

Vermont Family Network's Parent Match Program

Frequently Asked Questions & Answers

1. *What is the Parent Match program?*

A parent talks with another parent to get support and information. They understand each other because both have had similar experiences. A few phone calls allow sharing in confidence. Vermont Family Network (VFN) staff connects two parents to make a match. VFN staff will look for the match based on what you identify as important. You might ask for general support around behavior, education, siblings or family issues. You might want a match with someone with hospital experience or with the same specific diagnosis.

2. *What are the steps in the Parent Match process?*

- Parent requests a peer parent match.
- Staff checks availability of potential Support Parents.
- Staff sends an email with contact information to both parents.
- Support Parent contacts other parent (phone, text, or email).
- Parents talk by phone at mutually convenient time (2-4 calls suggested).

3. *Who can request a match?*

Anyone in a parenting role (e.g. parent, guardian, grandparent, foster, adoptive) who would find it helpful to talk with someone in a similar situation may request a match. Sharing thoughts, feelings, ideas and experiences with someone who's "been there" can help parents feel less alone, less isolated, and more part of a community.

4. *Who can be a Support Parent?*

Support Parents have a child with a special health care need, which is defined by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau as: "Those who have one or more chronic physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional conditions and who also require health and related services of a type or amount beyond that required by children generally."

A Support Parent has had the time and opportunity to go through their own process of adjustment and different emotional states. They have had experience parenting and navigating healthcare and educational systems.

5. *What skills and attributes contribute to making a successful match?*

- Communication skills: non-judgmental and active listening
- Self-awareness and self-reflection; understanding your own values and beliefs
- Maturity and empathy resulting from your own adaptation process
- Listening carefully rather than making assumptions or comparisons
- Share your own hopes, resources, and practical experiences
- Maintaining confidentiality is important to assure privacy and trust for both parents
- Relate respectfully to people of different backgrounds and cultures

6. *What are some helpful tips for Support Parents?*

- Make calls when you have time to talk.
- Introduce yourself as the Support Parent matched by VFN.
- Use person-first language (e.g., child with a disability rather than disabled child).
- Clarify terms that may be unfamiliar to you or to the other parent.
- Refer to children and adults by name.
- Ask parent about strengths of the child and family.
- Ask how other family members are doing.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Offer suggestions about what has worked for you keeping in mind that everyone is different.

7. *When should either matched parent call VFN for help?*

- If you're having difficulty connecting with the other parent
- If your availability changes
- If you think another match would be helpful
- If you have any questions or concerns

8. *Can I get a match if my child's diagnosis is extremely rare?*

Yes, staff will use our database to search in Vermont first, and then we'll try the national P2P (Parent to Parent) organizations.

9. *Are there other ways to connect with families like mine?*

Yes, we offer a variety of different ways for parents to connect, share information, and provide support. We have a [closed Facebook group](#), a [Yahoo listserv](#), a list of [support groups](#), [Sibshops](#), a [Vermont Leadership Series](#), and [Family Faculty](#). Families also enjoy participating in our annual conference and Family Fun Day.

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www.VermontFamilyNetwork.org

1-800-800-4005 or (802) 876-5315