



Core Competencies Revision Final Report

November 2019



Background

The national certification initiative evolved through the hard work and dedication of a myriad of individuals from across the United States who collaborated to create a professional standard for Parent Support Providers. Parent Support Providers (PSPs) are primary caregivers who have the “*lived experience*” of parenting a child who experiences emotional, developmental, behavioral, substance use, or mental health challenges. PSPs have experience navigating child/family-serving systems to access services and supports and have received specialized training to assist and empower other families who are parenting children with similar challenges.

In 2007 the National Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health (NFFCMH) began the process of developing a national certification for Parent Support Providers. National certification was developed to provide a structure for individuals who were performing peer support services to become certified. Certification was developed through the work of subject matter experts from across the country. The national certification exam was designed by a psychometrician with input from numerous families. The cornerstone for this work continues to be the principle of *lived experience*.

In 2012, NFFCMH launched the national certification examination for Parent/Family Peer Support Providers (PSP). As the field of peer support has matured, it is incumbent upon us to revise the examination questions and protocol to incorporate lessons we have learned and to reflect the evolution of the field. To that end, in 2018 we began the Core Competencies Revision Project with two clear goals:

1. To update the National Competencies and the exam used to certify the Parent Support Provider workforce.
2. To ensure the revised PSP credential continues to meet high standards of ethical and professional practice for parent support services and the proficiency and competency of parent support providers.



National Certification Initiative

The national certification was designed to define the knowledge, attitudes and skills that are essential for supporting families who are parenting children and young adults who are involved in child/family-serving systems. National certification:

- Ensures uniformity of core knowledge by practitioners
- Endorses continuing professional development and credibility
- Advances uniform standards and scope of practice
- Promotes ethical practice
- Provides a portable credential

Many states have developed their own standards for Parent Support Providers. There is significant variance in certifications, which results in a lack of uniformity. While some states have designed robust requirements and training, others require minimal training, and a few do not require lived experience.

For the revised National Competencies to have impact and validity nation-wide, a scan of state competencies needed to be conducted and each state's standards compared and contrasted. A composite of competencies across states was essential in order to establish a common base. It is important to note that the essence of a competency was frequently the same even though states may use different titles and wording for the competency itself. As important as the similarities found across states are, areas identified by states that were absent from the National Competencies are equally compelling.

Currently there is no national data base for state parent peer support competencies. Each state's certification and competency standards required an individual, manual search. There is no uniform department or place to search for these standards. States vary greatly regarding who is responsible for certification and how information about certification is made available to the public. NFFCMH contacted and researched family-run organization sites, state departmental sites, training sites, etc. in order to obtain as much information as possible. While these results are extensive, it is impossible to confirm that they are exhaustive.



Competency Versus Skill

In order to develop broad competencies that can be embraced by states, it is important to differentiate between a competency and a skill.

- Skills are the practical or cognitive tasks that you can do. Skills define the specific activities and they range widely in terms of complexity.
- Competence is the proven use of skills, knowledge, and abilities to accomplish something. Skills plus knowledge plus abilities equal competence. These behaviors demonstrate the ability to perform the job requirements competently.

Many states have assigned skills that are attributed to their stated competencies. Our goal is to build broad competencies that allow states to customize the specific skills, knowledge and abilities that make them applicable to their unique needs.

Levels of Proficiency

It should not be expected that every Parent Support Provider will demonstrate full proficiency in each competency area. Some competencies require an awareness of the information and broad enough knowledge regarding how to use the information. It is acknowledged that there will be differing levels of experience and proficiency among Parent Support Providers.

For the purposes of the National Certification competencies, the following 4 proficiency levels will be utilized:

- 1.) Basic: Uses basic understanding of the field to perform job duties
- 2.) Working: Successfully completes diverse tasks of the job; applies and enhances knowledge
- 3.) Extensive: Performs without assistance; recognized as a resource to others
- 4.) Expert/Leader: Seen as an expert and/or leader; guides, troubleshoots; has strategic focus



National Core Competencies

The NFFCMH currently has 11 core competencies. Built on the lived experience of parenting a child with emotional, mental health or behavioral needs, the foundation of this work is being able to articulate and draw from the lessons learned as a parent and cross walk them with the following eleven domains of competence:

- Ethics
- Confidentiality
- Effecting Change
- Behavioral Health
- Education
- Communication
- Parenting for Resiliency
- Advocacy
- Empowerment
- Wellness and Natural Supports
- Local Resources



Ethics



Confidentiality



Effecting Change



Behavioral Health
Information



Education Information



Communication



Parenting for Resiliency



Advocacy In & Across
Systems



Empowerment



Wellness & Natural
Supports



Local Resource
Information



Methodology

Data from the States

The Competencies National Scan was initiated by gathering core competencies and job descriptions from across the country. Core competencies from 39 states and the District of Columbia and 81 job descriptions from 44 states and the District of Columbia were collected. Each states' competencies were analyzed and compared to the National Competencies and reviewed for similarities and variations across states.

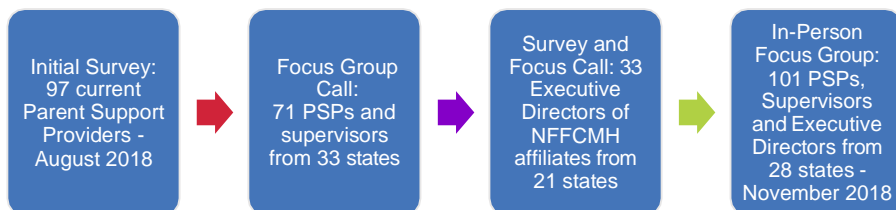
Each job description was analyzed to identify skills inherent to the PSP role in that state and to determine how these skills correlate to the national standards. For multiple job descriptions within a state, these were merged to create an intrastate description. The final step was to compare all states at a macro level to the skills embedded in the National Competencies. As a result of this analysis, a map of the significant skills associated with the national competencies was created.

Data from the Field

A survey was conducted with current Nationally Certified Parent Support Providers (CPSPs) seeking feedback to assess the ranking and importance in their daily work of the current core competencies and their input regarding new competencies to be considered.

The results from the national scan and the initial survey feedback from CPSPs were presented to two focus groups comprised respectively of current parent support providers and the Executive Directors of family-run organizations in August 2018. The first focus group consisted of over 70 Parent Support Providers (PSPs) and their supervisors from 33 states. The second focus group included 33 Executive Directors from family-run organizations representing 21 states.

Based on both the nationwide data collected and feedback from the field, revision suggestions were presented to a focus group of 100 Parent Support Providers, Executive Directors and Parent Support Provider Supervisors from 28 states in November of 2018. The input and feedback from this group was then incorporated into the results of the National Competency Scan.

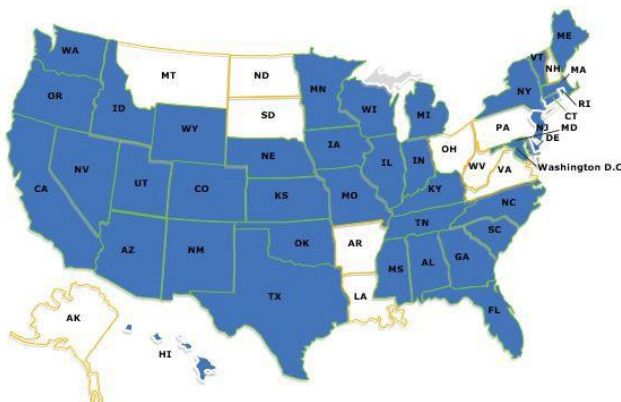




Summary of Findings

States Evaluated

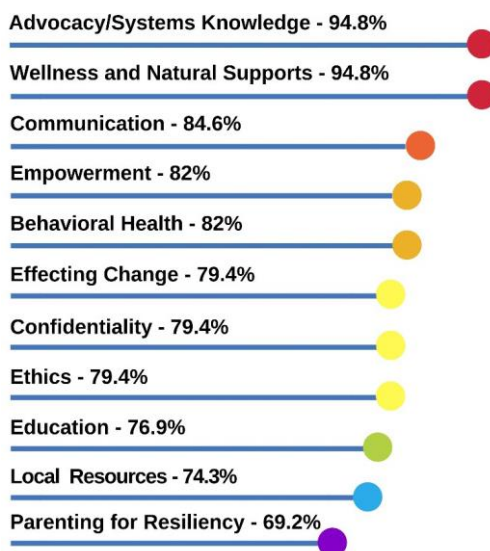
Information from 39 states and the District of Columbia were gathered as part of the National Scan.



What Did We Learn?

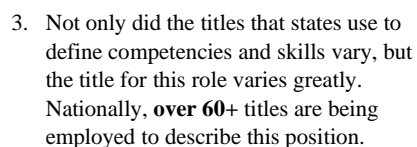
1. A high percentage of states use competencies that align with each of NFFCMH's current eleven competencies. These high percentages reveal that the current national competencies **remain important and relevant to the work** of Parent Support Providers across the country.
2. There is variation in language used by the states to describe core competencies. That variation is important to understand as our goal is **to create broad competencies that reflect the field work nationally** and can be tailored by individual states to fulfill their own unique needs. Rigid requirements for consistency across all measures is not the goal. Just like families, each state is unique and has its own culture and characteristics. Each state is also dealing with specific Managed Care Organizations and varied funder language.

State Scan Data: % of Alignment with Current Competencies





While the basis of the competencies was similar nationwide, states used a variety of titles or language to describe their competencies. For example: Instead of Ethics and Confidentiality, many states use the term Professionalism.





4. Communication is essential to all areas of Parent Support Provider work. Skills and knowledge that are assigned by NFFCMH and many states to the current Communication competency are integral and inseparable components of all other competencies and cannot be separated from the work of those competencies.
5. Several distinct new categories emerged that are outside of the current national competency categories. Values in the graph below indicate the number of states using each of these categories as a competency.

NEW CATEGORY - # OF STATES

Crisis and Safety Planning – 1

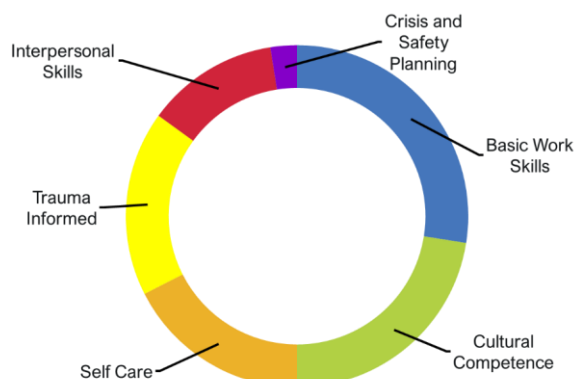
Basic Work Skills – 16

Cultural Competency – 11

Self-Care – 11

Trauma Informed – 10

Interpersonal Skills - 7



- 6. Many states have **combined competency** attributes to create broader, more encompassing categories that link to specific skill areas. Example: Systems Knowledge and Navigation was used to capture knowledge and skills relating to Behavioral/Mental Health, Education, Child Welfare, Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities and Justice Systems.





Combined Competency Examples

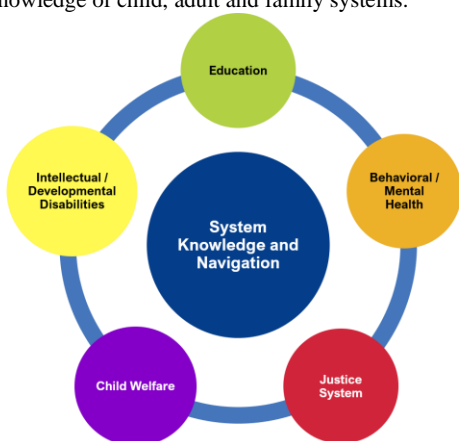
Systems Knowledge

There was consensus that the field required knowledge of systems that not only touched the child being served but the adults in the family as well. This breadth of knowledge is compounded as children age out of the child system and enter the adult system.

The current competency category of Behavioral Health and Education can be expanded to a new competency of Systems Knowledge. Systems Knowledge could include knowledge of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Education, Social Services, Intellectual Disabilities, Health Care, and Justice Systems. This broadly encompassing category would cover knowledge of all systems – those that touch children, transition-age youth and the adults involved in their lives as well.



This graphic is an excellent example of a broadened competency area. The initial suggestion was Knowledge of Child-Serving Systems. This evolved to become Systems Knowledge and Navigation to include knowledge of child, adult and family systems.





Professional Responsibilities

There was consensus from both the National Scan and the focus groups that two current National Competencies, Ethics and Confidentiality could be combined. Many states have already made this merger.

Additionally, the most prevalent of the newly emerging domains was Basic Work Skills, which frequently encompassed Professional Skill. In evaluating the skills and knowledge under Ethics, Confidentiality, Basic Work Skills and Professional Skill, there was significant overlap and duplication. This allows for two of the current National Competencies and two of the Emerging Domains to be merged into a single broader competency.

The single concern regarding this merger centered around the title of the new competency. Professionalism was the title that initially emerged, as it was found in the scan to be currently in use by many states. During the in-person focus group we conducted, there appeared to be a fairly equal split over the use of Professionalism. Those in support expressed that these were basic workplace skills and that it was the desire that Parent Support Providers be viewed as professionals. Others voiced concern that many families had negative experiences associated with the term professional and it should not be used. As a result of these discussions, the titles Professional Responsibilities or Workplace Competencies have been suggested.





Resources and Natural Supports

The National Scan revealed that most states did not separate Local Resources into its own competency domain. The ability to connect families with state, regional and community/local resources as well as natural supports were combined. Based on the scan, it is recommended that Resources and Natural Supports become a new competency, replacing Local Resources.

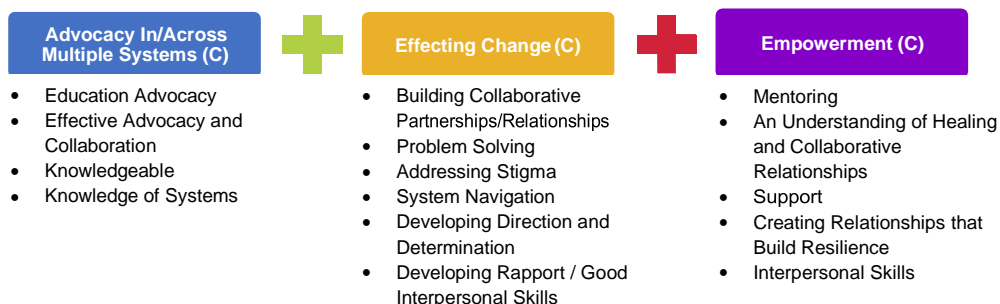




Recommendations Presented to National Panel of Experts

After conducting the scan of competency domains and skills sets and following the logic model and examples set forth in this paper, recommendations that the following broad competency areas be considered for the revision of the National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health's Core Competencies developed for presentation to a national expert panel. **Current (C)** and **Emerging (E)** competencies combined to create these recommendations and examples of skills that could be assigned by states to each new competency category are included below.

Advocacy and Effecting Change

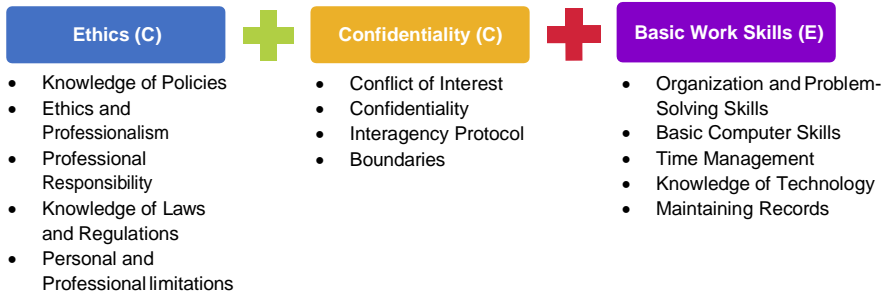


This new competency could include significant skills from each area as fitting for individual states and their PS role(s):

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Building Collaborative Partnerships and Relationships• Problem Solving• Relationship Building• Effective Advocacy | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Addressing Stigma• Systems Navigation• Communication Skills• Interpersonal Skills |
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Professional Responsibilities

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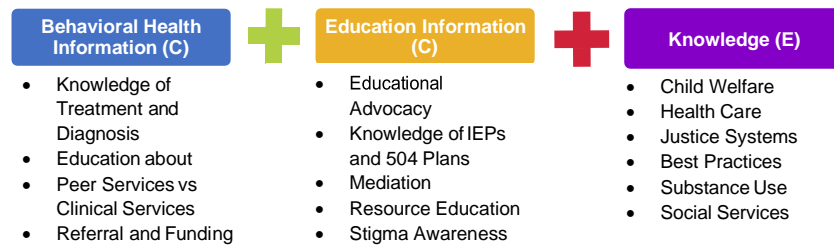


This new competency could include significant skills from each area as fitting for individual states and their peer support role(s):

- Basic Work Skills
- Knowledge of Policies
- Ethics
- Confidentiality
- Boundaries
- Legal Responsibilities
- Professional Development

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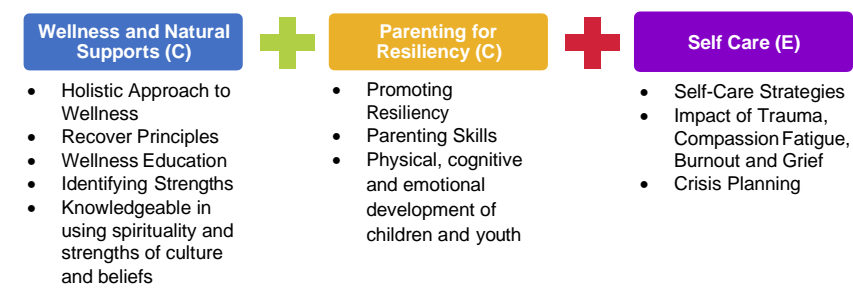
Systems Knowledge and Navigation



This new competency could include significant skills from each area as fitting for individual states and their PSP role(s):

- Mental Health – Adult, Child & Youth
- Intellectual Disabilities
- Substance Use
- Education
- Social Services
- Health Care Systems
- Justice Systems
- Co-Occurring/ Co-Morbid Conditions
- Adult Service Systems
- Mandatory Reporting
- Federal and State Laws/Regulations
- System of Care Principles
- Interagency Protocols and Mandates

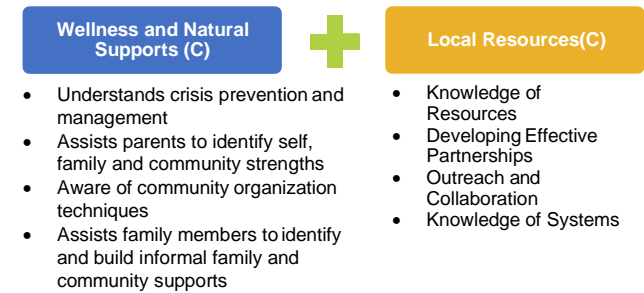
Wellness and Resiliency



This new competency could include significant skills from each area as fitting for individual states and their PS role(s):

- Holistic Approach to Wellness
 - Promoting Resiliency
 - Recovery Principles
- Impact of Trauma, Compassion Fatigue, Burnout and Grief
 - Wellness Education
 - Parenting Skills
- Self-Care Strategies (For Providers and Families)

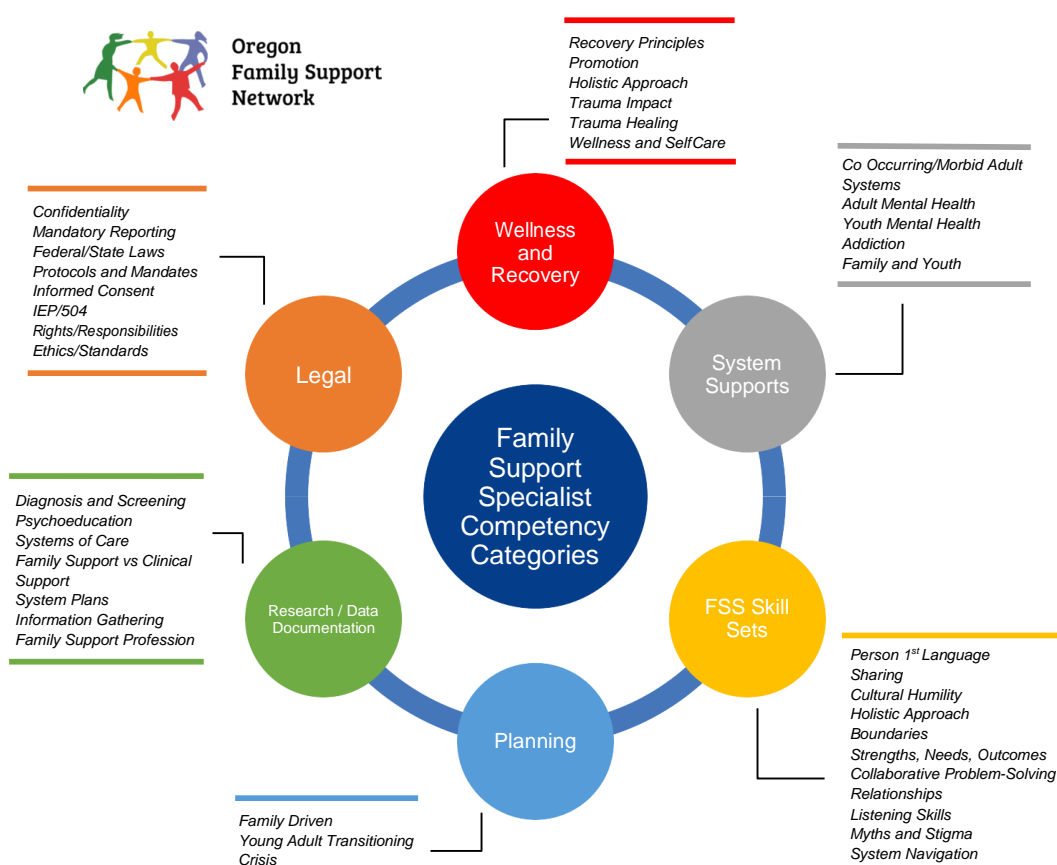
Resources and Natural Supports



This new competency could include significant skills from each area as fitting for individual states and their PS role(s):

- Help families identify and use natural supports and community resources
 - Local Community and System Navigation
- Identifying Family Strengths, Needs and Outcomes
 - Family Relationships Building
 - System Partner Relationship Building

Earlier this year, Oregon released their revised competencies using 6 core competency domains to cover 43 specific competency skill sets and knowledge bases. Their revisions were also able to encompass several of the emerging categories identified in our national scan, as well as emerging areas identified by focus groups. Taking an in-depth look at the work done by the state of Oregon can help illustrate how to develop broad domain competencies with specific competency skills and knowledge bases.



Expert Panel Final Review and Recommendations

In July 2019, a panel of Family Peer Support Experts convened for two days in Maryland, to review, discuss and evaluate the data of the project. The panel consisted of the following family peer support experts: Dr Kimberly Hoagwood – Vice Chair for Research at New York University Child Study Center and Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry; Gail Cormier – Executive Director of North Carolina Families United; Hugh Davis – Executive Director of Washington Families Ties; Susan Burger – Director of Workforce Development at Families Together in New York State; Karen Cooper – Family Advocacy and Community Training in Missouri, specialty in educational advocacy ; and Trish Todd – Maryland Coalition of Families, specialty in substance use disorder. Dr. Lynda Gargan, Executive Director of the National Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health facilitated. Michelle Covington, Project Manager, NFFCMH, who served as lead for the project, presented recommendations.

The panel recognized that, just like families, each state is unique and has its own culture, needs and terminology. Because of the unique nature of each state, and due to the variation in requirements of managed care organizations and other funders, strict adherence to a national standard is not feasible. In order to develop national continuity, broad competency domains were developed to enhance national consensus and to allow for each state to meet its unique needs through the creation and assignment of necessary skill sets and knowledge. As a result of the Expert Panel’s review of the state gathered data and the focus group feedback, five competency domains emerged:

- 1. Wellness & Resiliency**
- 2. Resources & Natural Supports**
- 3. Systems Knowledge & Navigation**
- 4. Effecting Change**
- 5. Professional Responsibilities**

Recommended Revised Competency Skill Areas

The Expert Panel worked to give *some* examples of skills that *could* fall into the new domains. Based on each state's unique needs, there is the ability to add skills to meet those needs.

Wellness and Resiliency

- Uses lived experiences to provide support, encouragement and hope
- Assists Families in building self-confidence/self esteem
- Assists families in building stability in their lives (Maslow's Hierarchy)
- Understands the holistic view of family members' physical, social, mental and spiritual strengths and needs
- Identifies family strengths, needs, outcomes
- Participates in Crisis and Safety Planning
- Demonstrates understanding of holistic approach to wellness
- Promotes and models resiliency
- Incorporates recovery principles
- Articulates the impact of trauma, compassion fatigue, burnout and grief
- Provides wellness education resources
- Reinforces positive parenting skills
- Designs self-care strategies (For Providers and Families)

Resources and Natural Supports

- Demonstrates knowledge of community-based resources and how to access, including funding options
- Collaborates with groups to pool resources
- Negotiates successfully with the community partners to meet families' needs
- Identifies transition resources
- Assists the family to identify goals and develop a plan for success across all life domains
- Demonstrates ability to provide necessary info and options on resources and support in order to allow families to make informed decisions
- Assists families to identify and use natural supports
- Supports families to access and navigate local resources
- Promotes positive family relationship building
- Creates opportunities for system partner relationship building

Systems Knowledge and Navigation

- Demonstrates general knowledge of diagnostic profiles and treatment options
- Describes basic tenants of guardianship and trusts
- Promotes understanding of parental rights and responsibilities in system supports
- Demonstrates general knowledge of the educational systems and advocacy within that system
- Demonstrates general knowledge of the behavioral health system, health care system, justice system, Substance use treatments and physical health systems for all family members.
- Demonstrates knowledge of social services and child welfare systems
- Demonstrates knowledge about the use of peer services.

Effecting Change

- Demonstrates effective communication strategies
- Promotes family voice and choice at all levels of systems service
- Capably assists families in asserting their rights to meet family's needs
- Proficient in supporting, teaching and coaching parents to identify and articulate their family's needs and goals
- Engages families to identify needed systems changes or issues
- Strategically shares lived experience to effect policy change and assist parents to do the same
- Partners with parents and professionals to build collaborative relationships
- Articulates the values of fostering cooperation between families and family-serving systems
- Models effective strategies for families without being directive
- Reframes challenges using strength-based language
- Advocates in a solution-focused manner

Professional Responsibilities

- Demonstrates mastery of basic work skills
- Articulates knowledge of policies
- Describes the distinctions between peer support and clinical services
- Practices cultural humility
- Applies ethical standards
- Conducts self with integrity
- Understands personal and professional limitations and implicit biases
- Incorporates standards of confidentiality
- Displays professional appearance, attitude and communication
- Uses self- disclosure appropriately

Job Title for Nationally Certified Peers

Understanding that, due to Managed Care Organization requirements, state policies, contracts, etc. states will create unique job titles for peer services, the expert panel recommended a broad title for nationally certified peers. In scans of current titles, we know that there are 50+ titles used across the nation that are providing service that can be defined as family peer support. As an outcome of the scan, descriptors emerged as essential to adequately describing the role:

- Family versus Parent – “Parent” is deemed too restrictive to describe the evolving constellation of caregivers who are fulfilling the parenting role
- Peer – it is essential that “peer” be used to emphasize that this role is not just knowledge-based service being provided but that the element of “lived experience” serves as the foundational underpinning

“Partner”, “Provider” and “Specialist” are widely utilized as a part of the job title. While each has advantages, the consensus of the expert panel is that for the purposes of national certification, the title that offers the most inclusive universal description is **Certified Family Peer Specialist (CFPS)**.

Next Steps

Final recommendations will be presented at the 30th Annual National Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health Conference in November of 2019 in Phoenix, Arizona. Feedback on the Final recommended competencies will be accepted through December 2019. Throughout the conference NFFCMH staff will be available to work with states to review their core competencies and to offer suggestions as to how they can be incorporated into the five, adopted national competencies. This support and technical assistance will be available on an ongoing basis.

Revised competencies will become effective January 2020. NFFCMH will issue new certificates to all nationally certified peers to reflect the revised job title and will provide notice of title change to funders, policy makers, and other interested parties as requested.