*The Principles of Wraparound: Chapter 2.1*

# Ten Principles of the Wraparound Process

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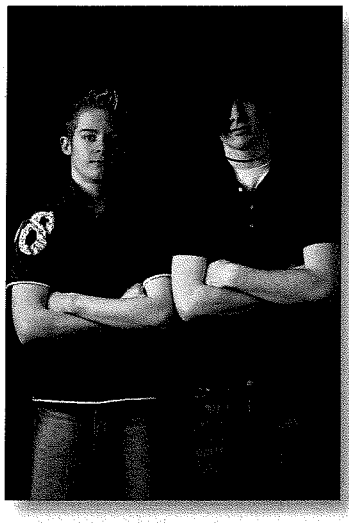

The philosophical principles of wraparound have long provided the basis for understanding this widely-practiced service delivery model. This value base for working in collaboration and partnership with families has its roots in early programs such as Kaleidoscope in Chicago, the Alaska Youth Initiative, Project Wraparound in Vermont, and other trailblazing efforts.

Perhaps the best presentation of the wraparound value base is provided through the stories contained in *Everything is Normal until Proven Otherwise* (Dennis & Lourie, 2006). In this volume, published by the Child Welfare League of America, Karl Dennis, former Director of Kaleidoscope, presents a set of stories that illuminate in rich detail how important it is for helpers to live by these core principles in service delivery. As described in the *Resource Guide*'s Foreword, these stories let the reader "experience the wraparound process as it was meant to be" (p.xi).

For many years, the philosophy of wraparound was expressed through the work of local initiatives and agencies such as Kaleidoscope, but not formally captured in publications for the field. Critical first descriptions were provided by VanDenBerg & Grealish (1996) as part of a special issue on wraparound, and by Goldman (1999) as part of an influential monograph on wraparound (Burns & Goldman, 1999).

These resources presented elements and practice principles that spanned activity at the team, organization, and

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national wraparound initiative

system levels. In other words, some elements were intended to guide work at the team level with the youth, family and hands-on support people, while other elements described activities at the program or system level. For many, these documents were the best means available for understanding the wraparound process. They also provided the basis for initial efforts at measuring wraparound implementation. (See the chapter on wraparound fidelity in chapter 5e.1 of this *Resource Guide*.)

## The Ten Principles as Presented by the National Wraparound Initiative

At the outset of the National Wraparound Initiative's work, it was recognized that presentation of the principles of wraparound would be a central part of the NWI's mission to enhance understanding of wraparound and support high-quality wraparound practice. So what, if anything, was needed to communicate the principles clearly?

In the first place, the early descriptions of wraparound's philosophical base included a series of elements that were described only briefly, or not at all. If these values were truly to guide practice, it seemed important to provide some information about what was meant by key terms and phrases like "culturally competent," "based in the community" and "individualized." Secondly, since the principles were intended to serve as a touchstone for wraparound practice and the foundation for the NWI's subsequent work, it was important that a document describing the principles receive formal acceptance by the advisors who comprised the NWI. Finally, for clarity, it seemed optimal to express the principles at the level of the family and team. Once the principles were clarified and written in this way, descriptions of the organizational and system supports necessary to achieve high-quality wraparound practice (see Chapter 5a.1 of this *Resource Guide)* could be presented as *"what supports are needed to achieve the wraparound principles for families and their teams?"* Furthermore, descriptions of the practice model for wraparound (See chapter 4a.1 of this *Resource Guide)* could be presented as *"what activities must be undertaken by wraparound teams to achieve the principles for youth and families?"*

The current document began with the efforts of a small team of wraparound innovators, family advocates, and researchers working together over several months. This team started with the original elements and practice principles, reviewed other documents and training manuals, and drafted a revised version of the principles as expressed at a family and team level. These descriptions were then provided to a much larger national group of family members, program administrators, trainers, and researchers familiar with wraparound. Through several stages of work, these individuals voted on the principles presented, provided feedback on wording, and participated in a consensus-building process.

Though not complete, consensus on the NWI principles document, initially created in 2004, was strong. Nonetheless, there were several key areas where the complexity of wraparound made consensus difficult within our advisory group. In many cases, advisors were uncomfortable with brief definitions of the principles because they did not acknowledge tensions that could arise in "real world" efforts to put the principles into practice. These tensions were acknowledged and addressed in the consensus document in several ways:

- First, in addition to the one- to two-sentence definition for each principle, more in-depth commentary is also provided, highlighting tensions and disagreements and providing much greater depth about the meaning of each principle.
- Second, we have allowed our NWI "community of practice" to revisit the principles. Most notably, at the behest of a number of advisors, the NWI revisited the principle of *Persistent*, and asked whether the original name for the principle, *Unconditional Care*, might be more appropriate and a new definition possible. The results of this 2008 survey of advisors are reflected in the definitions presented here, and a description of this process is presented for your information in Chapter 2.5 of this *Resource Guide*.
- Finally, true to the wraparound model, all the materials of the NWI are intended to be resources for use by local initiatives, families, and researchers to use as

they see fit. Thus, documents such as this one, as well as the *Phases and Activities of the Wraparound Process*, are conceived as "skeletons" to be "fleshed out" by individual users. For example, in Canada, a new nationwide initiative north of the border has adapted the NWI principles. As a result, they have used the NWI principles to describe the value base in ways to suit their purposes, such as a description of the paradigm shifts necessary for wraparound and the personal values expected of participating helpers.

Many have expressed a need to move beyond a value base for wraparound in order to facilitate program development and replicate positive outcomes. However, wraparound's philosophical principles will always remain the starting point for understanding wraparound. The current document attempts to provide this starting point for high-quality practice for youth and families.

Considered along with the rest of the materials in the *Resource Guide to Wraparound,* we hope that this document helps achieve the main goal expressed by members of the NWI at its outset: To provide clarity on what it means to do wraparound, for the sake of communities, programs, and families. Just as important, we hope that NWI documents such as this continue to be viewed as works in progress, updated and augmented as needed based on research and experience.

## The Ten Principles of the Wraparound Process

***1. Family voice and choice.*** Family and youth/child perspectives are intentionally elicited and prioritized during all phases of the wraparound process. Planning is grounded in family members' perspectives, and the team strives to provide options and choices such that the plan reflects family values and preferences.

The wraparound process recognizes the importance of long-term connections between people, particularly the bonds between family members. The principle of family voice and choice in wraparound stems from this recognition and acknowledges that the people who have a long-term, ongoing relationship with a child or youth have a unique stake in and commitment to the wraparound process and its outcomes. This principle further recognizes that a young person who is receiving wraparound also has a unique stake in the process and its outcomes. The principle of family voice and choice affirms that these are the people who should have the greatest influence over the wraparound process as it unfolds.

This principle also recognizes that the likelihood of successful outcomes and youth/child and family ownership of the wraparound plan are increased when the wraparound process reflects family members' priorities and perspectives. The principle thus explicitly calls for family voice—the provision of opportunities for family members to fully explore and express their perspectives during wraparound activities—and family choice—the structuring of decision making such that family members can select, from among various options, the one(s) that are most consistent with their own perceptions of how things are, how things should be, and what needs to happen to help the family achieve its vision of well-being. Wraparound is a collaborative process (principle 3); however within that collaboration, family members' perspectives must be the most influential.

The principle of voice and choice explicitly recognizes that the perspectives of family members are not likely to have sufficient impact during wraparound unless *intentional* activity occurs to ensure their voice and choice drives the process. Families of children with emotional and behavioral disorders are often stigmatized and blamed for their children's difficulties. This and other factors—including possible differences in social and educational status between family members and professionals, and the idea of professionals as experts whose role is to "fix" the family—can lead teams to discount, rather than prioritize, family members' perspectives during group discussions and decision making. These same factors also decrease the probability that youth perspectives will have impact in groups when adults and professionals are present.

Furthermore, prior experiences of stigma and shame can leave family members reluctant to express their perspectives at all. Putting the prin-

ciple of youth and family voice and choice into action thus requires intentional activity that supports family members as they explore their perspectives and as they express their perspectives during the various activities of wraparound. Further intentional activity must take place to ensure that this perspective has sufficient impact within the collaborative process, so that it exerts primary influence during decision making. Team procedures, interactions, and products—including the wraparound plan—should provide evidence that the team is indeed engaging in intentional activity to prioritize the family perspectives.

*The wraparound team should be composed of people who have a strong commitment to the family's well-being.*

While the principle speaks of *family* voice and choice, the wraparound process recognizes that the families who participate in wraparound, like American families generally, come in many forms. In many families, it is the biological parents who are the primary caregivers and who have the deepest and most enduring commitment to a youth or child. In other families, this role is filled by adoptive parents, step-parents, extended family members, or even non-family caregivers. In many cases, there will not be a single, unified "family" perspective expressed during the various activities of the wraparound process.

Disagreements can occur between adult family members/ caregivers or between parents/caregivers and extended family. What is more, as a young person matures and becomes more independent, it becomes necessary to balance the collaboration in ways that allow the youth to have growing influence within the wraparound process. Wraparound is intended to be inclusive and to manage disagreement by facilitating collaboration and creativity; however, throughout the process, the goal is always to prioritize the influence of the people who have the deepest and most persistent connection to the young person and commitment to his or her well-being.

Special attention to the balancing of influence and perspectives within wraparound is also necessary when legal considerations restrict the extent to which family members are free to make choices. This is the case, for example, when a youth is on probation, or when a child is in protective custody. In these instances, an adult acting for the agency may take on caregiving and/or decision making responsibilities vis-à-vis the child, and may exercise considerable influence within wraparound. In conducting our review of opinions of wraparound experts about the principles, this has been one of several points of contention: How best to balance the priorities of youth and family against those of these individuals. Regardless, there is strong consensus in the field that the principle of family voice and choice is a constant reminder that the wraparound process must place special emphasis on the perspectives of the people who will still be connected to the young person after agency involvement has ended.

> ***2. Team based.*** The wraparound team consists of individuals agreed upon by the family and committed to the family through informal, formal, and community support and service relationships.

Wraparound is a collaborative process (see principle 3), undertaken by a team. The wraparound team should be composed of people who have a strong commitment to the family's well-being. In accordance with principle 1, choices about who is invited to join the team should be driven by family members' perspectives.

At times, family members' choices about team membership may be shaped or limited by practical or legal considerations. For example, one or more family members may be reluctant to invite a particular person— e.g., a teacher, a therapist, a probation officer, or a non-custodial ex-spouse—to join the team. At the same time, not inviting that person may mean that the team will not have access to resources and/or interpersonal support that would otherwise be available. Not inviting a particular person to join the team can also mean that the activities or support that he or she offers

will not be coordinated with the team's efforts. It can also mean that the family loses the opportunity to have the team influence that person so that he or she becomes better able to act supportively. If that person is a professional, the team may also lose the opportunity to access services or funds that are available through that person's organization or agency.

Not inviting a particular professional to join the team may also bring undesired consequences, for example, if participation of the probation officer on the wraparound team is required as a

condition of probation. Family members should be provided with support for making informed decisions about whom they invite to join the team, as well as support for dealing with any conflicts or negative emotions that may arise from working with such team members. Or, when relevant and possible, the family should be supported to explore options such as inviting a different representative from an agency or organization. Ultimately, the family may also choose not to participate in wraparound.

When a state agency has legal custody of a child or youth, the caregiver in the permanency setting and/or another person designated by that agency may have a great deal of influence over who should be on the team; however, in accordance with principle 1, efforts should be made to include participation of family members and others who have a long-term commitment to the young person and who will remain connected to him or her after formal agency involvement has ended.

***3. Natural supports.*** The team actively seeks out and encourages the full participation of team members drawn from family members' networks of interpersonal and community relationships. The wraparound plan reflects activities and interventions that draw on sources of natural support.

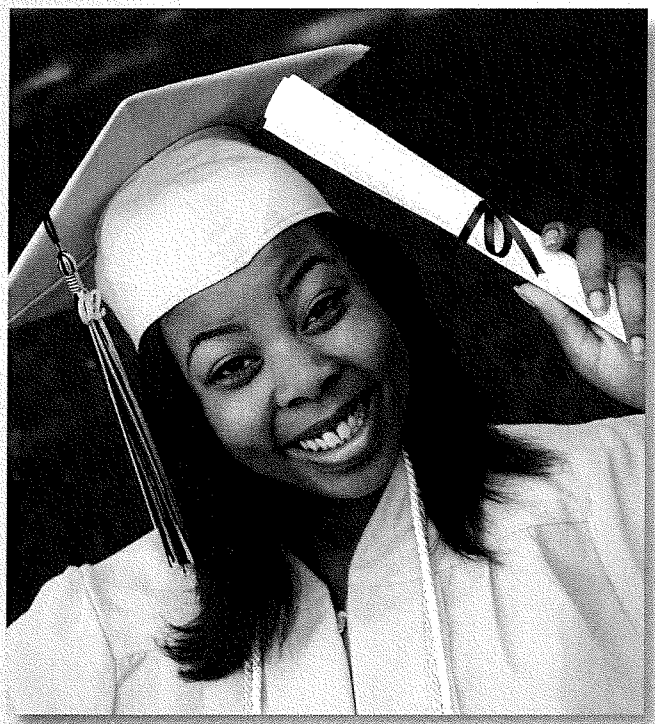
This principle recognizes the central importance of the support that a youth/child, parents/caregivers, and other family members receive "naturally," i.e., from the individuals and organizations whose connection to the family is independent of the formal service system and its resources. These sources of natural support are sustainable and thus most likely to be available for the youth/child and family after wraparound and other formal services have ended. People who represent sources of natural support often have a high degree of importance and influence within family members' lives. These relationships bring value to the wraparound process by broadening the diversity of support, knowledge, skills, perspectives, and strategies available to the team. Such individuals and organizations also may be able to provide certain types of support that more formal or professional providers find hard to provide.

The primary source of natural support is the family's network of interpersonal relationships, which includes friends, extended family, neighbors, co-workers, church members, and so on. Natural support is also available to the family through community institutions, organizations, and associations such as churches, clubs, libraries, or sports leagues. Professionals and paraprofessionals who interact with the family primarily offer paid support; however, they can also be connected to family members through caring relationships that exceed the boundaries and expectations of their formal roles. When they act in this way, professionals and paraprofessionals too can become sources of natural support.

Practical experience with wraparound has shown that formal service providers often have great difficulty accessing or engaging potential team members from the family's community and informal support networks. Thus, there is a tendency that these important relationships will be underrepresented on wraparound teams. This

principle emphasizes the need for the team to act intentionally to encourage the full participation of team members representing sources of natural support.

***4. Collaboration.*** Team members work cooperatively and share responsibility for developing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating a single wraparound plan. The plan reflects a blending of team members' perspectives, mandates, and resources. The plan guides and coordinates each team member's work towards meeting the team's goals.



Wraparound is a collaborative activity—team members must reach collective agreement on numerous decisions throughout the wraparound process. For example, the team must reach decisions about what goals to pursue, what sorts of strategies to use to reach the goals, and how to evaluate whether or not progress is actually being made in reaching the goals. The principle of collaboration recognizes that the team is more likely to accomplish its work when team members approach decisions in an open-minded manner, prepared to listen to and be influenced by other team members' ideas and opinions. Team members must also be willing to provide their own perspectives, and the whole team will need to work to ensure that each member has opportunities to provide input and feels safe in doing so. As they work to reach agreement, team members will need to remain focused on the team's overarching goals and how best to achieve these goals in a manner that reflects all of the principles of wraparound.

The principle of collaboration emphasizes that each team member must be committed to the team, the team's goals, and the wraparound plan. For professional team members, this means that the work they do with family members is governed by the goals in the plan and the decisions reached by the team. Similarly, the use of resources available to the team—including those controlled by individual professionals on the team—should be governed by team decisions and team goals.

This principle recognizes that there are certain constraints that operate on team decision making, and that collaboration must operate within these boundaries. In particular, legal mandates or other requirements often constrain decisions. Team members must be willing to work creatively and flexibly to find ways to satisfy these mandates and requirements while also working towards team goals.

Finally, it should be noted that, as for principles 1 (family voice and choice) and 2 (team-based), defining wraparound's principle of collaboration raises legitimate concern about how best to strike a balance between wraparound being youth- and family-driven as well as team-driven. This issue is difficult to resolve completely, because it is clear that wraparound's strengths as a planning and implementation process derive from being team-based and collaborative while also prioritizing the perspectives of family members and natural supports who will provide support to the youth and family over the long run. Such tension can only be resolved on an individual family and team basis, and is best accomplished when team members, providers, and community members are well supported to fully implement wraparound in keeping with all its principles.

***5. Community based.*** The wraparound team implements service and support strategies that take place in the most in-

clusive, most responsive, most accessible, and least restrictive settings possible; and that safely promote child and family integration into home and community life.

This principle recognizes that families and young people who receive wraparound, like all people, should have the opportunity to participate fully in family and community life. This implies that the team will strive to implement service and support strategies that are accessible to the family and that are located within the community where the family chooses to live. Teams will also work to ensure that family members receiving wraparound have greatest possible access to the range of activities and environments that are available to other families, children, and youth within their communities, and that support positive functioning and development.

***6. Culturally competent.*** The wraparound process demonstrates respect for and builds on the values, preferences, beliefs, culture, and identity of the child/youth and family, and their community.

The perspectives people express in wraparound—as well as the manner in which they express their perspectives—are importantly shaped by their culture and identity. In order to collaborate successfully, team members must be able to interact in ways that demonstrate respect for diversity in expression, opinion, and preference, even as they work to come together to reach decisions. This principle emphasizes that respect toward the family in this regard is particularly crucial, so that the principle of family voice and choice can be realized in the wraparound process.

This principle also recognizes that a family's traditions, values, and heritage are sources of great strength. Family relationships with people and organizations with whom they share a cultural identity can be essential sources of support and resources; what is more, these connections are often "natural" in that they are likely to endure as sources of strength and support after formal services have ended. Such individuals and organizations also may be better able to provide types of support difficult to provide through more formal or professional relationships. Thus, this principle also emphasizes the importance of embracing these individuals and organizations, and nurturing and strengthening these connections and resources so as to help the team achieve its goals, and help the family sustain positive momentum after formal wraparound has ended.

*Undesired behavior, events, or outcomes are not seen as evidence of child or family "failure" and are not seen as a reason to eject the family from wraparound.*

This principle further implies that the team will strive to ensure that the service and support strategies that are included in the wraparound plan also build on and demonstrate respect for family members' beliefs, values, culture, and identity. The principle requires that team members are vigilant about ensuring that culturally competent services and supports extend beyond wraparound team meetings.

***7. Individualized.*** To achieve the goals laid out in the wraparound plan, the team develops and implements a customized set of strategies, supports, and services.

This principle emphasizes that, when wraparound is undertaken in a manner consistent with all of the principles, the resulting plan will be uniquely tailored to fit the family. The principle of family voice and choice lays the foundation for individualization. That principle requires that wraparound must be based in the family's perspective about how things are for them, how things should be, and what needs to happen to achieve the latter.

Practical experience with wraparound has shown that when families are able to fully express their perspectives, it quickly becomes clear that only a portion of the help and support required is available through existing formal ser-

vices. Wraparound teams are thus challenged to create strategies for providing help and support that can be delivered outside the boundaries of the traditional service environment. Moreover, the wraparound plan must be designed to build on the particular strengths of family members, and on the assets and resources of their community and culture. Individualization necessarily results as team members collaboratively craft a plan that capitalizes on their collective strengths, creativity, and knowledge of possible strategies and available resources.

> ***8. Strengths based.*** The wraparound process and the wraparound plan identify, build on, and enhance the capabilities, knowledge, skills, and assets of the child and family, their community, and other team members.

The wraparound process is strengths based in that the team takes time to recognize and validate the skills, knowledge, insight, and strategies that each team member has used to meet the challenges they have encountered in life. The wraparound plan is constructed in such a way that the strategies included in the plan capitalize on and enhance the strengths of the people who participate in carrying out the plan. This principle also implies that interactions between team members will demonstrate mutual respect and appreciation for the value each person brings to the team.

The commitment to a strengths orientation is particularly pronounced with regard to the child or youth and family. Wraparound is intended to achieve outcomes not through a focus on eliminating family members' deficits but rather through efforts to utilize and increase their assets. Wraparound thus seeks to validate, build on, and expand family members' psychological assets (such as positive self-regard, self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and clarity of values, purpose, and identity), their interpersonal assets (such as social competence and social connectedness), and their expertise, skill, and knowledge.

> ***9. Unconditional.*** A wraparound team does not give up on, blame, or reject children, youth, and their families. When faced with challenges or setbacks, the team continues working towards meeting the needs of the youth and family and towards achieving the goals in the wraparound plan until the team reaches agreement that a formal wraparound process is no longer necessary.

This principle emphasizes that the team's commitment to achieving its goals persists regardless of the child's behavior or placement setting, the family's circumstances, or the availability of services in the community. This principle includes the idea that undesired behavior, events, or outcomes are not seen as evidence of youth or family "failure" and are not seen as a reason to reject or eject the family from wraparound. Instead, adverse events or outcomes are interpreted as indicating a need to revise the wraparound plan so that it more successfully promotes the positive outcomes associated with the goals. This principle also includes the idea that the team is committed to providing the supports and services that are necessary for success, and will not terminate wraparound because available services are deemed insufficient. Instead, the team is committed to creating and implementing a plan that reflects the wraparound principles, even in the face of limited system capacity.

At the same time, it is worth noting that many wraparound experts, including family members and advocates, have observed that providing "unconditional" care to youth and families can be challenging for teams to achieve in the face of certain system-level constraints. One such constraint is when funding limitations or rules will not fund the type or mix of services determined most appropriate by the team. In these instances the team must develop a plan that can be implemented in the absence of such resources without giving up on the youth or family. Providing unconditional care can be complicated in other situations, such as the context of child welfare, where unconditional care includes the duty to keep children and youth safe. Regardless, team members as well as those overseeing wraparound initiatives must strive to achieve the principle of unconditional care for the youth and all family members if the wraparound process is to have its full impact on youth, families, and communities.

***10. Outcome based.*** The team ties the goals and strategies of the wraparound plan to observable or measurable indicators of success, monitors progress in terms of these indicators, and revises the plan accordingly.

This principle emphasizes that the wraparound team is accountable—to the family and to all team members; to the individuals, organizations and agencies that participate in wraparound; and, ultimately, to the public—for achieving the goals laid out in the plan. Determining outcomes and tracking progress toward outcomes should be an active part of wraparound team functioning. Outcomes monitoring allows the team to regularly assess the effectiveness of plan as a whole, as well as the strategies included within the plan, and to determine when the plan needs revision. Tracking progress also helps the team maintain hope, cohesiveness, and efficacy. Tracking progress and outcomes also helps the family know that things are changing. Finally, team-level outcome monitoring aids the program and community to demonstrate success as part of their overall evaluation plan, which may be important to gaining support and resources for wraparound teams throughout the community.

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