

The Impact of Social and Peer Supports on Parent/Child Well-being

An Annotated Bibliography

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This research was completed in partnership with:



Since 1983, PEPS has been connecting families in parent peer-support groups and now offers programs for expectant parents, parents of newborns, infants, or adolescents and teens, plus affinity groups for families sharing identities that intersect with their identity as a parent. With PEPS, parents create strong, healthy families with concrete support, social connections and parenting resources. PEPS is a 501(C)(3) nonprofit organization.

www.peps.org

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1. Introduction

A growing body of research suggests that meaningful connections between parents and their peers correlates to child, parent, and family resilience and overall well-being. Social connections are commonly posited to be a leading factor for adult wellbeing, and peer-to-peer support is seen to be a promising practice in clinical/recovery settings. However, research on social and peer-to-peer connections and family/child wellbeing in the general population is in nascent stages. While many in the general population are not clinically defined as being in “recovery”, we suggest that American parents must recover daily from the impacts of cultural and social isolation, the pandemic, racism, capitalism and the affiliated lack of pro-family public policies (federal paid leave, universal preschool), all which serve to undermine the modern family and human well-being. During the creation of this bibliography, the [US Surgeon General](#) declared the US to be in an epidemic of social isolation. [Record high rates of depression and suicidal ideation amongst female teens](#) suggest severe consequences of social isolation across the socioeconomic spectrum, and reports of [decreasing life expectancy for Americans](#) evidence that while we are all worse off, [people of color and people with lower incomes](#) are disproportionately impacted.

This research suggests that the unique benefits of peer-to-peer support cannot come from any other source. Peer-to-peer support was once easily found in American social networks such as faith-based institutions, community clubs, local familial networks, and in-person (pre Zoom) workplaces. American society is no longer set up to offer such supports in a consistent or reliable way. While formal peer-to-peer supports are commonly turned to for clinical intervention/recovery, this research project suggests that their *preventive* effects are understudied, underestimated, and underutilized. PEPS is thereby in a class of its own, addressing an emerging and critical unmet need for *preventive* social support networks for families during times of transition (newborn and infant groups) and vulnerability (adolescent and special pops groups). There is also a body of research that explains why PEPS is exceptionally successful in this endeavor from a psychological perspective.

In this bibliography, we have organized by category the most relevant research on the impact of social and peer-to-peer parental supports on child wellbeing. We also look at the modern deficiency of such supports in American society/policy and acknowledge the history of abuse and genocide towards indigenous communities that has punished childrearing practices that center community wellness and extended care. We provide research demonstrating the efficacy of peer-to-peer support with an emphasis on clinical and recovery settings. Finally, we offer a philosophical argument that it is collective care, rather than self care, that is required to achieve wellness and liberation. The long story of success for PEPS is proof that the concept of collective care truly can be translated from theory into practice.

2. Social Support for Parents Increases Parental Well-Being

Peer-Reviewed Journal Article

Armstrong, PhD, Birnie-Lefcovitch, PhD, & Ungar, PhD. (2005, June). *Pathways Between Social Support, Family Well Being, Quality of Parenting, and Child Resilience: What We Know*. Retrieved May 8, 2023, <https://internationalparentingschool.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Armstrong-Birnie-Lefcovitch-and-Ungar-2005.pdf>

This literature review covers theoretical and conceptual frameworks for the relationships between social supports for parents and child/parent/family well being. The specific focus is on how social supports impact the well being of families that include children with disabilities. Research suggests that this is an understudied area. However, support from friends is positively correlated with a family's perception of itself. Family well being is dependent upon a number of factors including the family's structure, relationships between members, parent mental health, and parent self-efficacy. Interpersonal relationships with friends are found to have a protective effect on stress management, quality of parenting and child resilience.

► Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS

This resource provides a conceptual model based in a comprehensive review of literature depicting how the type of social supports found in PEPS serve as mediators that increase parental emotional well being, quality of parenting and family functioning which then directly impact child self-esteem, child competence and child resiliency.

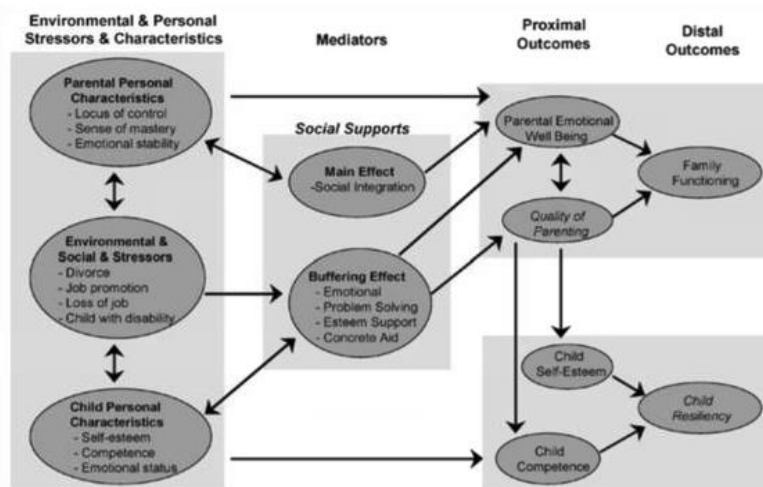


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

Figure 1. Conceptual model depicting the pathways between social supports and family well-being. (June 2005, *Journal of Child and Family Studies*)

Peer-Reviewed Journal Article

De Sousa Machado T, Chur-Hansen A, Due C. First-time mothers' perceptions of social support: Recommendations for best practice. *Health Psychol Open*. 2020 Feb 7;7(1):2055102919898611. doi: 10.1177/2055102919898611. PMID: 32095254; PMCID: PMC7008558. Retrieved from

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7008558/#:~:text=Much%20of%20the%20research%20around,may%20not%20be%20effectively%20targeted.>

Postpartum social support is seen to be valuable as a protective factor against PMAD and generalized postpartum “distress” (including common baby blues) which is reported in up to 80% of the population. The goal of this literature review was to determine which social supports specifically mothers of newborns reported to be of value, and what the barriers were to accessing those supports. These questions were of interest given that certain populations (immigrants, refugees, etc) have more barriers to access. The study found that many women prefer social support from other mothers, and particularly those with understanding of PMAD. Many expressed a need for more informational resources from healthcare professionals and more culturally responsive care. Those of immigrant refugee and asylee status were more disconnected. Many mothers reported a high barrier to accessing the social support needed to talk openly about their distress, attributing this to shame and embarrassment, particularly if they feel stigma around mental health in their cultural context. Home visiting was found to be of desire for many as was 1:1 listening support, as well as “Support groups and community health prevention initiatives, particularly interventions including other mothers, may benefit women and are frequently recommended” ([Dennis and Chung-Lee, 2006](#); [Hong Law et al., 2018](#); [Letourneau et al., 2007](#); [Manuel et al., 2012](#); [Razurel et al., 2011](#); [Shaw et al., 2006](#); [Webster et al., 2011](#)).

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

This article offers evidence that support groups like PEPS can positively influence women’s postnatal mental health and that such resources may be particularly needed in immigrant/refugee/asylee populations provided that they are offered in a culturally responsive way.

Peer-Reviewed Journal Article

Feinberg, E., Declercq, E., Lee, A., & Belanoff, C. (2021). *The Relationship between Social Support and Postnatal Anxiety and Depression: Results from the Listening to Mothers in California Survey* (3rd ed.). Women's Health Issues. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.whi.2022.01.005>. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1049386722000056>

Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders (PMAD) impact a substantial portion of the population with 6.5%-12.9% of parents suffering perinatal depression and 8.6-9.9% suffering perinatal anxiety. This study of Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders analyzed the results of the Listening to Mothers in California survey of 2,372 mothers who gave birth in 2016. Mothers who reported having consistent social support were half as likely to suffer PMAD than those who did not have such support. The authors affirm the validity of social support intervention programming to protect parent/child wellbeing against the threat of PMAD.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

This study affirms PEPS in its inclusion of PMAD information in its curriculum and suggests that PEPS can mitigate the effects of PMAD.

Website

Cleveland Clinic (2022, April 12). *Postpartum Depression*. Stewart DE, Vigod S. Postpartum Depression. N Engl J Med. 2016 Dec 1;375(22):2177-2186. doi: 10.1056/NEJMcp1607649. PMID: 27959754. Retrieved May 20, 2022, from

<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/9312-postpartum-depression#management-and-treatment>

The Cleveland Clinic's online resource on PMAD is frequently updated and commonly referenced. It is stated here that PMAD affects 15% of the population, while baby blues affects 50-70% of the population. The website describes the symptoms and causes, diagnosis and tests, management and treatment, prevention, outlook/prognosis, and FAQs.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

Of note to PEPS, The Cleveland Clinic recommends three key treatments for PMAD, with support groups amongst them. The other two are medication and psychotherapy. It is also notable that the [most-cited literature review on PMAD found on Google Scholar](#) and sourced from the New England Journal of Medicine provides a consistent recommendation (we were not able to access the article in its entirety which is why it is not listed here as a separate resource but we found it worth mentioning). Both resources state that treatment should adapt to level of severity.

Bray L, Carter B, Sanders C, Blake L, Keegan K. Parent-to-parent peer support for parents of children with a disability: A mixed method study. *Patient Educ Couns*. 2017 Aug;100(8):1537-1543. doi: 10.1016/j.pec.2017.03.004. Epub 2017 Mar 6. PMID: 28284463. Retrieved from <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28284463>

This is a mixed methods study of a UK based nonprofit that trains parents who have a child with a disability to “befriend” parents who have more recently welcomed a child with a disability. The organization offers 8 training sessions to the volunteers (called “befrienders”) and the volunteers then do 6-8 home-based 1:1 peer support sessions with the new parents (called “befriendees”). Pre and post questionnaires and interviews were conducted to measure the change in both the befriendees and the befrienders. Results included three key themes of ‘being lost and not knowing which way to turn’, ‘finding or being a guide’ and ‘getting to a better place’. Parents reported that the most beneficial aspect of the program was sharing feelings, anxieties with a peer who had ‘been there’. Ultimately, the results were not a linear move from surviving to thriving, but a work in progress, with good and bad days. All parents are on a journey with their child and the peer-to-peer befriending scheme helped parents who felt lost to find a “guide”, for the volunteers to gain meaning and satisfaction in supporting a peer, and for many of those serving and served to reach a ‘better place’. A limitation of the study was a small sample size.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

This study examines a nonprofit parenting peer support model that is similar to the PEPS model and demonstrates that the program served as a catalyst for participants to move toward a “better place” in their parenting journey. Volunteers also benefited. The study advises that professionals inform parents of the value of peer-to-peer parenting support programs. Note that the parents in this study were specifically parents of children with disabilities whereas PEPS serves the general population.

National Survey

Tuning In: Parents of Young Children Tell Us What They Think, Know and Need is a comprehensive research undertaking by ZERO TO THREE and the Bezos Family Foundation, 2016.d. <https://www.zerotothree.org/resource/national-parent-survey-overview-and-key-insights/>

The last national parenting survey conducted by Zero to Three indicated that nearly half of parents (48%) reported lacking adequate support. The comprehensive survey gathered data from over 2000 households, and produced six different recommendations for stakeholders, including “Create opportunities for parents to learn from each other—to share challenges, brainstorm solutions, and offer support.”

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

This survey provides quantitative data to back up the “why” behind PEPS. Zero to Three is a leading, highly respected national source for information and data around early childhood education and parenting. This recommendation (p. 28 of the report linked above) is very consistent with the PEPS model.

Thinking about the times when you feel overwhelmed or stressed as a parent, do you get the support you need?

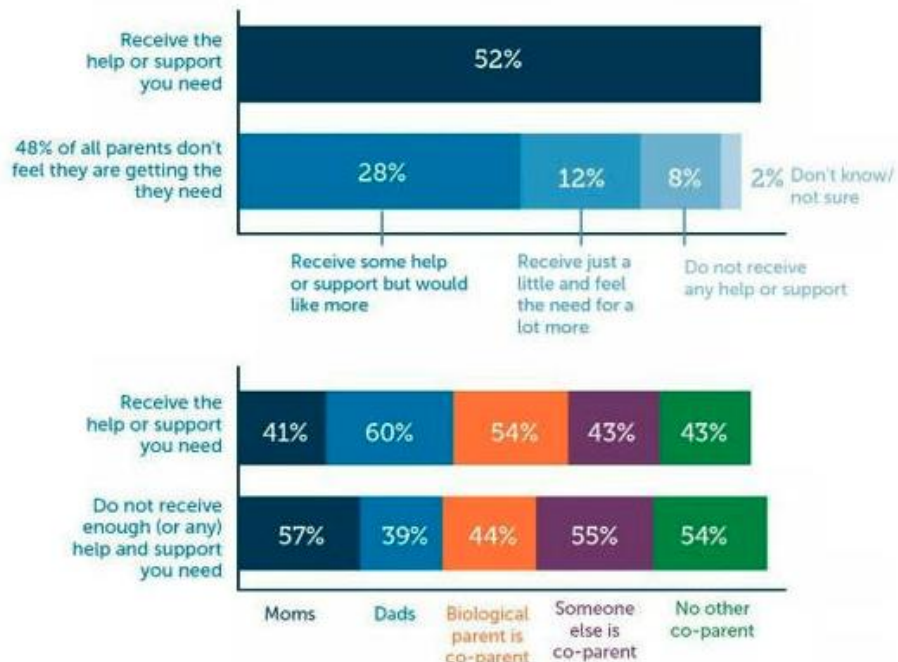


Figure 2. A bar graph depicting percentages of respondents who feel overwhelmed or stressed as a parent and the level of support they're finding. (2016. USA. Zero to Three and Bezos Family Foundation)

Book

Small, Mario. *Unanticipated gains: Origins of network inequality in everyday life*. Small, M. L., New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. Summary can be retrieved from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/chso.12409>

The University of Chicago. (2015, August 15). *Unanticipated Gains: Origins of Network Inequality in Everyday Life* [Video] YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S6pLxwRhdcY>

Social capital theorists have long studied the effects of having positive social networks. This book investigates why some people have strong social networks than others, concluding that effective networks result less from deliberate "networking" than from the "institutional conditions" of the early childhood education centers, workplaces, colleges and universities, faith-based institutions and other organizations in which they regularly participate. Emphasis in this book is placed upon the benefits of participation in childcare centers that facilitate connections between parents and offer additional supports to low income populations. For example, childcare centers that created opportunities for parent-to-parent connection (consistent drop-off pick up windows and space to socialize) created resilience-building parent to parent relationships.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

The findings of this book may be relevant as PEPS seeks to increase its relevance to a broader socioeconomic spectrum. The author found that organized programs, such as childcare settings, have the opportunity to make a fundamental impact on the wellbeing of parents if designed with this in mind. While the focus here was on childcare centers, fewer and fewer seats exist for infants in childcare centers, so it may be that peer support groups are now better positioned to meet this need than childcare centers, broadly speaking.

3. Parental Peer and Social Support Increases Child Well-Being

Federal Training Document

Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, "Family Connections to Peers and Community" (Washington, DC: Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,). Retrieved from

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/rtp-family-connections-to-peers-and-community.pdf>

This brief from the "Research to Practice" series from the national Head Start Office demonstrates that family engagement practices in Head Start are a research-based best practice. There is useful research here on the value of creating opportunities for low income families to build social and cultural capital given the positive effect these have not only on child and family well being, but also in helping a (low income) family to achieve a more equitable level of power and influence in a program/school setting. The resource points out that bringing intention to family engagement may be even more important in immigrant communities. Positive social relationships for parents and families benefit children by boosting parents mental health and capacity for caregiving, particularly in the prenatal and infancy period. It also buffers against abuse and neglect, has a positive impact on the health of children (for example, injury prevention) and positively impacts child development (for example, exposure to more

activities). Quotation: “The number of reliable adult friends in the social network of a family is positively associated with a child’s happiness, more friendships with other children, and a greater involvement in community organizations (Cochran & Nieto, 2002).”

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

This resource helps to make the case that the specific type of work that PEPS does is recommended as an intervention at the federal level for low income and immigrant families in particular. There is a paragraph on page 3 beginning with the statement “Head Start and Early Head Start staff can create opportunities for parent-to-parent contact through, for example, socialization groups associated with home visiting” which essentially describes the type of programming infant PEPS offers as a recommended preventive strategy for low income and immigrant populations. The Family Engagement Model (see figure below) shows how Head Start believes that family connections to peers and community are a factor in achieving positive child outcomes, and that like PEPS, all areas of the programming offered are through a lens of equity, inclusiveness, cultural and linguistic responsiveness

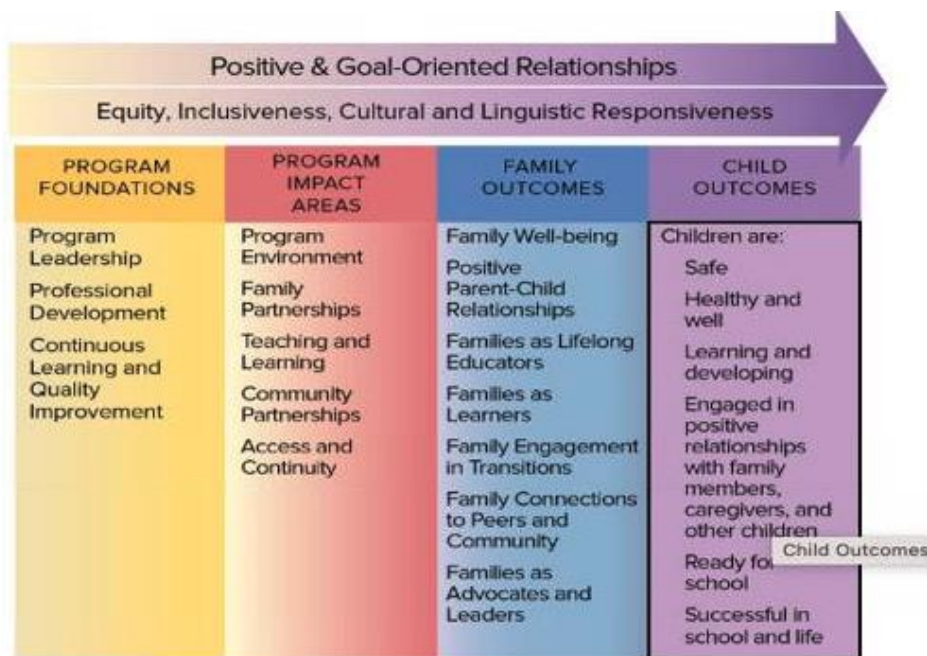


Figure 3. The Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework depicts the four categories that contribute to positive and goal-oriented relationships. (2013. Washington, DC, USA. Boston Children’s Hospital.)

Head Start Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, "School Readiness: Family Well-being" (Washington, DC: Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,). Retrieved from <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/school-readiness/article/family-well-being>.

This document emphasizes that social support from professionals and communities is essential to school readiness for children. Specifically, social supports should focus on child and parent strengths, and help parents understand risk factors for depression to support healthy parenting. It is recommended that childcare centers encourage social networks for parents such as: home visits, parenting groups, parent training groups, parent meetings, and socialization opportunities to combat depression and feelings of isolation.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

This resource is relevant to PEPS as although school readiness may seem distant, we are teaching our children in every interaction. Young children learn through relationships, with the parent-child relationship being the most important one. Communities like PEPS support this relationship and this can be linked to school readiness.

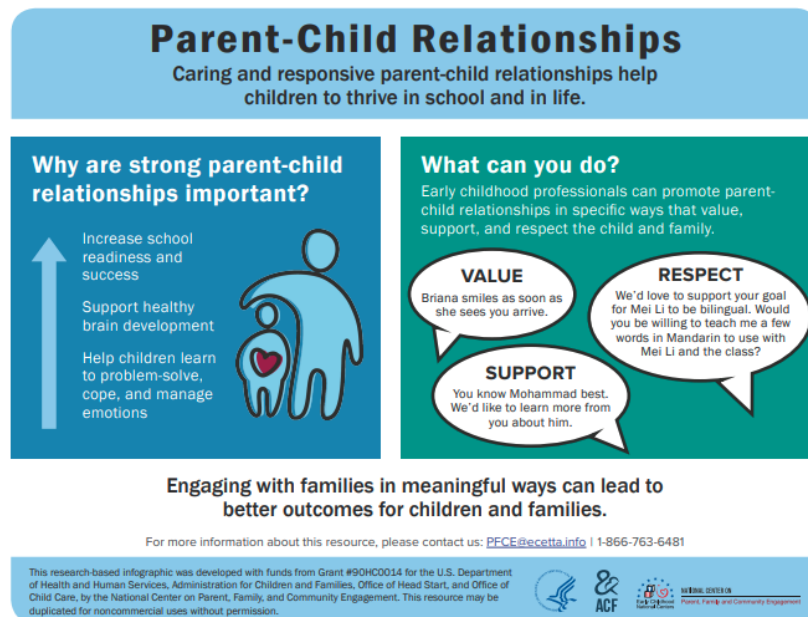


Figure 4. A graphic image depicting parent-child relationships and how we can promote them. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start. 2016)

Peer-Reviewed Journal Article

Southwick SM, Sippel L, Krystal J, Charney D, Mayes L, Pietrzak R. Why are some individuals more resilient than others: the role of social support. *World Psychiatry*. 2016 Feb;15(1):77-9. doi: 10.1002/wps.20282. PMID: 26833614; PMCID: PMC4780285. Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4780285/>

Most all humans suffer one or more traumas in their lifetime but responses are variable. This paper explores the causation for differential trauma response. Much research focusing on resilience focuses on the individual and this paper explores the impact of the social supports surrounding the individual and how they correlate to trauma response. There are many types of social support. Those who were brought up in a caring, responsive, reliable environment are more likely to have more protective factors, particularly when they were provided opportunity to learn to cope with frustration and challenge. While personality is considered “heritable”, the environment impacts the expression of attributes. For example, positive social support moderates the occurrence of depression in children who suffer abuse. One’s social support network has strong influence on their lifestyle decisions and ability to cope with stress and trauma. Positive social support has an inoculating effect on humans; weak social support is correlated with weaker mental and physical health outcomes.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

This paper concludes that interventions aimed at increasing resilience in humans ought to target not only the individual, but the family and community social system, which is the type of (pre) intervention PEPS offers. Furthermore, the social supports in childhood have a lifelong influence on the ability to cope with stress. Social supports inoculate against mental and physical diseases, suggesting potential public health benefits of a program like PEPS.

Newspaper Article

Zimmerman, Eilene. What Makes Some People More Resilient Than Others? Zimmerman, Eilene. June 18, 2020. *New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/18/health/resilience-relationships-trauma.html>

This article weaves together research to stress that early relational health is critical to the ability to cope with adversity later in life. A notable quote: “The most significant determinant of resilience — noted in nearly every review or study of resilience in the last 50 years — is the quality of our close personal relationships”. The article states that the first twenty years of life are the most critical to building the skills for resilience.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

This is particularly relevant to PEPS given the growing understanding of trauma, adversity and resilience and the growing interest in offering trauma informed care and educational services. PEPS offers an opportunity for parents to connect in healing relationships with peers under the guidance of a trauma-informed curriculum. This healing can be passed on to their children to create lifelong protective factors.

Policy Brief

Schmitt, S., Matthews, H., & Golden, O. (2014). Thriving Children, Successful Parents: A Two-Generation Approach to Policy. *CLASP: Policy Solutions That Work for Low Income People*. <https://doi.org/>

Parent and child well being are interdependent. However, public programming and policy typically treats them as separate entities. Programs that intend to support the child tend to overlook the parent, such as kindergarten readiness programs in preschools or child dental health initiatives in elementary schools. The same goes for adult-oriented programs, such as workforce training or education that fails to provide childcare. Even when policies are intended to meet the needs of both generations, there is often room for improvement, such as overly complex paperwork for the childcare payment assistance program (vouchers for families with lower incomes).

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

While most services typically focus on either parent or child (think preschools; mental health therapy), PEPS is unique in that it serves both parties. Furthermore, in the case of groups where both parents participate, it is perhaps the only program that serves the entire family all at once, creating a source of connection between and amongst parents at a time that can otherwise be rife with stress. In terms of the two generation approach, we would argue that it helps many parents feel supported during their return to work after parental leave; in some cases parents find childcare through PEPS connections as well.

Figure 1: A Two Generation Pathway

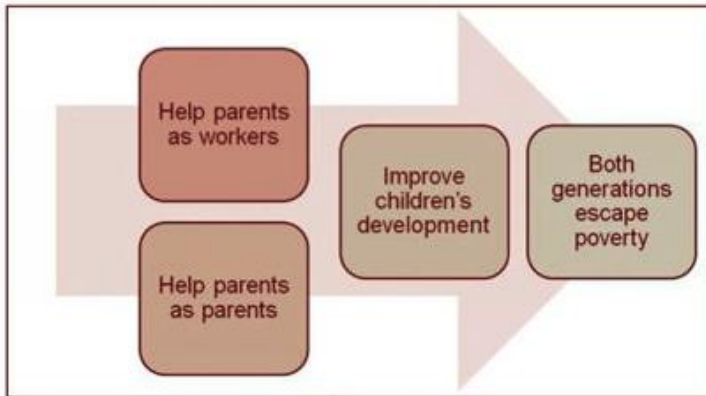


Figure 5. A graphic depicting the desirable outcomes of programs supporting both the child and parents. (July 2014. Washington, DC, USA. Clasp.org.)

Video

[Harvard Center for the Developing Child]. (2013, May 13). *Building Adult Capabilities to Improve Child Outcomes: A Theory of Change* [Video]. Youtube.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urU-a_Fs5Y&t=6s

This video depicts a theory of change from the Harvard Center for the Developing Child, which aims to achieve breakthrough outcomes for vulnerable children and families. It describes the need to focus on building the capabilities of parents/caregivers and strengthen the parties that collectively form the community of relationships essential to children's lifelong learning and wellbeing.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

Programming and services for children is too often disconnected from programming and services for parents. By tying them together, PEPS builds adult capabilities to improve child outcomes, without needing to leave the child at the doorstep.

Program Guide

Center for the Study of Social Policy (2022). How to Communicate Effectively About Early Relational Health: What It Is and Why It Matters A Messaging Guide. Retrieved from https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/HPS_ERH_Messaging-Guide_November-2022.pdf

The Center for Social Policy believes that building a more equitable society requires us to better advocate for early relational health (ERH). This messaging guide was created so that advocates can amplify a more consistent story about the value of ERH. Emotional connection is the result of "strong, positive, and nurturing relationships". It can be repaired after challenges. Positive interactions such as singing, talking, and playing together is essential to growth and development for young children and also positively impacts parents/caregivers and adults in the extended family. These powerful relationships create protective factors for both children and adults alike. All parents/caregivers know that connecting with their children matters, but societal stressors can overload families and communities, exacting a toll on our ability to be present and positive together. Due to structural racism, economic and social injustices, and a lack of family-centered policies, families do not have access to supports that are responsive to their needs. To promote Early Relational Health in all communities, it is essential to first listen to families to better understand their challenges and their needs in a culturally responsive way. "We must then work together with families to create a shared vision to transform our communities, systems, programs, and policies, so that each and every family can experience the emotional well-being and joy that develop during those first days, months, and years of connecting and nurturing." This guide breaks down core stories of ERH and helps advocates prepare to talk to different audiences about the connection between ERH, family wellbeing, and equity.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

This tool may be of use to those doing advocacy work of PEPS and also to those seeking to engage new stakeholders in the work of PEPS.

Book

Morris, Amanda & Payton, Amy C. (2018). Building Early Social and Emotional Relationships with Infants and Toddlers Integrating Research and Practice: Integrating Research and Practice. 10.1007/978-3-030-03110-7.

This book is a compilation of chapters written by different experts on the topic of infant/early childhood mental health (IECMH). The book breaks down the very components of IECMH by stages and across contexts (childcare, trauma, parenting/caregiving, etc), ultimately synthesizing a relationship-focused theory of positive development. The concluding chapters tell the stories of empirically-supported intervention and prevention programs that focus on early relational health, such as [Legacy Parenting](#) and [Circle of Security](#). The book concludes with recommendations for supporting future directions for supporting IECMH through research, practice, and policy.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

This book is a resource available to PEPS as the need arises to take a deeper dive into the clinical research that undergirds the work of PEPS.

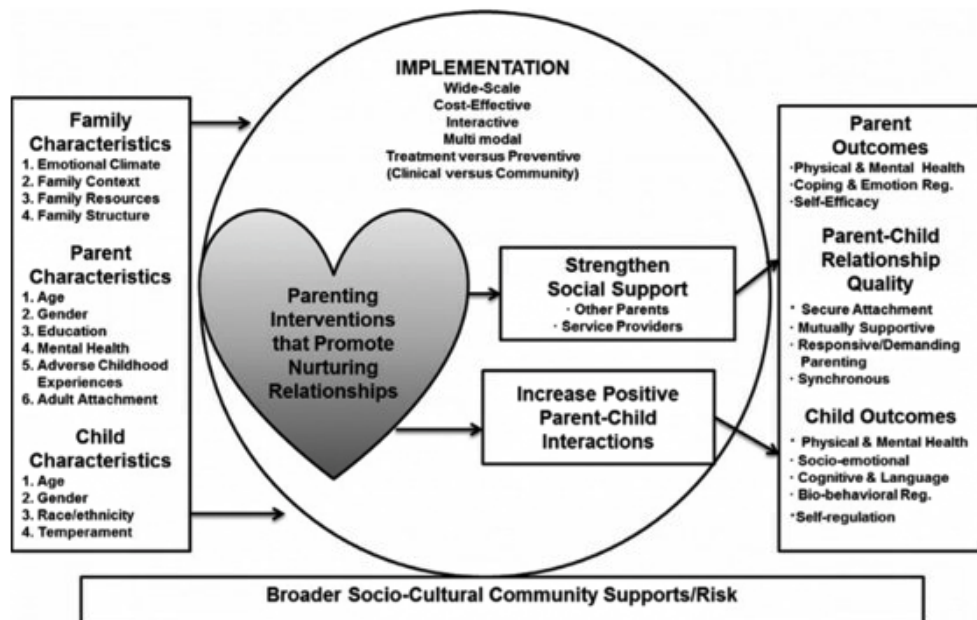


Figure 6. Building early relationships model of change (Morris et al., Reference Morris, Robinson, Hays-G, Claussen, Hartwig and Treat 2017).

4. Social and Peer Support is Lacking in “Western” Society

Surgeon General Report

Murthy, Vivek. 2023. Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation: The US Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community. US Health and Human Services. Retrieved from <https://www.hhs.gov/about/news/2023/05/03/new-surgeon-general-advisory-raises-alarm-about-devastating-impact-epidemic-loneliness-isolation-united-states.html>

This report details why the US Surgeon General believes the US should treat loneliness the same way it treated other public health interventions such as tobacco cessation. The Surgeon General finds that the incidence of most common diseases are exacerbated by social isolation. This report both describes and quantifies the problem and also makes recommendations for areas where all sectors of our country can contribute to the solution by creating more social connection opportunities in all categories. The report also points out that the incidence of mental illness is currently higher in young adults than adults, with 1 in 3 young adults living with mental illness currently as compared to 1 in 5 adults.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

PEPS is a model for an organization that has lead with social connection. This research demonstrates that the benefits of PEPS may go well beyond helping parents through the early years, creating a foundation for a lifetime of improved wellness, if participants continue to prioritize social connection.

Peer-Reviewed Journal Article

Children's Socioemotional Development Across Cultures. Annual Review of Developmental Psychology. Vol 2:27-46. December 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-devpsych-033020-031552>

Attachment theory (Bowlby) holds that children who are appropriately cared for by their parent/caregiver will display stranger anxiety around 8 months of age and will prefer their primary caregiver over others. This is held as a universal standard by child development theory. This article argues that child development theory carries a western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic (WEIRD) bias but is falsely considered normative given that the majority of research is conducted in WEIRD countries. Children raised in non-WEIRD cultures, such as traditional/rural cultures (roughly 30-40% of the human population) adapt to the norms of an agrarian society in which large, multigenerational households share caregiving responsibilities and few strangers may be present. This is contrasted with the individualistic nuclear family norms that are dominant in WEIRD countries. “The developmental focus of Western

middle-class children is on individualistic agency, which implies that socioemotional development is subordinated to self-development. The developmental focus of the rural traditionally living farmer child is on social connectedness and social responsibility. Self-development is part of the development of communal agency.” As such, imposing WEIRD parenting interventions out of context can have harmful effects on families. The author argues that this practice is unethical.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

This piece highlights the importance of PEPS decision to seek multicultural, anti-racist partners to conduct curriculum review. It also supports PEPS philosophy that there is no one “right” way to parent. Cross-cultural research is one tool PEPS can use as it seeks to stay on the ever-evolving course toward greater equity for a broader diversity of families.

Book

Vazquez, C. I. (2004). *Criando a Su Nino con Orgullo Latino : Como Ayudarle a Su Hijo a Valorar Su Cultura y Triunfar en el Mundo de Hoy* (1st ed.). Harper Collins.

<https://www.betterworldbooks.com/product/detail/criando-a-su-nino-con-orgullo-latino-como-ayudarle-a-su-hijo-a-valorar-su-cultura-y-triunfar-en-el-9780060593469>

Immigrant families that rely on familismo/ familialism, a belief system that values the collective over the self, encounter endless challenges when they arrive in the US. Particularly, interpersonal conflict that often leads to disruption between newer and older generations. In contrast, white families navigate the system by focusing on raising children through individualism and personal resilience. This in theory is a protective mechanism that prepares white children to thrive alone and praises self-preservation. Once they have a family of their own and they have to care for someone else the cycle continues. As PEPS seeks to “build access, cultivate, and collaborate”, multicultural research is essential.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

We know that families of color have historically built cultural wealth and centered community wellness in order to combat systems of oppression and while we can learn from many of these systems, we must acknowledge that families of color still suffer the highest rate of maternal deaths, suicide, and depression. Institutionally, for example, immigrant families in the United States are unable to thrive and have to rethink and build what Vazquez describes as the “new familialism” in order to build a system of support that works for the US. This research demonstrates the impact of socialized behavior and culture in the United States to newcomers.

Newspaper Article

Brooks, D. The Nuclear Family was a Mistake. Brooks, David. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/03/the-nuclear-family-was-a-mistake/605536/>

Brooks walks the reader through the modern historical conditions that have led to increasing isolation in the US. He debunks the myth that a society structured around nuclear families is likely to create the connected conditions that most humans need to thrive. Rather, our society has shifted from large and interwoven extended family structures to one in which the nuclear family predominates, placing individual over family and liberating the wealthy while undermining working and lower income families. Extended family structures mitigate risk and provide greater support for children; those without wealth are vulnerable in a society that is structured according to the preferences of those who have wealth. He states, "Americans are hungering to live in extended and forged families, in ways that are new and ancient at the same time. This is a significant opportunity, a chance to thicken and broaden family relationships, a chance to allow more adults and children to live and grow under the loving gaze of a dozen pairs of eyes, and be caught, when they fall, by a dozen pairs of arms. For decades we have been eating at smaller and smaller tables, with fewer and fewer kin. It's time to find ways to bring back the big tables."

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

The concept of humans "hungering" for "forged" families is one that explains why the PEPS model has grown over the past 40 years and continues to grow. Many parents find their (desperately needed) forged families through PEPS. It argues for the continued growth of the PEPS model (albeit better adapted to the needs of historically underserved communities, in alignment with the current strategic direction)

Peer-Reviewed Journal Article

Blackstock, C. (2011) The Emergence of the Breath of Life Theory. *Journal of Social Work Values and Ethics*, Volume 8, Number 1 (2011) Copyright 2011, White Hat Communications. Retrieved from <https://jswve.org/download/2011-1/spr11-blackstock-Emergence-breath-of-life-theory.pdf>

This review discusses the Breath of Life Theory as told by the Siksika. It names the troubled history behind Maslow's Hierarchy, a model that has been used in multiple western practices to discuss self-actualization or success. The model argues that in order to find belonging, connectedness, and to thrive, an individual requires food, safety and basic needs first within a hierarchy. Recently Slow Factory Foundation has highlighted Siksika's Nation stance on the challenges with Maslow's interpretation and stolen models from their own ways of life. The Siksika claim that wellness starts with connection, a child born cannot thrive without connection to a parent and as

such the most important element to survival is not food, nor safety but relationship and connection to others in the natural world.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

Western value on individual needs before focusing on the spiritual needs around relationships is a factor in isolation, rise of mental illness and more. This article highlights the wisdom of indigenous thought and the danger in moving away from that wisdom. PEPS model of sitting in circles together is “the most indigenous thing we can do” (credit: Melanie Roper). PEPS has helped those who are disconnected from the tradition of putting group before individual to do so again. It has given people something they may not have known they needed or were missing until they found it.

Peer-Reviewed Journal Article

Muir, N., & Bohr, Y. (2019). Contemporary Practice of Traditional Aboriginal Child Rearing: A Review. *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, 14(1), 153-165. Retrieved from <https://fpcfr.com/index.php/FPCFR/article/view/378>

This review on contemporary practices in traditional aboriginal child rearing emphasizes the harmful impact of colonialism on the loss of connected child rearing practices. *Through western culture and the harmful history of abuse and genocide towards indigenous communities we have punished childrearing practices that center community wellness and extended care.* It is important to recognize that indigenous communities have been centering relationships in the child rearing of their newer generations. Even though risk-taking and independence were fostered in children, extended family was highly involved with Aboriginal children. Australian Aboriginal children were respected members within their network of extended family. Inuit children were the center of attention in an affectionate and nurturing extended family network. The Navajo were matrilineal and matrilineal and as such, with maternal grandmothers, aunts and others particularly involved with children. In Anishnaabe culture, family included the nuclear family, the extended family, the community family, a Nationhood family, clan family (spiritual), and a cultural family (ceremonial). The interconnectedness of biological family and non-biological family-kin- is a deep seated value within Aboriginal culture.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

When asking the question, “Why does PEPS work?”, turning to indigenous roots offers insight. The PEPS model is in alignment with ancient wisdom. It is also important to recognize that PEPS has benefited in some ways from the harm done to indigenous communities (ie the resulting accumulation of wealth that is a resource to all groups/organizations who have members, donors, and grantors of means). All such groups/organizations, including PEPS, bear responsibility to heal and restore. The current strategic direction is moving PEPS in this direction; PEPS is/can be a model for traditionally privileged organizations to adopt healing and restorative practices.

Peer-Reviewed Journal Article

Balto, A. (2005). Traditional Sámi Child Rearing in Transition: Shaping a New Pedagogical Platform. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 1(1), 85–105.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/117718010500100106> Retrieved from

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/117718010500100106>

The Sami, indigenous to the northern region of Norway/Sweden/Finland/Russia, are a culture that lives in close connection with neighbor and nature. Studies concur that Sami people are less likely to suffer from mental health challenges. This study highlights the value of centering social and peer support in child rearing practices. The Sami form networks that offer children nurture and safety, encouraging children to form attachments to many adults beyond their nuclear family. These adults work collaboratively. Children are raised collectively from the onset; even naming rituals are intended to bond children with their extended social network. Furthermore, the Sami believe that humanity’s success relies on having a cooperative relationship with nature, and that this balance cannot be achieved if society moves away from original wisdom. It is important to take a holistic view of Sámi cultural practices.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

This article offers yet another example of the fact that PEPS relies upon ancient wisdom, and suggests that this practice has distinguished PEPS from family-serving organizations that have experienced less success.

Online Article

Media, B. (2020, October 9). *The untold story of parenting in Africa*. Medium. Retrieved March 30, 2023, from <https://medium.com/illumination-curated/the-untold-story-of-parenting-in-africa-706ff86aa7f0>

This article highlights the westernization of parenting practices in Africa and the call to revitalize successful ancestral practices that center collective child rearing. For example, the presence of the extended family and the “compound house” instill a strong sense of social responsibility. It highlights that in traditional African parenting its survival is based on its reliance on extended family and/or other adults in the community. It claims that due to western systems the extended family system is now under pressure and rapidly failing to fulfill its primary role of socialization.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

Many traditional values around the relevance of extended networks are still in use in society and effectively support communities to resist systemic oppression. These stories must be told in order to prevent deculturalization. This is relevant to PEPS as it seeks to realize its strategic goal of collaboration.

Interview

Henry, Libby (July 2023). Interview with the leader of an immigrant community in Washington State. Conducted by Pia Johnson Barreto in Spokane, WA. This interview was conducted specifically for this bibliography project.

Full text can be viewed at:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1I633HrUWfLwC59366YGCr6QbtdYjFIVx/view?usp=drive_link

This interview provides the recollection and perspective on peer support for childrearing and birthing mothers from a Marshallese Leader, Libby Henry, who has firsthand seen the impact of white normative spaces in the US within her immigrant community. Western Research seldomly centers the experience and ancestral knowledge that lives in these communities and this interview provides a first account of the relevance of connectedness in the wellness of community and family. The process of parenting and birthing is highly regarded as a gift in her community. The interview encompasses how, in the Marshall Islands, connectedness and peer support begins at Birth when many people attend and support, unlike many in the United States for whom hospitals limit visitors. This initial step builds a support network that continues to support and center the parent through rituals in the years of child rearing. Libby's account centers the idea that in the Marshall Islands women experience less recurrence of the diagnosis of postpartum depression or suicide and harm to babies and young children, unlike what she witnesses in the United States. The Marshallese Community celebrates and centers parents just as much as children in the process, and engages intergenerational support where older and younger women support peers through the process of parenting and starting a family. The Marshallese community also, in Libby's account, honors and celebrates milestones collectively, with the first birthday of a child being a major event for many members of the community.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

This interview highlights the impact of the parenting culture and support in the United States to an immigrant community who are often unable to maintain cultural practices and peer relationships with the extended community here, causing challenges for new parents and emphasizing the importance of programs that center peer and community support and the conservation of practices of an immigrant community as well as many other communities of color.

5. The US Does Not Center Children and Families

Peer-Reviewed Journal Article

Van Niel MS, Bhatia R, Riano NS, de Faria L, Catapano-Friedman L, Ravven S, Weissman B, Nzodom C, Alexander A, Budde K, Mangurian C. The Impact of Paid Maternity Leave on the Mental and Physical Health of Mothers and Children: A Review of the Literature and Policy Implications. *Harv Rev Psychiatry*. 2020 Mar/Apr;28(2):113-126. doi: 10.1097/HRP.0000000000000246. PMID: 32134836. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339736571_The_Impact_of_Paid_Maternity_Leave_on_the_Mental_and_Physical_Health_of_Mothers_and_Children_A_Review_of_the_Literature_and_Policy_Implications

This paper synthesizes over 25 contemporary studies on the effect of paid maternity leave on the mental and physical health of mothers and their children. As of the time of publication in 2019, the US was the only member of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that does not have a national paid maternity leave policy. The reviewers conclude that enacting a federal paid maternity leave policy would positively impact American public health. There is also data to suggest that doing so would address gross inequities between families in higher and lower income brackets. Finally, such policy is projected to have a beneficial impact on the US economy. In summary, the authors recommend a minimum of 12 weeks of paid leave for all American mothers.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

This work highlights the importance of offering support to new parents as a public health measure. PEPS offers a critical counterbalance in a society that is internationally known for its lack of support for new mothers and infants. This article also affirms PEPS in its advocacy priorities.

Book

Bogenschneider, Karen. (2014). *Family Policy Matters*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

This text serves as a family policy primer for the early 21st century, integrating modern research and political/legal practice to make an evidence-based case for policy that centers families. The argument is made that family rights have long been subordinated to individual rights in the US, and cites international examples of families supporting society and policies supporting families. The final chapters of the book focus on the “family policy lens toolkit” for advocates and professionals to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of policies.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

PEPS is an organization known for moving beyond analysis and into action. This book offers political theory and practical guidance to support PEPS decision to “advocate for equitable policies”.

6. Transitions and Frequency Matter in Combating Social Isolation

Book + Book Review + Podcast

Marisa, F. (2022). *Franco, Marisa G. Platonic: How the Science of Attachment Can Help You Make--and Keep--Friends*. Penguin.

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/676695/platonic-by-marisa-g-franco-phd/>

Kavitha, G., & Sylvie, D. How to show your friends you love them, according to a friendship expert. *NPR*. <https://www.npr.org/2022/09/01/1120550646/how-to-show-your-friends-you-love-them-according-to-a-friendship-expert>

Murthy, V. (2022, January 25). *Why Do Friendships Matter? Part 1*. [Podcast]. Health and Human Services. <https://www.hhs.gov/surgeongeneral/priorities/house-calls/dr-marisa-g-franco-part-1/index.html>

US Surgeon General Vivek Murthy speaks with Dr Marisa G Franco, author of *Platonic: The Guide to Making and Keeping Friends*. This book is an actionable guide to making and sustaining friendships in adulthood. It marries stories of real friendships with psychological research to offer practical guidance on building stronger friendships.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

For example, friendship is more likely to result from recurring points of connection (regular meetups, such as PEPS meetings) and if the connection occurs at a time of life transition (new parenthood) and if there is mutual sharing of vulnerability (birth stories, stories of distress in parenting teens, for example). This resource provides a psychological research base to explain why PEPS is exceptionally successful in helping many people form lasting friendships/social networks to combat isolation.

7. Positive impact of Peer-to-Peer Support in Recovery & Special Needs Populations

Shalaby RAH, Agyapong VIO. Peer Support in Mental Health: Literature Review. JMIR Ment Health. 2020 Jun 9;7(6):e15572. doi: 10.2196/15572. PMID: 32357127; PMCID: PMC7312261. Retrieved from <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32357127/>

Formalized peer support in mental health has emerged in recent decades as a way to better close the growing gap between healthcare providers and patients. This literature review sought to get insight into the nature and efficacy of such services. While peer support has long existed its intentional integration appears to have become more commonplace after the mental health deinstitutionalization that occurred in the US in the seventies and gaining popularity in the nineties as part of the community health movement and gaining increasing interest on using insurance (Medicaid) to cover peer support services in the early 2000s. The review suggests that peer support can be part of a trauma informed care movement, shifting from a patient treatment approach from “What is wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?”. The review looked at peer support research in numerous contexts and found that success varies by context and population. For example the success of peer support in serious mental illness settings was limited to moderate whereas peer support in addiction recovery populations showed increased success for more than half of people. Peer support success for older adults suffering generalized depression was particularly pronounced within lower income populations. Researchers found substantial challenges to overcome in the field of peer support services (ie low pay for peer workers) but that overall the literature supports the international growing trend to adopt peer support in addiction and mental health settings.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

For example, friendship is more likely to result from recurring points of connection (regular meetups, such as PEPS meetings) and if the connection occurs at a time of life transition (new parenthood) and if there is mutual sharing of vulnerability (birth stories, stories of distress in parenting teens, for example). This resource provides a psychological research base to explain why PEPS is exceptionally successful in helping many people form lasting friendships/social networks to combat isolation.

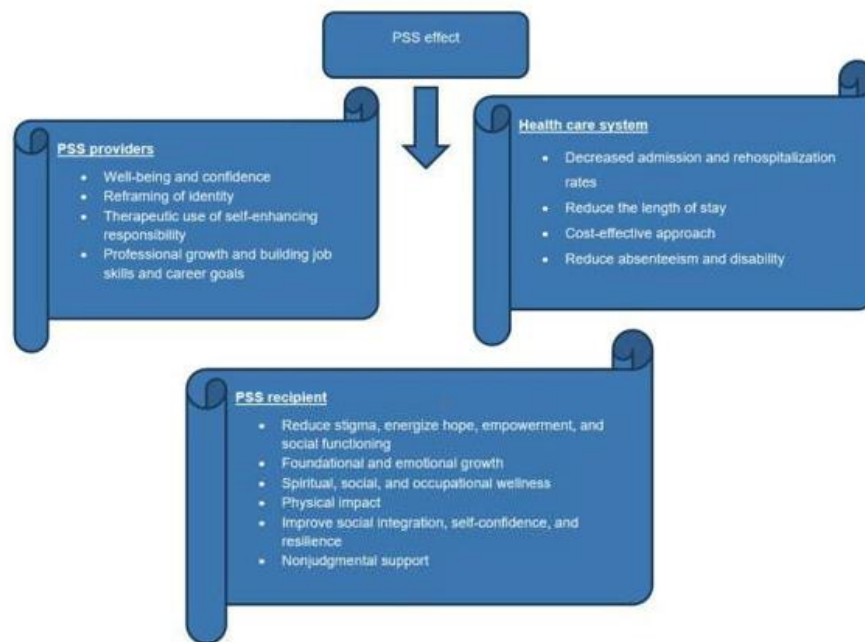


Figure 7. A series of three graphics depicting the conceptual framework for the effect of peer support workers on mental health. (June 2020. USA. National Library of Medicine.)

Peer-Reviewed Journal Article

Hall, S., Ryan, D., Beatty, J. et al. Recommendations for peer-to-peer support for NICU parents. *J Perinatol* 35 (Suppl 1), S9–S13 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1038/jp.2015.143> Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4694192/>

Peer-to-peer support ('peer support') is an evidence based approach to supporting the wellbeing of people across various categories of need. This study looked at the specific category of parents of infants in neonatal intensive care unit. Such parents are at increased risk for PMAD. The study surveyed parents with infants in NICU who

worked with “veteran” parents, which are parents who previously had a child in NICU. These parents were seen to be of value given that family members and friends often do not understand the experience of being in NICU. Parents surveyed reported significant increases in confidence, outlook and mental health after working with veteran parents. This led to a shorter stay in the NICU for their families. The authors state, “Peer support therefore offers a ‘legitimate’ and ‘unique form of assistance that is not typically met by the formal service system’ and one that cannot come from any other source.” They recommend that peer support be offered in a variety of ways (phone, group, in person), that volunteers are trained, and that it operate within a broader system of support for NICU parents and extended family.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

Although this article focuses on very specific recommendations for peer support groups in NICU specifically, it offers a brief literature review supporting the efficacy of peer support in a context (NICU) that is related to the work of PEPS.

Tracy K, Wallace SP. Benefits of peer support groups in the treatment of addiction. *Subst Abuse Rehabil.* 2016 Sep 29;7:143-154. doi: 10.2147/SAR.S81535. PMID: 27729825; PMCID: PMC5047716 Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5047716/>

Peer support group interventions are on the rise in the substance abuse recovery field, but they have not been rigorously tested as a standalone treatment or in a way that properly isolates them from other treatments in order to test their efficacy. Authors conducted a literature review of 10 studies and found that peer support groups hold promise for treatment of addiction with benefits being found in primary goal areas for participants. However, authors recommended more rigorous research before they could scientifically/definitively declare support groups to be an effective treatment due to the difficulty of disentangling support groups from other treatments used simultaneously by participants.

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

This piece has been included for transparency purposes. Research on peer support group efficacy- in isolation from other interventions- is currently in nascent stages. More research is needed on this topic.

8. Collective Wellness

Article + Book + Video

Hersey, Tricia, 2022. *Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto*. Little Brown Spark.

Hersey, T. (2022, October 6). Rest is Resistance: How to Dream Your Way to a Radically Decolonized Future. *The New York Cut*. <https://www.thecut.com/2022/10/rest-is-resistance-manifesto-nap-ministry-book-excerpt.html>

[Youtube]. (2021, April 9). *Tricia Hersey: Rest & Collective Care as Tools for Liberation* [Video]. Sounds True. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7OuXnLrKyio>

“Due to the pressures of capitalism, Americans subject their bodies and minds to work at an unrealistic, damaging, “machine-level” pace — feeding into the same engine that enslaved millions into brutal labor for its own relentless benefit. In *Rest Is Resistance*, Tricia Hersey argues that our worth does not reside in how much we produce, especially not for a system that exploits and dehumanizes us. Rest, in its simplest form, becomes an act of resistance and a reclaiming of power because it asserts our most basic humanity. We are enough. The systems cannot have us.” (please note that the authors of this bibliography chose to quote this summary rather than paraphrase, because the words of Hersey are prophetic and poetic and we did not want to lose that element)

► **Connecting Research to Practice: How this Resource Relates to PEPS**

Of particular relevance to PEPS, Hersey argues that collective care, in contrast to self care, is essential to achieving liberation. PEPS is unique in that it focuses not on the individual parent or child, but on relationships and community. In a world where examples of collective care are too few, PEPS proves that collective care is not only theoretically relevant but truly achievable.

9. Closing Thoughts

We cannot resolve a systemic and/or institutionalized issue at an individual level. We know that even with this knowledge, families continue to live in isolation. The system does not support families to prioritize wellness and connectedness, particularly low income families. A true solution will require organizations, institutions and policymakers to partner with families to break down barriers and move from the myth of self-care towards collective wellness. For forty years, PEPS has been doing this on a local scale, disrupting the harmful impacts of social isolation for new families in the Seattle Area. The PEPS model holds unique potential to prevent the negative impacts of social isolation from further ravaging our communities, not only for new parents, but for families at various points of transition and vulnerability.

10. A Note on Research Bias

Henrich, J., Heine, S. J., & Norenzayan, A. (2010). The weirdest people in the world? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 33(2-3), 61–83. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X0999152X>
<https://www2.psych.ubc.ca/~henrich/pdfs/WeirdPeople.pdf>

Bornstein MH. Culture, Parenting, and Zero-to-Threes. *Zero Three*. 2015 Mar;35(4):2-9. PMID: 29576678; PMCID: PMC5865595. <https://coastfraseridpscd.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Zero-to-3-Mar-2015-Culture-Parenting-Child-Dev.pdf>

The majority of existing research in infant development and parenting originates from WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic) culture and holds those findings to be universal. This acronym was coined in a [paper written in 2010 by Heinrich et.al entitled “The WEIRDest People in the World”](#). Scholars in modern history have most often hailed from and/or been financially supported by countries and institutions within WEIRD society. Their research subjects tend to be undergraduates at universities in WEIRD societies. This has led to generalized knowledge about infants and parents. The Heinrich study analyzed just how universal WEIRD culture is and found that it is actually one of the least representative cultures. Furthermore, the culture of the US was not found to be generalizable to the rest of the Western World, yet 70% of psychology citations at the time were from the US. This presumption of normativity of WEIRD research is both fallible at best and dangerous at worst. Infants and parents in non-WEIRD countries have often been held to standards based upon research that is irrelevant to them. This phenomenon holds potential to harm given the judgements that can form against cultures that may have less power and resources. For example, John Bowlby’s attachment theory is a product of Western thought but has been seen as normative across child development study and practical settings. In this true [anecdote](#), a parent from India had her children seized from her home in Scandinavia when child protective services misunderstood her parenting approach, which was interpreted through a WEIRD lens rather than through the lens of her culture where her actions were typical. Eventually she was reunited with her children but only after years of separation, a divorce, and a return to her home country. Clearly, WEIRD bias can result in the colonization of the mind and corresponding misguided and oppressive practices, however unintentional.

Efforts were made to counter this issue in this bibliography, such as the inclusion of resources that focus on the cultures of indigenous peoples and studies that were intentional to include immigrants. However, we acknowledge that “WEIRD” bias permeates most research, and remains difficult to disentangle at this particular point in the evolution of epistemology.