

FACILITATOR MANUAL

PARENT- CENTERED PLANNING

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Preface

We are glad that there has been more attention on understanding the needs of parents with a variety of types of disabilities. Parents with disabilities can face a variety of challenges when trying to raise children, including discriminatory attitudes by medical and social service providers, lack of access to parental supports, and state laws that specifically mention parental disability as grounds for termination of parental rights. Researchers have found that parents with disabilities are at a higher risk for involvement with the child welfare system, and if they are involved with the child welfare system, they are more likely to have child maltreatment substantiated and have their children placed out of their home. Unfortunately, the funding system has not been designed to provide appropriate parental supports for parents with disabilities to prevent child welfare involvement, and child welfare professionals have little training in working with parents with disabilities.

We were happy to partner with the National Research Center for Parents with Disabilities at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University, which received funding from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, to develop a brief, supportive planning intervention that could be used by professionals working with parents with disabilities. The Parent Centered Planning model was inspired by the person-centered planning model, which has been ubiquitous in the field of disability advocacy and supports for nearly forty years. In our development of Parent Centered Planning, we found that most parents participating in Parent Centered Planning had positive short-term outcomes, such as strengthening their supportive relationships, clarifying their parenting goals, and making progress towards their self-identified goals. This brief intervention is appropriate for use with any parent with a disability, including new parents, parents with a new disability, any parent that wants to help plan for their family, or parents involved in the child welfare system. We hope that this promising practice for supporting parents with disabilities can be incorporated into a broader array of supports for parents with disabilities.

Introduction

Parent-centered planning is a strengths-based model aimed at helping parents with disabilities plan for parenting. This model is an adaptation of person-centered planning, which puts the individual's desires and goals as the focal point of planning and decision-making. This model helps parents set realistic long-term parenting goals and enlists supporters to assist parents in making concrete steps toward achieving these goals.

The parent-centered planning model shifts the focus away from a parent's weaknesses or needs as well as away from experts taking a leading role. Supporters, such as family members, friends, neighbors, clergy, co-workers, and others are invited to participate voluntarily through providing input and guidance, but they are not to direct the nature of the goals. Through a series of structured exercises that focus on the strengths and preferences of the parent, a parenting plan is created and makes use of informal and formal resources to support the parent. A trained facilitator leads the parent-centered planning process, including monitoring goal achievement, in partnership with the parent.

This process is not meant to be a substitute for formal services, but rather is a first step in helping to create a strengths-based parenting plan that can help a parent build parental supports. The parent-centered planning model can be thought of in four phases: the preparation phase, the invitation phase, the planning meeting phase, and the transition phase.

Phase 1

Preparation

- The facilitator conducts an intake meeting with the parent in which they introduce the parent-centered planning process to the parent and gather background information that would be helpful throughout the process. A key activity during this phase is to help the parent identify the current and potential support people for parenting who could be invited to the parent-centered planning meeting.

Phase 2

Invitation

- The facilitator schedules the parent-centered planning meeting in a familiar location such as the parent's home, and the facilitator and/or the parent invites people to the meeting. The facilitator contacts all invited participants to remind them that their role in this process is to assist the parent in developing his or her own plan.

Phase 3

Parent-Centered Planning Meeting

- The parent-centered planning meeting is the main part of this intervention. In this meeting, the facilitator leads the parent and his or her supporters through a series of exercises. The parent first identifies his or her future goals and vision for their family, as well as the parent's strengths and challenges. The facilitator then helps the parent break down the goals into attainable short-term goals with action steps identifying which current supports can assist with these steps. The final outcome is a Parental Support Plan, which has attendees' commitments for specific actions designated.

Phase 4

Transition

- In the final phase, the facilitator conducts follow-up meetings with the parent to get updates on the parent's progress, adjust goals or action steps, and re-enlist or further commit support from supporters before shifting away from the facilitator role. The facilitator does not help the parent directly take action toward the goals, but assists the parent to use their support team.



Phase 1: Preparation

To Do Checklist

- Clarify initial key players (i.e. parent, facilitator, one or two initial support people)
- Schedule initial meeting with key players
- In initial meeting
 - Provide overview of parent-centered planning process
 - Obtain written consent forms
 - Identify potential supports from parent's community using the relationship map tool

Clarify Initial Key Players

When making your initial outreach call to the parent who will be at the center of the parent-centered planning process, ask who they would like to be present for your preparation meeting. The presence of a support person may offer important emotional or physical support for the parent and beginning your relationship by centering their emotional and physical needs with that question sets the tone for the remainder of the process. Some examples of support people may be:

- Significant other
- Immediate family member
- Extended family member
- Personal care assistant

When scheduling your preparation meeting, make sure to include this person (or these two people).

Overview of Process

A clear understanding of what the parent-centered planning process is and what to expect moving forward is important for increasing a sense of security, and further allows the parent to be in the driver's seat as a person who is choosing to go through this process at each step of the way. This can be done in several ways, and all should link back to how this process supports the specific reasons they have vocalized for participating in this planning process:

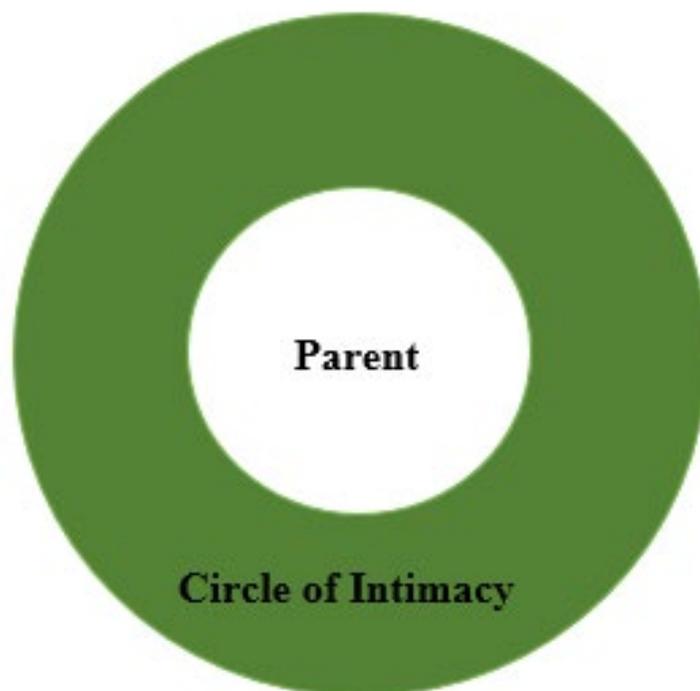
- Read through the introductory portion of this manual as a group, pausing at each paragraph to discuss and/or answer any questions.
- Ask what information the parent already has, fill in missing gaps, and answer any questions.
- Get creative with how you convey the information in the introductory portion of this manual. Perhaps use visuals like drawing, figurines, or printed images to convey the concepts of the planning process.

Consent Forms

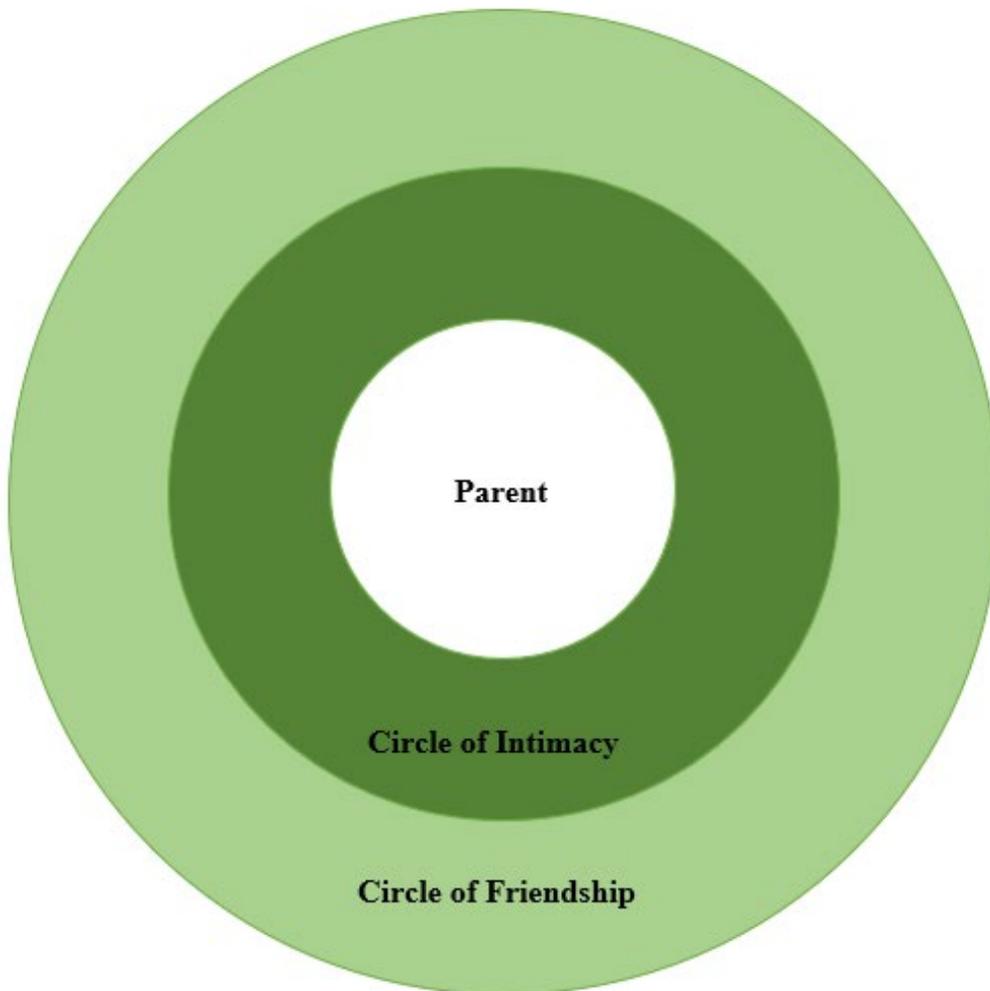
Confirm what consent forms you need to get signed based on your agency and license. Consent to receive services, acknowledgement of HIPPA, releases of information to speak with supports are examples of consent forms you may need to complete in preparation for the remaining phases of the process.

Relationship Mapping

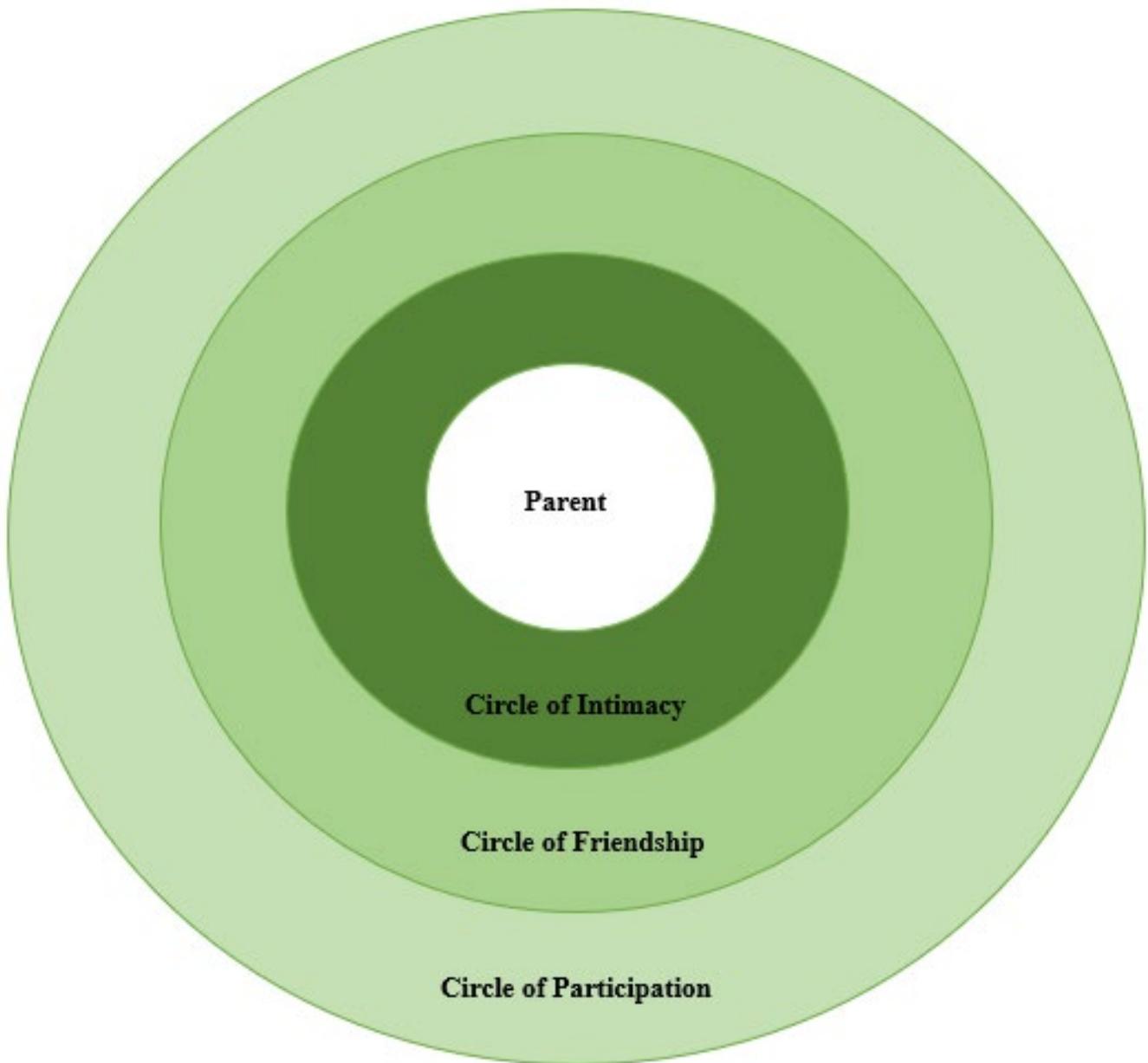
The relationship map tool is adopted from the person-centered planning Circles of Support relationship map model. It consists of four concentric circles surrounding the parent/family in the middle. The first circle, closest to the parent/family, is the circle of intimacy, which includes people that the parent/family cannot imagine living without.



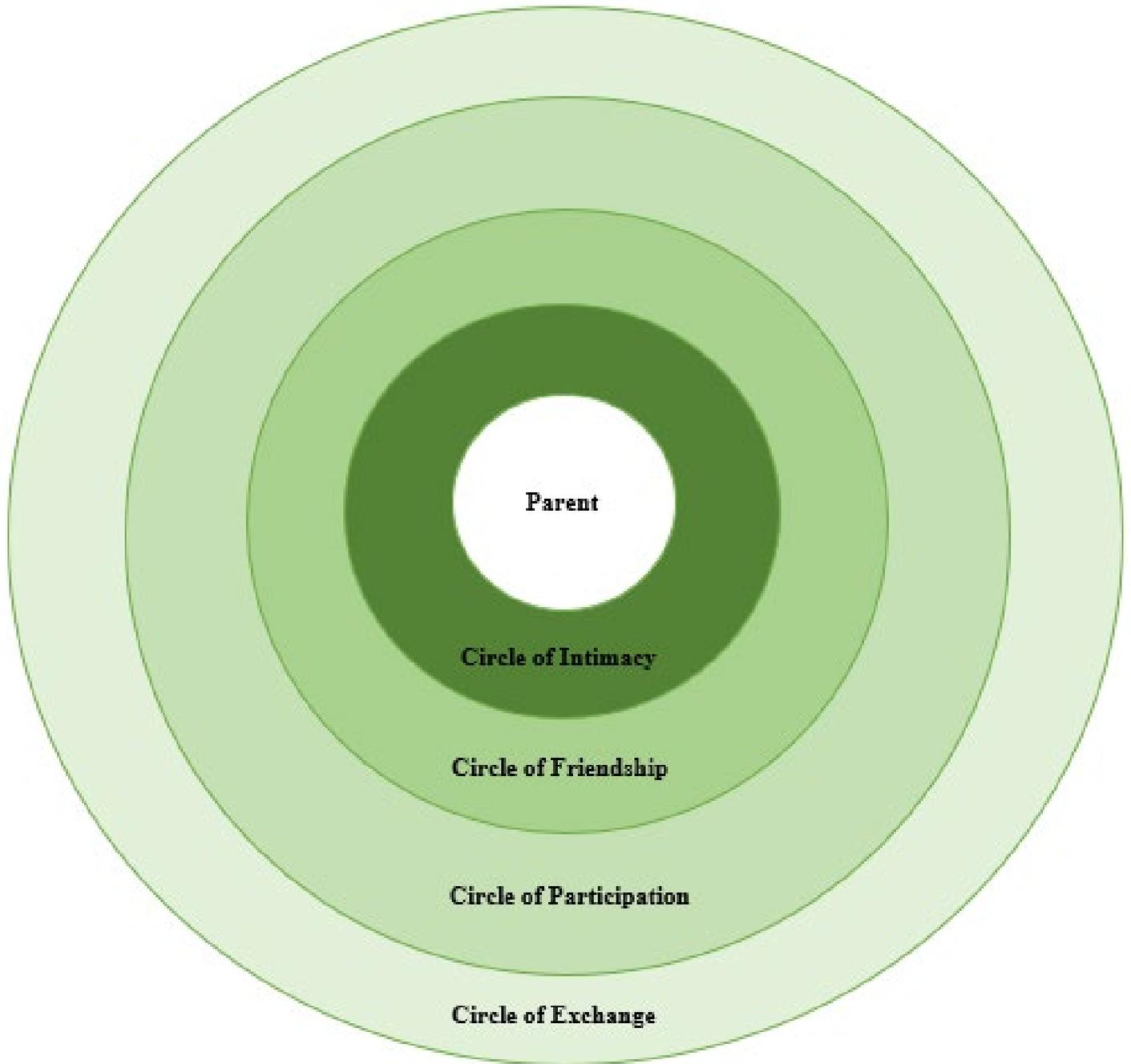
The second circle is the circle of friendship, which includes close friends and perhaps some extended family members.



The third circle is the circle of participation, which includes individuals with whom the parent/family are involved with in the community such as church members, co-workers, schoolmates as well as other acquaintances.



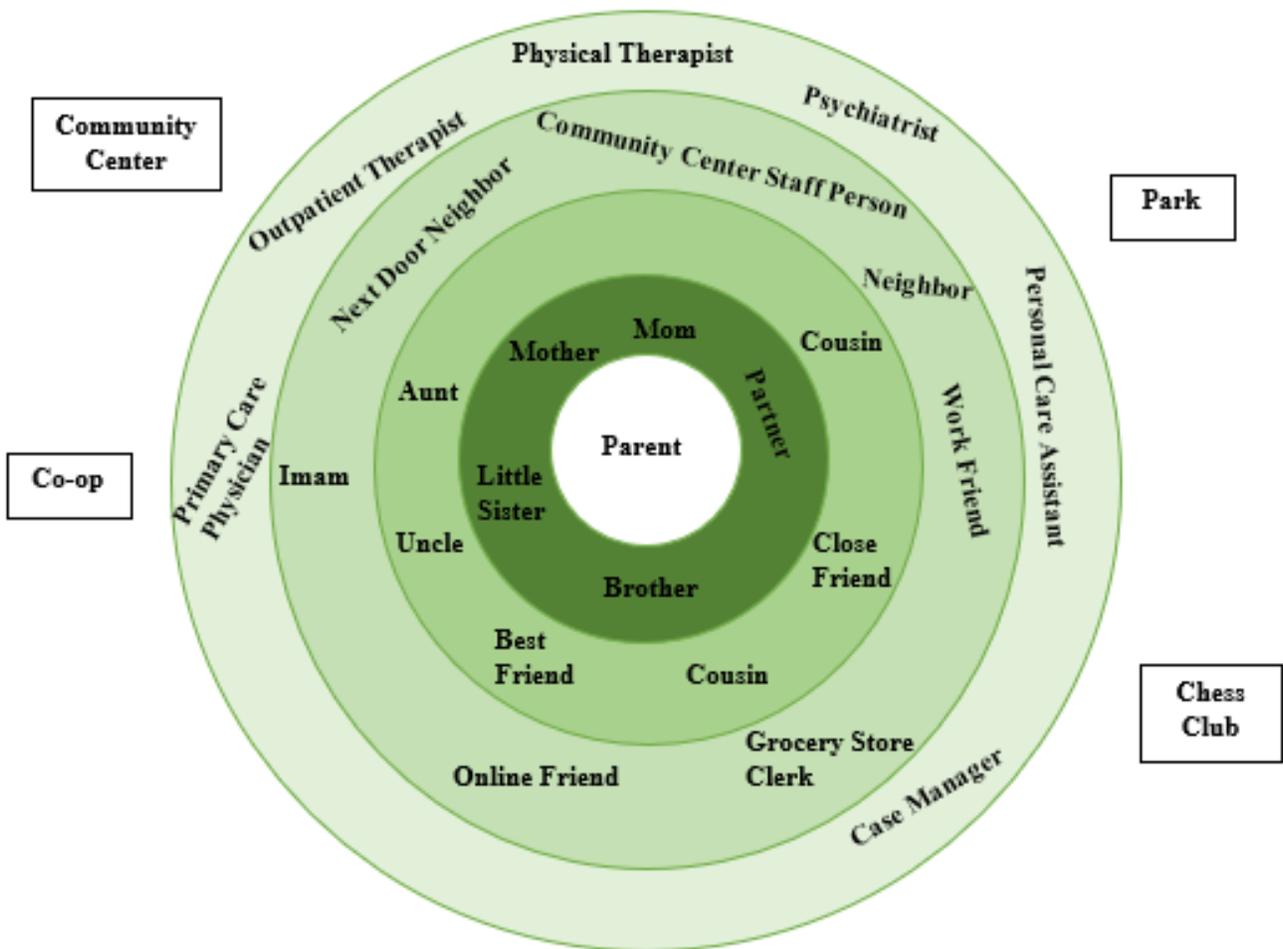
The fourth circle is the circle of exchange, which includes the people that are paid to be in the parent/family's lives.



In development of the relationship map, questions to ask the parent include:

- Who are your best friends?
- Who do you love the most? and Who loves you the most?
- Who is closest to the parent/caregiver? Who is close the family/children?
- Who enjoys spending time with the parent and family? Who does the parent and family enjoy spending time with?
- Who has helped the parent and family in the past?

The social worker will fill in the map with the parent and their key support person present at the preparation meeting. The social worker will also ask about community places the parent goes to, and who they see there. The social worker can actively seek out community members who could potentially be invited to join the person’s circle.



As the initial Relationship Map is being developed, it is also used as an assessment tool.

Additional discussion regarding the assessment and development of the map center on questions such as:

- What are the main patterns and themes in the relationships network?
- What areas of relationship are missing? What would be important to build?
- Are there old friends or acquaintances from the past, with whom the parent and/or family would like to reconnect?
- Are there friends or acquaintances from the community that can be invited to join the planning circle?
- Where could community members who would like to get to know this parent and/or family be found?
- Who helps the parent make good decisions?
- Do the children have adults in their lives that could potentially be supportive to the family?

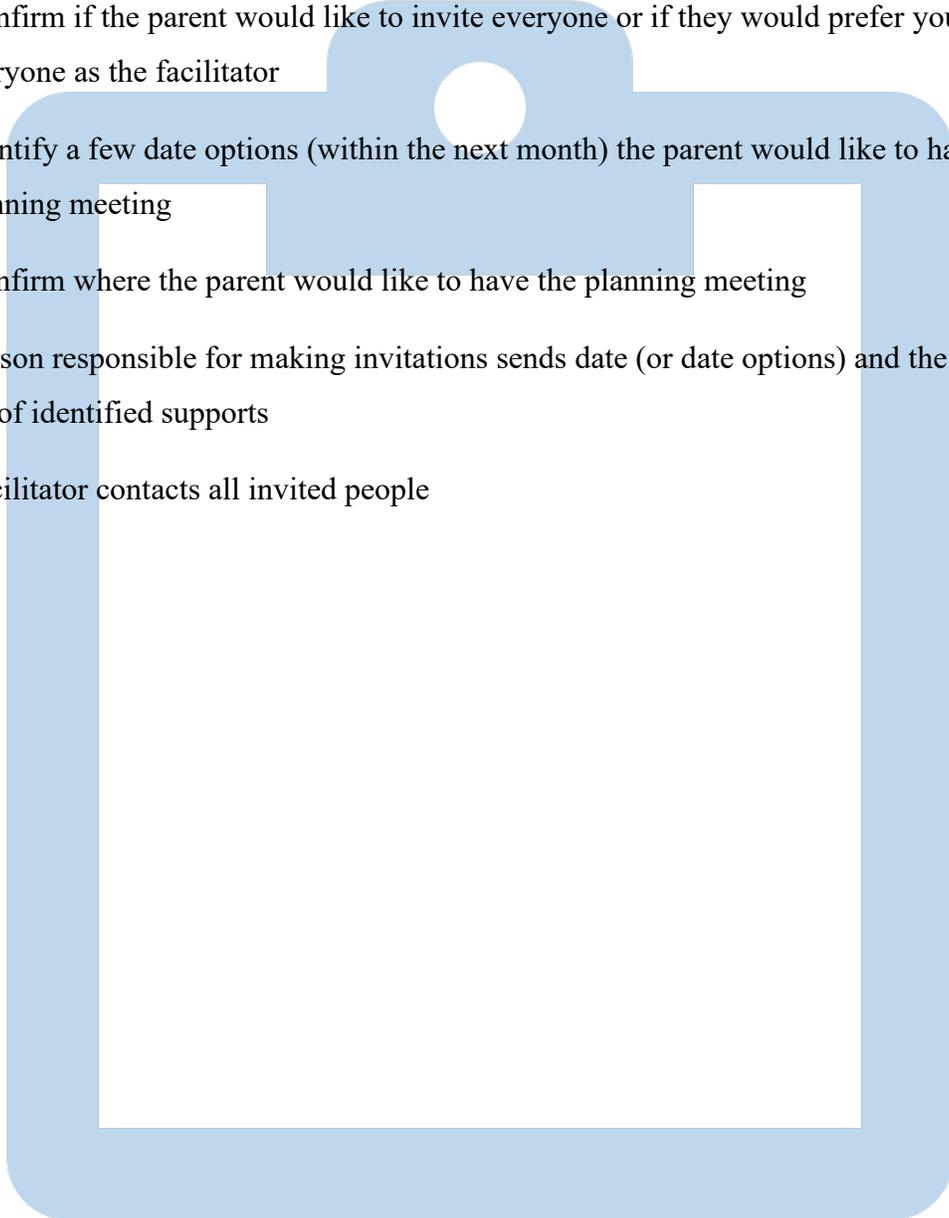
Once the initial map is complete, the facilitator asks the person who they would like to have participate in Parent-Centered Support Meeting.

It is important to recognize that a relationship map is a dynamic product. It should be assessed and re-worked at regular intervals, as new supportive relationships are developed, and existing relationships are strengthened and enhanced.



Phase 2: Invitation

To Do Checklist

- 
- You should now have a list of people the parent wants invited to the planning meeting, and how they should be invited
 - Confirm if the parent would like to invite everyone or if they would prefer you to invite everyone as the facilitator
 - Identify a few date options (within the next month) the parent would like to have the planning meeting
 - Confirm where the parent would like to have the planning meeting
 - Person responsible for making invitations sends date (or date options) and the location to list of identified supports
 - Facilitator contacts all invited people

Confirm Invitation List

When confirming how the identified list of planning meeting participants should be invited, it may be helpful to have some examples or options for the parent to consider. Some examples of invitation methods might be:

- Text message
- Phone call
- Mailed letter
- Email
- Social media (e.g. Snapchat, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook)

After deciding the invitation method, confirm how the parent feels most comfortable making invitations. There are a few options for this process as well:

- Parent makes invitations without any support
- Parent makes invitations with the support of an identified person (e.g. the support person at the initial meeting, someone from one of their circles of support)
- A support person identified by parent (e.g. primary support) makes invitations
- The facilitator makes invitations

Date and Location

The parent will decide what date work best for them, and what location feels most comfortable. In order to increase the chances of including everyone on the invitation list, it is important to choose a date that is at least two weeks away but not more than a month away. This allows the invitees to set that time aside without drawing the process out too long.

If the invitation method is electronic, it may be possible to give invitees several options of dates and times that work for the parent and then select the date and time with the most available invitees. Whether or not the invitation method includes date and time options must be up to the parent and their level of comfort with multi-step planning.

It is important that the meeting location is accessible, convenient, and comfortable for the parent. It may be tempting to identify options for the parent to choose from that work for you as the facilitator, or work better for other participants, and it is vital that the needs and wants of the parent are prioritized during all preparation phases of this parent-centered planning process.

Ensure that there are childcare arrangements in place for the parent on the day of the parent-centered planning meeting, depending on the age of the parent's child(ren).

Sending Invitations

Once you have identified the person responsible for inviting participants, you have identified the invitation method, you have identified whether to send out one date or date options, and you have identified the best date(s) and the location, it is time to invite everyone. You, as the facilitator, are responsible for confirming invitations have gone out. How this happens depends on the preference of the parent and should be agreed upon during the invitation planning process.

Confirmation options include:

- Facilitator name is Cc'd onto electronic invitation form (e.g. text chain, email list)
- Parent reaches out to facilitator via phone, text, or email after everyone has been invited
- Facilitator plans to reach out to parent through their preferred communication method on a selected day

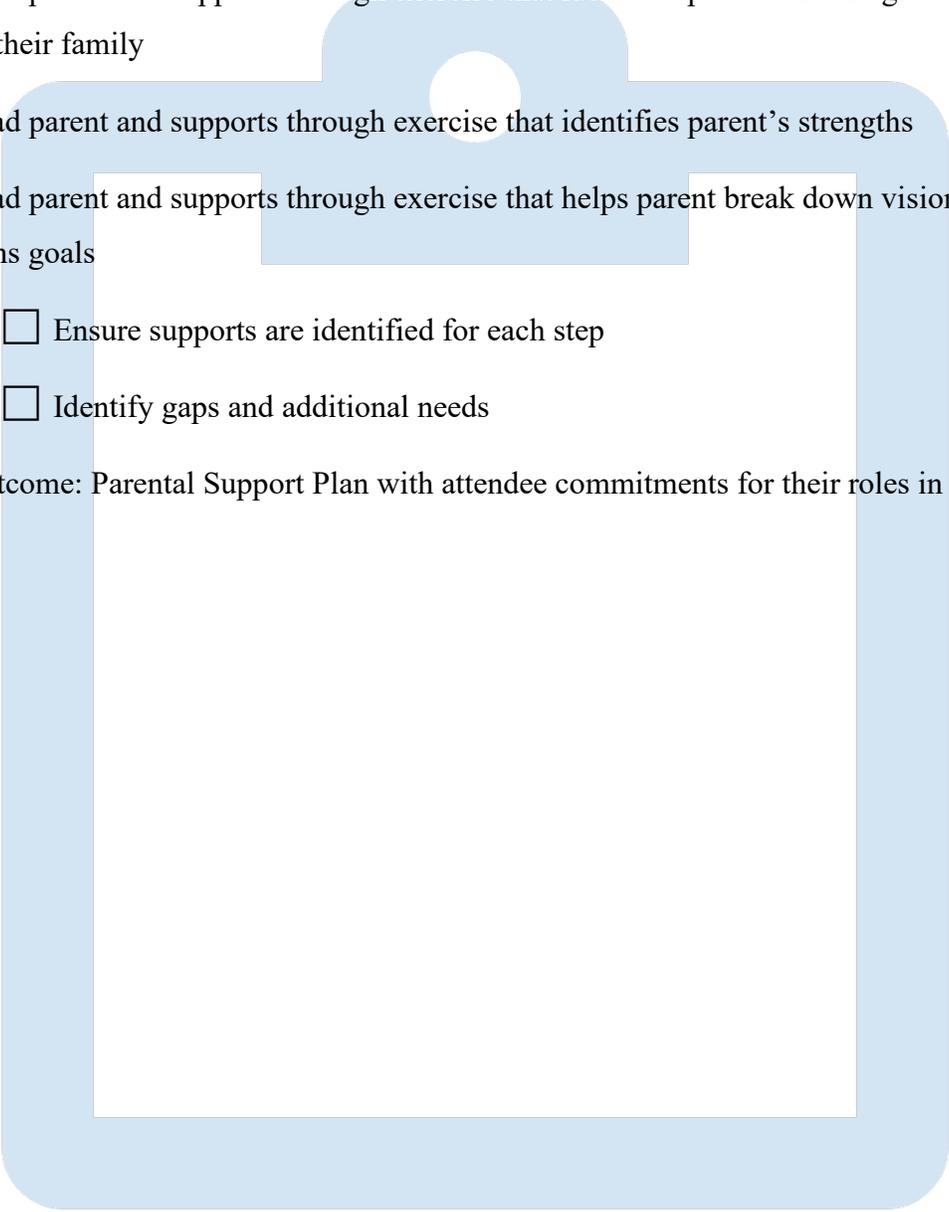
Contact Invitees

After you've confirmed that all invitees have been invited, you will contact them to confirm their attendance and clarify their role. You will describe the purpose of the parent-centered planning meeting and highlight their role as assistants or supports to the parent as the parent develops their own plan. This conversation may include examples of what their role is not, and the importance of keeping the parent in the driver's seat of this process.



Phase 3: Parent-Centered Planning Meeting

To Do Checklist

- 
- Open meeting with introductions and overview of the itinerary
 - Lead parent and supports through exercise that identifies parent's future goals and vision for their family
 - Lead parent and supports through exercise that identifies parent's strengths
 - Lead parent and supports through exercise that helps parent break down vision into short terms goals
 - Ensure supports are identified for each step
 - Identify gaps and additional needs
 - Outcome: Parental Support Plan with attendee commitments for their roles in the plan

Opening

You will begin the meeting by introducing yourself as the facilitator or guiding force of the parent-centered planning meeting. Then guide the group through introductions that include participant names and relationship to parent. You will clarify again the purpose of the parent-centered planning meeting, highlighting that everyone present is here to assist the parent in achieving their self-identified goals. Remember this meeting is intended to be brief, no more than a few hours, to accommodate the busy schedule of the parent.

It may be helpful to have a visual representation of the agenda (e.g. a poster, writing or pictures on a white/black board, handouts). Go through the agenda with everyone using a graphic flow chart inspired by the PATH model. You can explain that the purpose of the graphic flow chart is to break down big dreams into attainable action steps. As the group moves through the steps on the flow chart, you or a helper will be writing down (using words or images) what is being said onto the flow chart.



Step 1: North Star

The first step is to identify the parent’s dream or vision for their family. To help the parent identify their vision, the group may engage in a brainstorming activity where the facilitator or helper writes down ideas onto a white/black board or large poster paper. To encourage creativity, consider asking the following questions:

- What are your (the parent’s) values, culture, and beliefs around parenting?
- What parenting activities or roles are important to you (the parent)?
- What do you (the parent) want your home or living space to be like?
- What role would you (the parent) like to play in your other meaningful relationships while parenting?

The group may support the parent by participating in the brainstorming process; for example, a close friend may remember the parent telling them about an activity they hope to do with their child when their child begins school, and may offer that activity as a potential vision for the facilitator to write down on the brainstorming board. While the group may participate in brainstorming, the parent will decide what their vision will be. Once the parent has identified their “North star” the flow chart will look something like this:



Strengths

Next, the group will identify the parent's strengths and challenges related to their parenting vision. Similar to the identification of the "North star," the entire group can participate in the brainstorming process while the facilitator or helper records ideas using words or images.

Remember that it may be difficult for the parent to talk about their own strengths and encourage the group to share observations or memories that support the identification of strengths. Helpful prompts to offer the group include:

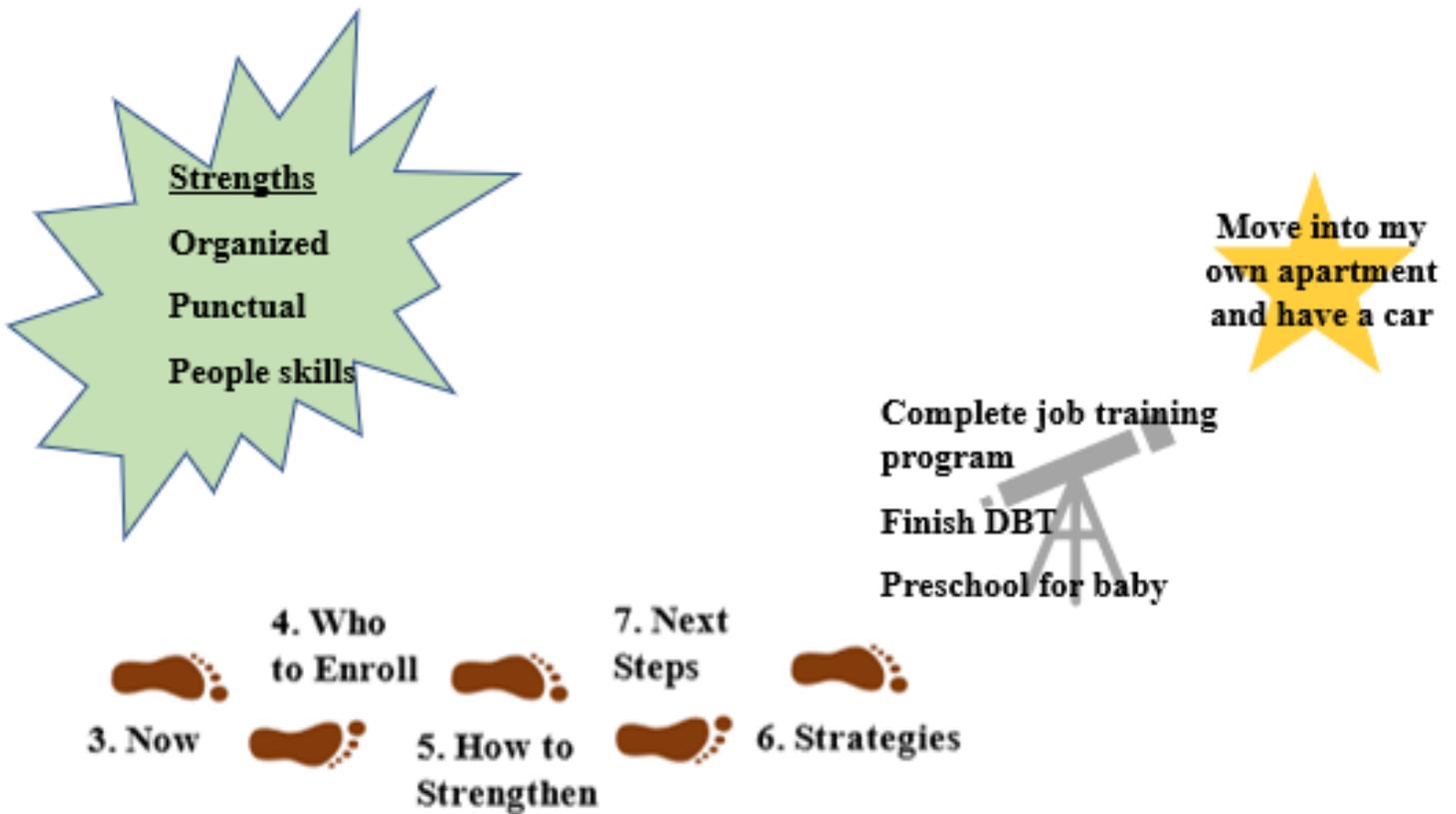
- What are you doing right now that will help you reach your North star?
- What are some things you like to do? What helps with that?
- What are some activities you think you're good at? What are some activities other people have told you you're good at?
- Tell me about a time when you overcame a parenting challenge? What helped with that?

When you're listening to the parent and other group members talk about strengths, listen for additional strengths that are not declared directly and write those down. Pause the group every few minutes to check for accuracy in what you're writing down.

If the group is struggling to come up with strengths, encourage the group to engage in more storytelling about experiences with the parent related to parenting, and listen for strengths that relate to the parenting vision. At that point pause the group when you write down a new strength, and check if what you wrote down was accurate. If it was not, ask what a more accurate strength might be. You will pull from your list of strengths to complete the remainder of the flow chart.

Step 2: Our Sense of the Goal

The next step is engaging in a group discussion about what the parent's "North star" means to the group, keeping a timeframe of about one year in mind. After a group discussion in which you, as the facilitator, pause intermittently to check whether the parent is agreeing with group member interpretations, the facilitator or helper will add a summarize version of the group's sense of the parent's vision that could be achieved reasonably in the next year. The flowchart will then look something like this:

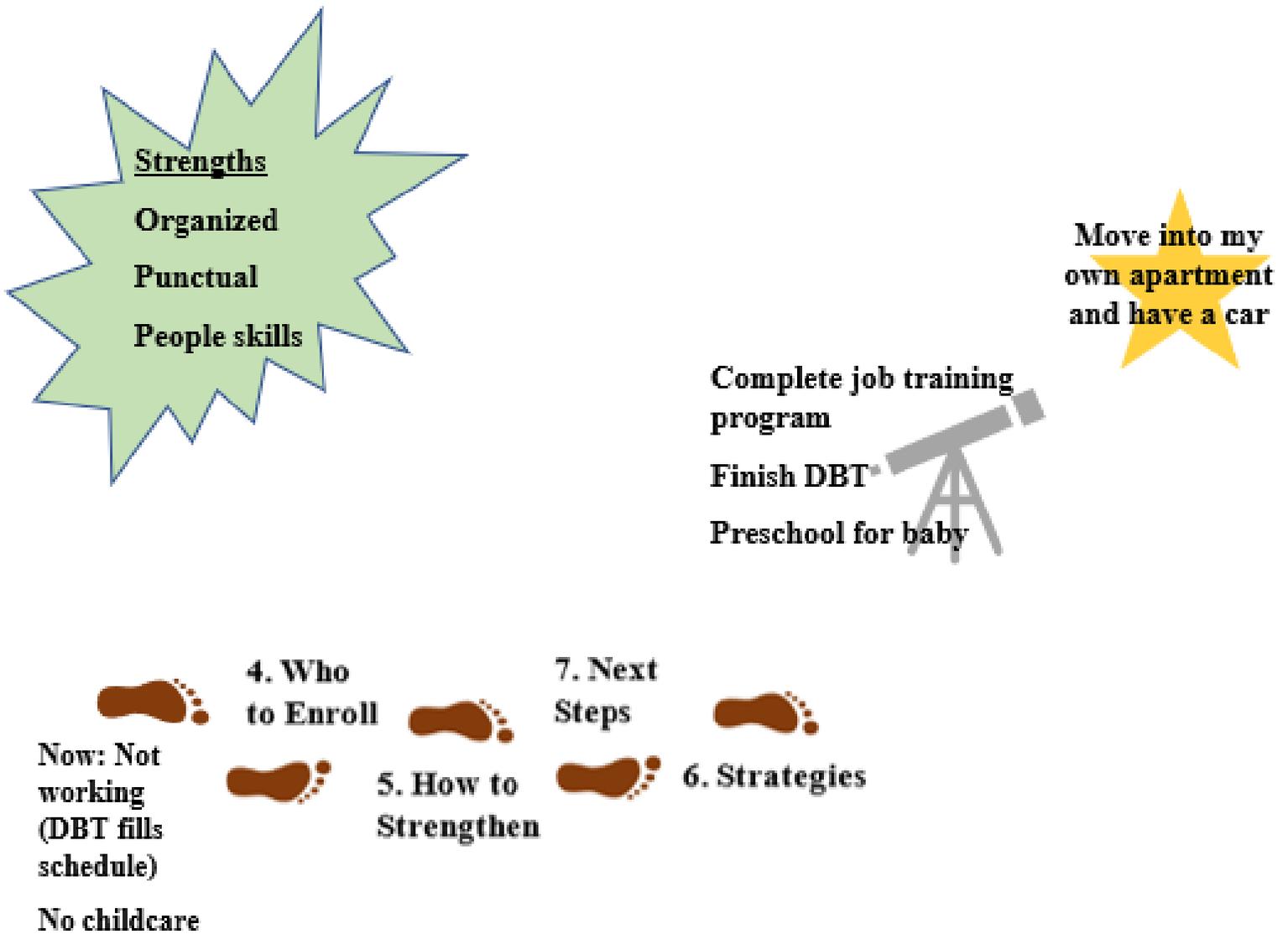


Step 3: Now

Now that there is an understanding of the parent’s vision for the future and the time-focused group interpretation of that goal, the group will shift its focus to the present. With a focus on the one-year goal, the group will engage in a visual brainstorming activity to identify activities, supports, and skills that the parent will need in order to achieve that goal. Another way to think about this might be: what are the current gaps or barriers in the parent’s way as they reach for their “North star”?

The facilitator has two roles through this process. First, the facilitator must hold the group accountable to their role as supports as the parent remains centered. This might mean redirecting group members if they begin identifying barriers that the parent doesn’t align with, or re-centering the parent’s voice and perspective while tempering conversation paths that feel more critical than constructive. Second, the facilitator will be filtering identified skills, activities, and

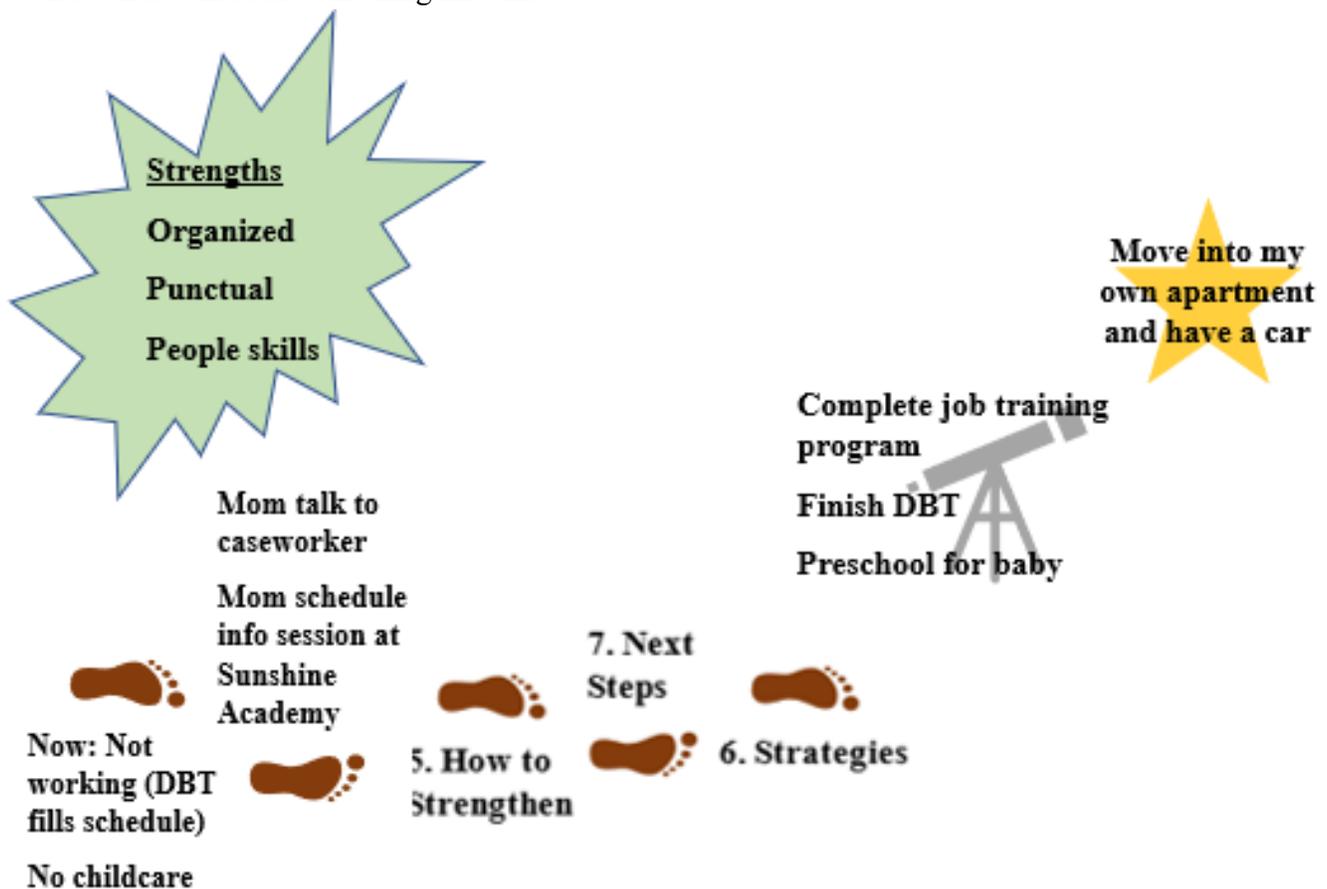
supports that are relevant to the goal so the group ends up with a list of current needs or gaps.
Your flowchart will then look something like this:



Step 4: Who to Enroll

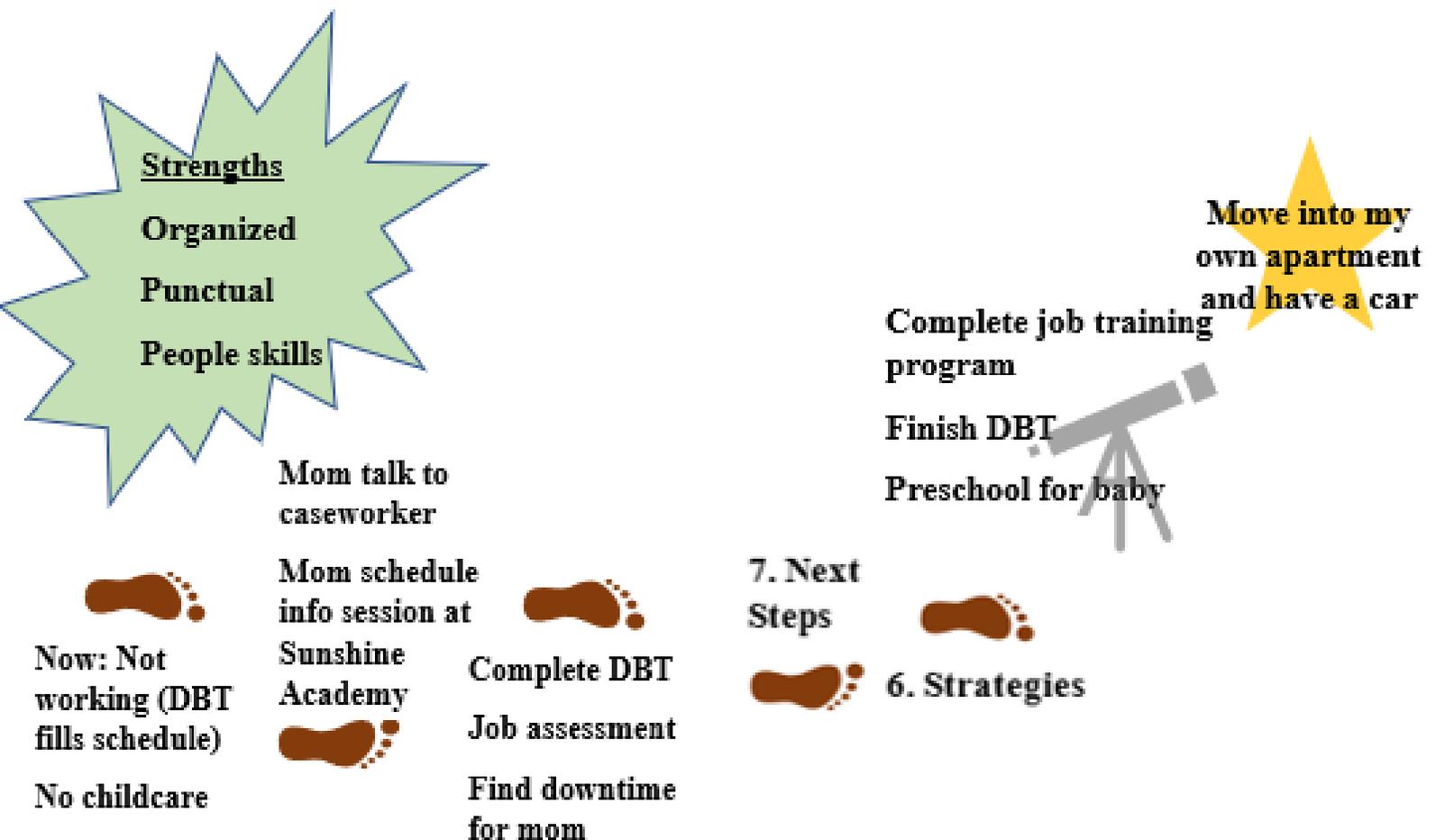
To address the identified gaps, the group will identify whose support needs to be enlisted and how the parent will enlist that support. When guiding the group through this next brainstorm, keep in mind that supports can be people present at the planning meeting as well as people who are not present. The facilitator may add the additional role of resource identifying on top of listening, recording, and refocusing. For example, the parent may say they need to connect with a preschool closer to their DBT group, which is outside of their neighborhood, and the people present in the group may find themselves unsure of where to look. You may know of a few good preschools in the neighborhood the parent was thinking of, or may at least know of a good online list. In this example, you may suggest the list and after the parent agrees they would like this resource you will write down the website/preschool name with “call school to schedule info session.”

After the group has gone through the process of identifying a series of WHOs and HOWs, the flowchart will look something like this:



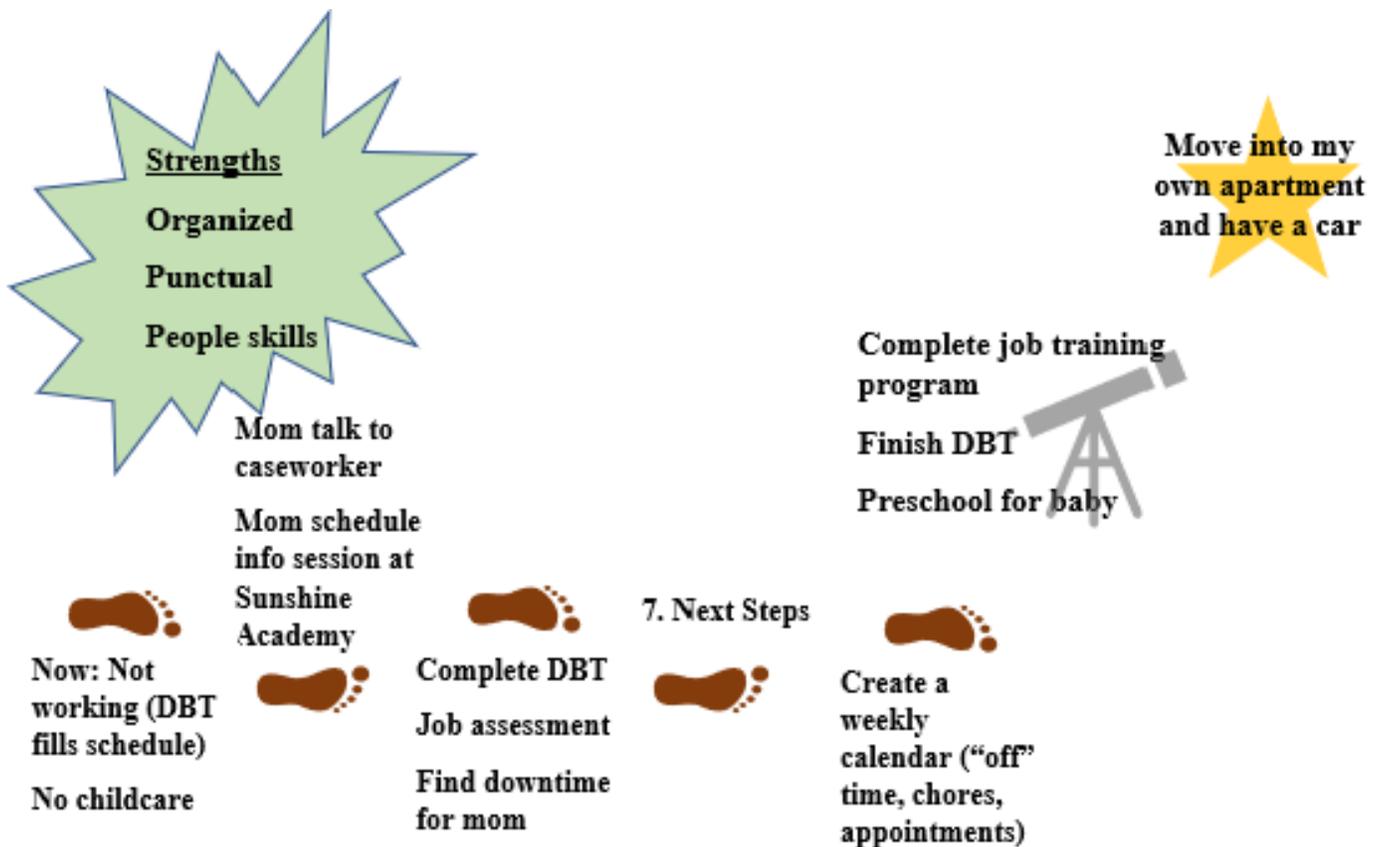
Step 5: How to Strengthen

Next, the group will clarify the tie between steps 3 and 4. In other words, how will the supports the parent identified for step 4 address the needs from step 3? This will essentially be a positively framed version of the needs in step 3. For example, “no childcare” will be written as “childcare assistance;” “not working due to DBT” will be written as “training for job assistance,” “check in with caseworker around DBT progress,” and perhaps “clarify DBT timeline.” Your job as the facilitator is to make sure that the group has identified a step for each of the needs identified in step 3, and to make sure that the parent’s perspective and desires are centered throughout the brainstorming process. The flowchart will now look something like this:



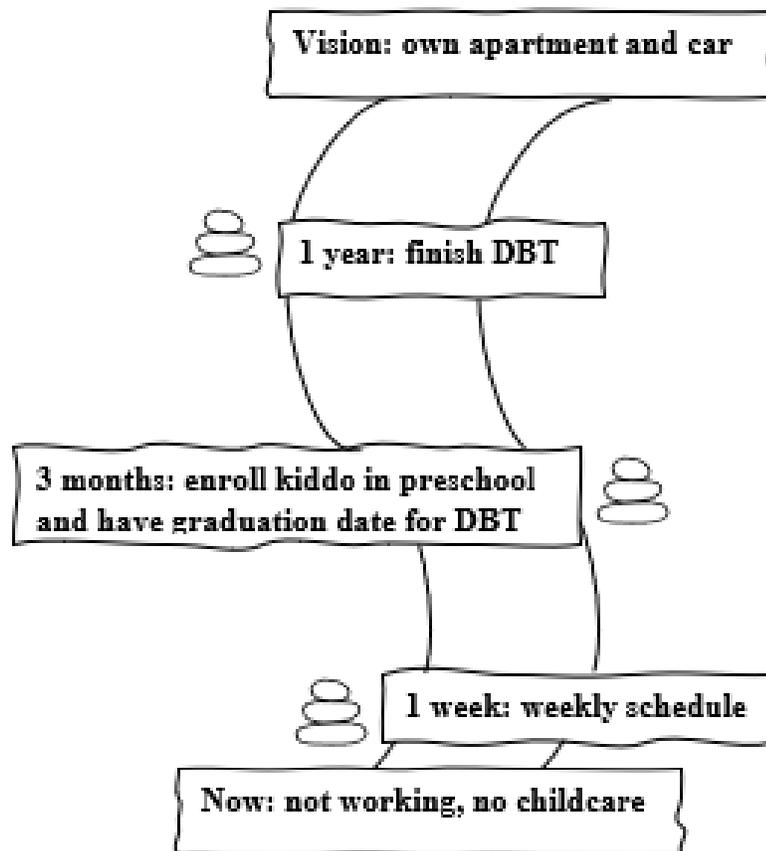
Step 6: Strategies

The second to last step in this process is identifying strategies or “bold steps” that the parent feels they can take now. These are action steps that the parent has the capacity to accomplish within the next week. The job of the facilitator through brainstorming strategies is to ensure the group environment remains conducive to realistic goal setting for the parent, rather than calling the parent to stretch passed what feels possible in order to meet the expectations of other group members. For example, if the parent’s initial idea for a bold step is to create a weekly schedule, and that results in a group member suggesting a daily calendar would be more effective, the facilitator should pause with the group and consider how much more effortful a daily calendar is when a weekly calendar is a strong bold step. If the parent in this example feels that the daily calendar would not be overwhelming, a mini-brainstorm around the pros and cons of a daily calendar over a weekly calendar may be helpful. Finally, if the parent feels strongly about the daily calendar that may be added to the list, and if the parent prefers the weekly calendar that will be added instead. Once the group has come up with a reasonable number of bold steps (this number will change depending on the parent), the flowchart will look like this:

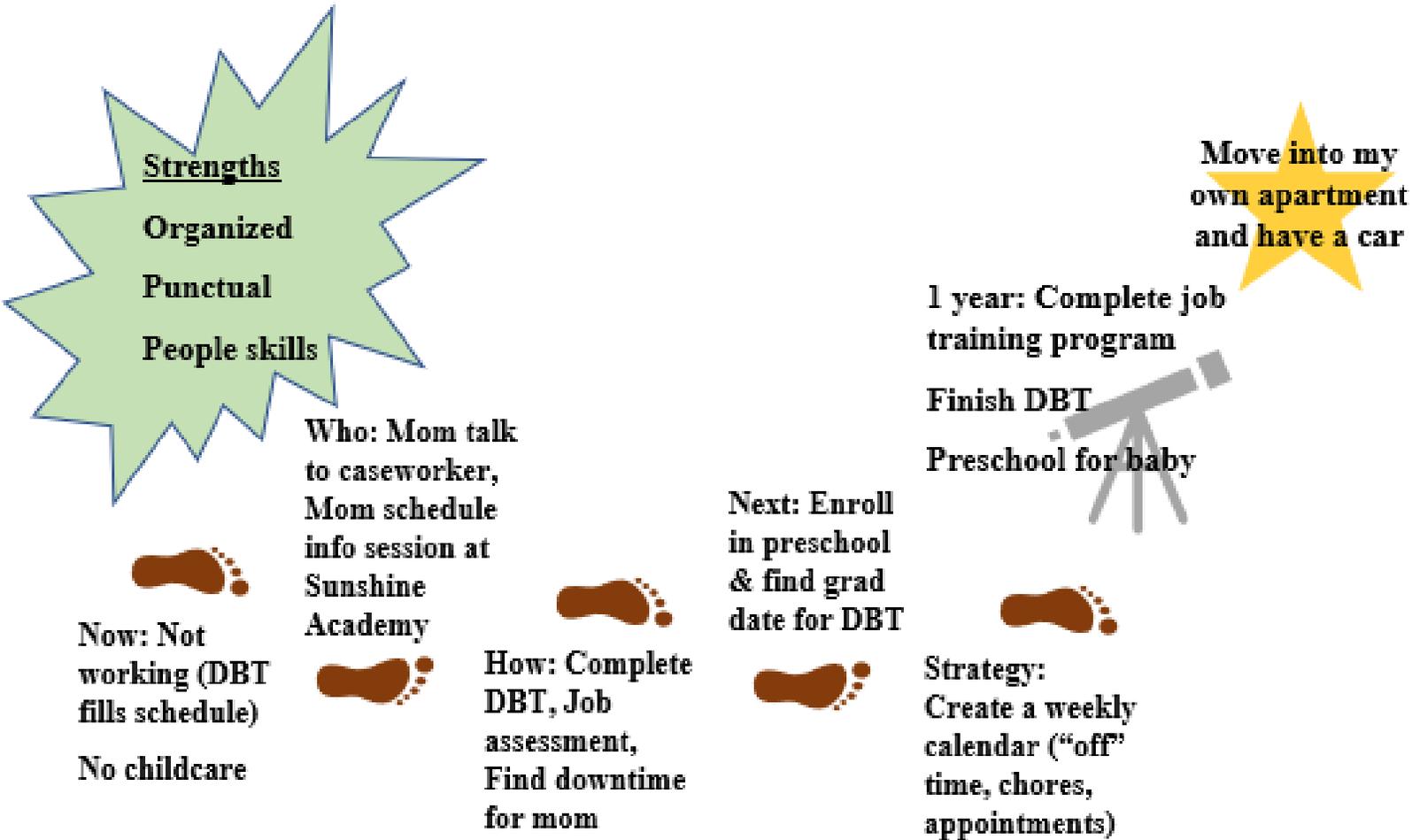


Step 7: Next Steps

Finally, the group will support the parent in identifying what their short-term goals will be. This will be a further narrowing of their vision beyond the already narrowed one-year goal. While continuing to brainstorm may be sufficient in helping the parent identify what their three-to-four-month goals are, it might also be overwhelming to balance all the information that is now on the flowchart. To support this process, it may be helpful to draw a simplified flowchart that only includes the goals. To facilitate this activity, you draw a winding path. Next you put the vision at the top of the path and where the parent is now at the bottom. Starting a bit below the top of the path you will begin marking off “milestones” – the first one will be “one year”, a few paces below that will be “three months,” and near the bottom of the path will be “one week.” You will put their one-year goal at the the “one year” milestone, and their bold step at the “one week” milestone. The visual of how much time and energy will go into the three-month goal may be a bit clearer when in visual comparison with the one-week and one-year goals. The winding path activity may look this:



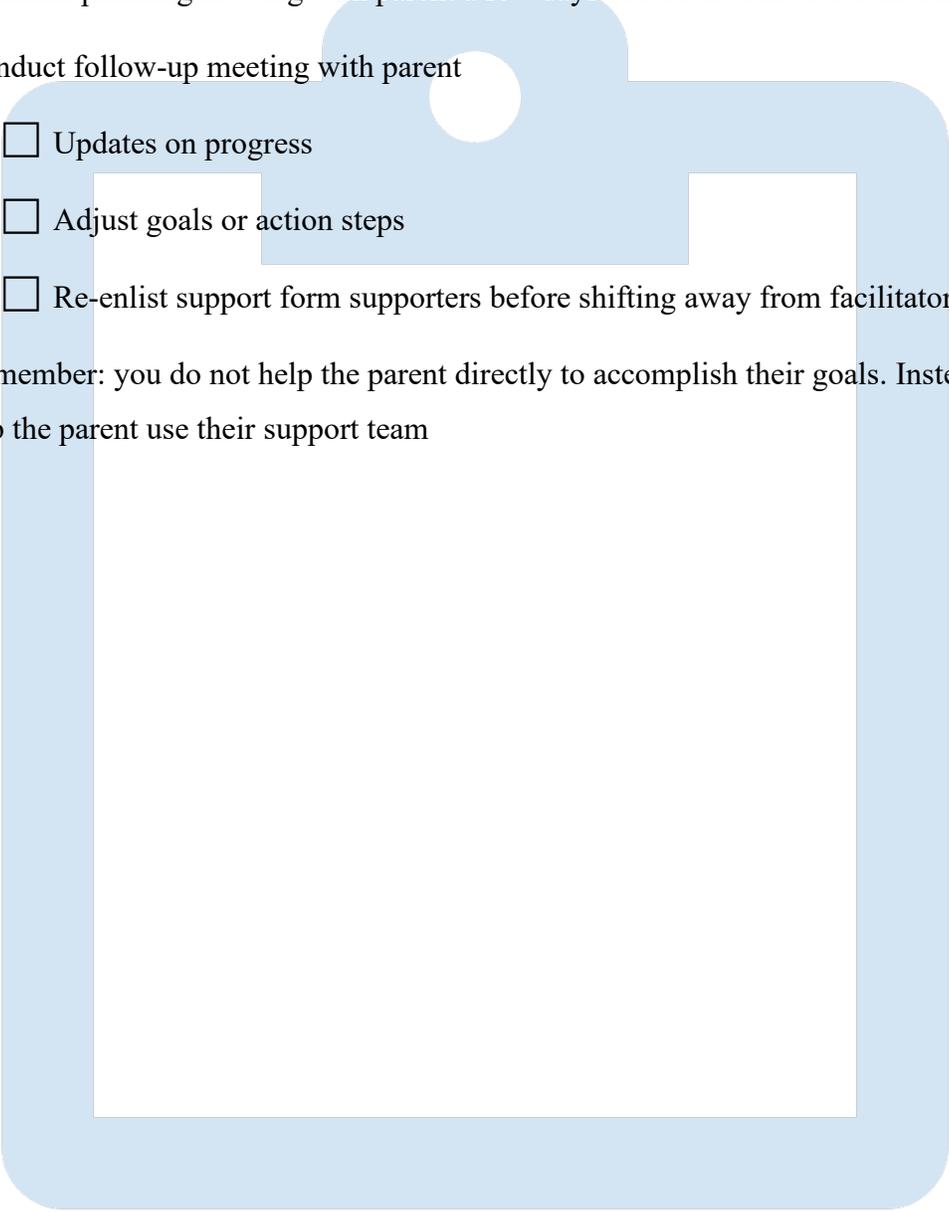
The short-term goal identified in the winding path activity will be added to the final flowchart. The final version of your parent support plan will look something like this:





Phase 4: Transition

To Do Checklist

- 
- Schedule follow-up meeting with parent at the end of the planning meeting
 - Confirm planning meeting with parent a few days before the scheduled meeting
 - Conduct follow-up meeting with parent
 - Updates on progress
 - Adjust goals or action steps
 - Re-enlist support from supporters before shifting away from facilitator role
 - Remember: you do not help the parent directly to accomplish their goals. Instead, you help the parent use their support team

Scheduling & Confirming Follow-Up Meeting

The follow-up meeting is the final phase in the parent-centered planning process. You will plan to meet with the parent and their supportive community two or three times over the next two months, and you will schedule the first of these meetings before you part ways after the planning meeting. The purpose of the follow-up is to offer resources that support achieving the first steps of the plan, to assist with problem solving, and to help break some action steps into smaller more actionable tasks.

The first follow-up meeting will be scheduled several weeks out to allow time for progress and/or problems to occur. Because there is a sizeable amount of time between contacts, it is helpful to send a reminder/confirmation using the parent's preferred communication method a day or two before the scheduled meeting. Just as you scheduled the first follow-up at the end of the planning meeting, you will also schedule the second follow-up at the end of the first follow-up meeting. Both follow-up meetings will have the same purpose.

Transitioning Out

The goal of the transition phase is not for the facilitator to take action themselves on any of the steps or tasks. The goal is to assist the parent in using their supports, and to remind them of the process. Skills like collaborative problem solving, goal setting and adjusting, and scaffolding are valuable supports through this process. You can also encourage the parent to refer back to the relationship map they created in preparation for the planning meeting, and all the flowcharts and brainstorm sheets that were saved from the planning meeting itself. If the parent is going through this process with an ongoing support team, this transition plan could remain ongoing as part of the parent's care plan with the other providers. Alternatively, these phases can be used as a one-time planning process for which the transition phases end after the two-month follow-up is complete.

Resources

Organizations

The Association for Successful Parenting.

<https://achancetoparent.net/>

National Research Center for Parents with Disabilities.

<http://heller.brandeis.edu/parents-with-disabilities/index.html>

Additional Parent-Centered Planning Resources

DeZelar, S., & Lightfoot, E. (2021). Enhancing supports for parents with disabilities: a qualitative inquiry into parent centered planning. *Journal of Family Social Work*, 1-19.

Lightfoot, E. & DeZelar, S. (2020). *Parent-Centered Planning for Parents with Disabilities. Practice Notes*. Center for the Advanced Studies in Child Welfare, No. 36. Available at: <https://cascw.umn.edu/portfolio-items/parent-centered-planning-for-parents-with-disabilities-pn36/>

Lightfoot, E., & DeZelar, S. (2020). Parent centered planning: A new model for working with parents with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 114, 105047.

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Person-Centered Planning Research Articles

Claes, C., Van Hove, G., Vandeveld, S., van Loon, J., & Schalock, R. L. (2010). Person-centered planning: Analysis of research and effectiveness. *Intellectual and developmental disabilities, 48*(6), 432-453.

O'Brien, J., Pearpoint, J., & Kahn, L. (2010). *The PATH and MAPS Handbook*. Toronto, ON, Canada: Inclusion Press.

Pearpoint, J., Forest, M., O'Brien, J., Forest, M. S., O'Brien, J. W., & Pearpoint, J. C. (1993). *PATH: A workbook for planning positive possible futures: Planning alternative tomorrows with hope for schools, organizations, businesses, families*. Inclusion Press.

Ratti, V., Hassiotis, A., Crabtree, J., Deb, S., Gallagher, P., & Unwin, G. (2016). The effectiveness of person-centered planning for people with intellectual disabilities: A systematic review. *Research in developmental disabilities, 57*, 63-84.