

Fact Sheet: Natural Supports

What are Natural Supports?

Everyone relies on natural support at different times and at varying degrees throughout their life. Consider who you call on to get some advice, think through a problem or get practical assistance for a job you can't do on your own. You are likely to call on family, friends, colleagues, neighbours and sometimes acquaintances or friends of friends – depending on what it is you need.

For people with disability natural support is 'support that is (easily) present in a situation and provides attentiveness, encouragement or assistance, that allows a person to more fully participate and belong in everyday, familiar and typical events and experiences,' Janet Klees, 2011.

Natural supports include:

- emotional support,
- role models to imitate,
- welcome,
- invitation,
- physical assistance
- all of the elements that will ensure the person's fullest participation in the situation.

What natural supports are NOT:

- paid support
- a replacement for paid support
- the goal of relationship but the possible outcome
- always provided by friends (the bus driver, shop keeper may assist regularly)
- provided by anything other than people (not objects, materials or, technology)
- always spontaneous or naturally occurring

Types of natural support are:

- a ride (to an event)
- an introduction (to a new group, club, neighbour, someone with a shared interest)
- time to help a person learn a new skill (working a computer, a recipe)
- companionship (a walk in the evenings, trip to the shops)
- inclusion in an activity (gardening, walking the dog)
- coaching (in a new job, in the classroom)
- advocacy (getting your unit painted, encouraging others to show respect)
- problem solving (mapping out options, helping choose preferences)
- friendship & relationship (sharing a special event, exploring a shared interest)
- acquiring new life-style opportunities (joining a gym, attending Weight Watchers)
- assistance with fitting into a new situation (church, job, school)
- listening (to concerns, to a person's real wishes)
- reminder (to catch a bus, pay a bill)

How is natural support generated?

- in places where other people are present
- through frequent, regular and consistent presence with others
- through participation in shared experiences or occupations
- through contact and connections with a variety of people in diverse situations
- when providing support is just a small step beyond what another party would generally do (you are not asking too much)
- by intentionally asking people and being clear about how they could assist
- by taking time, persevering and making effort to enlist them

Information for this fact sheet was obtained from a workshop presented by Janet Klees in Sydney in 2011 (janet@legacies.ca).



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