

# RESEARCH PREVIEW

## *A Preliminary Synthesis of Qualitative Research: Gaining Emotional Well-Being from Other Parents*

Summers, J.A., Brotherson, M.J., Naig, L., Ethridge, B., Singer, G.H., Kruse, A., & Wang, W. A meta-synthesis of qualitative research on parent-led supports. Work in progress.

### BOTTOM LINE

Much of the research on parent support programs uses qualitative methods (usually involves listening to families through individual interviews or groups discussions to learn their firsthand perspectives). We searched this research to find articles about parent-led supports so that we could gain an in-depth look of participants' emotional outcomes. These "snapshots" further explain the findings of quantitative studies (often involves parents answering objective questions in a way so that a score can be derived) on the same topic. Parent-led supports tend to offer a sense of belonging and shared experience that professionally led supports usually do not. Parent-led supports are not effective, however, if there are too many differences between the participants.

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## INTRODUCTION

We wanted to learn more about the emotional outcomes parents experience when they participate in parent-led support groups, online discussions, and one-to-one parent programs (matching a veteran parent of a child with a disability with a referred parent of a child with a disability).

Some research, called “quantitative research,” typically involves having the family fill out questionnaires that ask them to provide a number-based response to a question. Another kind of research, called “qualitative research,” explores issues by having families share open-ended responses through formats such as interviews and discussion groups. When qualitative research accompanies quantitative research, it provides more detail from parents’ perspectives. Both forms of research have recognized standards of quality, and both offer systematic means to gather and interpret information. Because much of the research about family emotional supports is qualitative, we analyzed it as a supplement to quantitative research. This research is still ongoing, but we have some early findings to share.

## ACTION STEPS

- Recognize that a special sense of belonging and connection can occur in learning about other parents’ experiences and knowing that they have “walked in your shoes.”
- Recognize that families report that parent-led experiences are especially helpful when other families’ experiences are very closely matched with their own.
- Reach out to other families who you meet in your community, as well as through your child’s program.
- Check out the Parent to Parent map for the availability of programs in your area (link to the map at [www.p2pUSA.org](http://www.p2pUSA.org)).

“I feel more comfortable talking about things that I’m dealing with...to these people than I do to my family or other friends outside the group. I feel like I’m being heard. This is our lifeline, like sometimes it’s the only thing that keeps you going...to be able to talk to the mothers.”

## KEY FINDINGS

In general, parents report the main differences between parent-led supports and other supports provided by professionals are a sense of belonging and shared experience.

Across all five studies, parents experience the following through parent-led supports:

- A sense of belonging, having connections that feel “like family,” and common bonds
- An opportunity to gather information, get advice, and learn from each other about services, professionals, and problem-solving

- An opportunity to share family stories and experiences, including opportunities to give as well as take; encourage and celebrate accomplishments; and affirm feelings
- A sense of empowerment and purpose
- A sense of the “normalcy” of feelings, an affirmation of the child as a child first who also has a disability
- Opportunities to provide each other with strategies such as reframing a situation to look on the positive side, looking at causes for challenges, and sharing humor

Additionally, parent-led supports were not effective if there were too many differences in situations, preferences, or values among the participants.

## PUBLICATIONS USED IN THIS META-SYNTHESIS

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