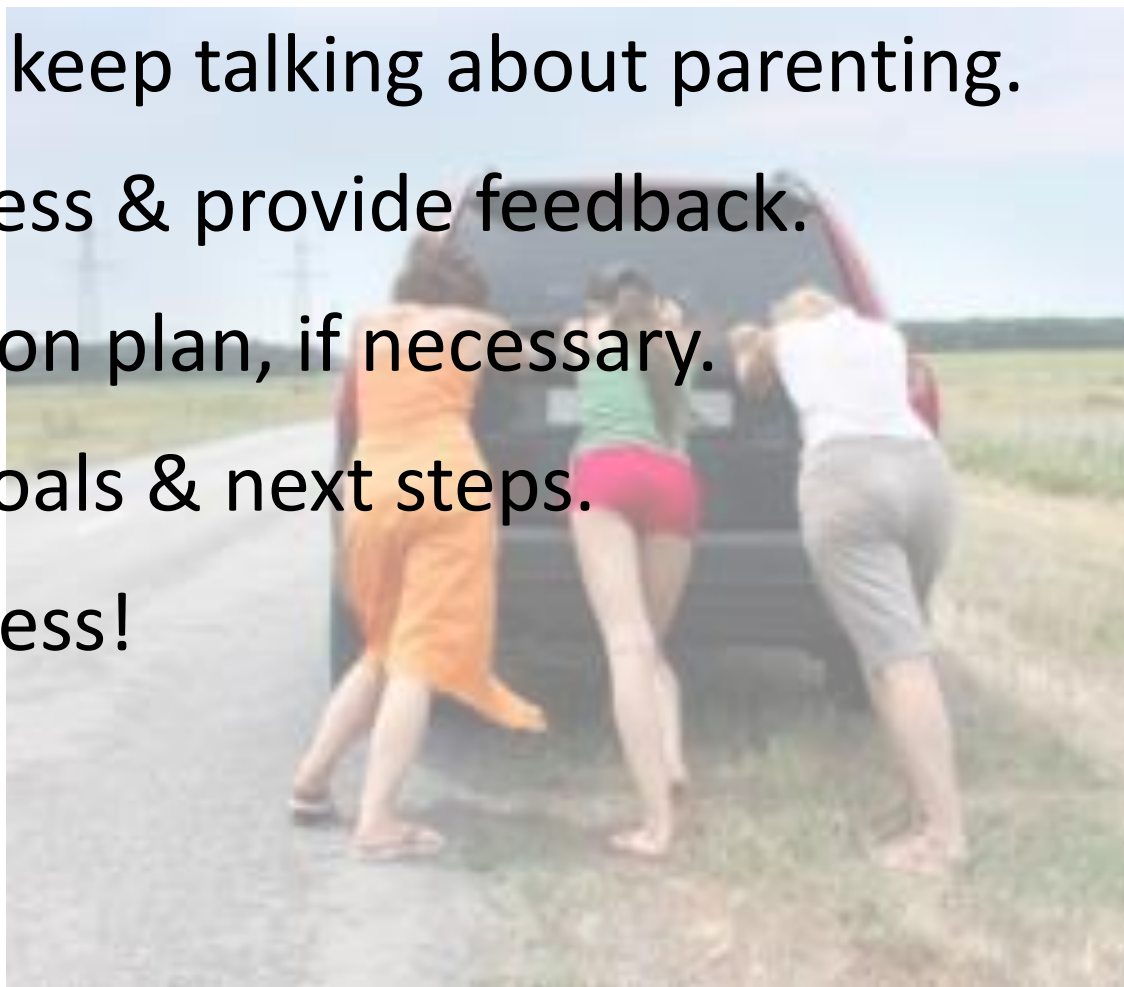
- Reduce stress
- Increase hope
- Feel better
- Do better





Recommendations for Practitioners

- Start talking & keep talking about parenting.
- Monitor progress & provide feedback.
- Adjust the action plan, if necessary.
- Identify new goals & next steps.
- Celebrate success!





Practitioners Provided Feedback

- “My perceived weakness in this area was preventing me from talking about parenting. This was a barrier in helping others that could benefit from parenting support.”
- “By talking about this more openly it has improved my own life and enriched my role with those I support.”



National Research Center for Parents with Disabilities
Parents Empowering Parents
Padres Empoderando a Padres

“We honor our parents by
carrying their best forward and
laying the rest down.”



Bruce Springsteen, *Born to Run* (2016)



National Research Center for Parents with Disabilities

Parents Empowering Parents

Padres Empoderando a Padres

Contacts & Resources

- jnicholson@brandeis.edu
- <https://heller.brandeis.edu/parents-with-disabilities/>



Opportunity for Discussion

- How do you encourage hope & joy in parenting?
- What is the most important lesson a parent can learn?

