

# Being a Staff Liaison to Family Partners

Your unit is working with the **Perinatal Quality Collaborative of North Carolina** (PQCNC; pronounced “picnic”) on a project to develop standards of care for identification and management of infants at risk for early onset sepsis. A vital part of your team’s success is partnering with families to learn from their experiences and translate those learnings to improve practice. To engage patients and families in meaningful ways, it is important that they have an individual who can serve as a point of contact and support them as members of your improvement team. This individual should be passionate about learning from families, able to communicate the value of partnership, and forward the work by facilitating the below described activities.

## The benefits of working with family partners

Bringing the perspective of families directly into the planning, delivery and evaluation of care is a critical part of improving safety and quality.

Family partners:

- **Offer insights** that illustrate what we do well and highlight where changes may be needed
- **Help us develop priorities** and make improvements based on family-identified needs rather than on our own professional assumptions
- **Bring a fresh perspective** that help us come up with solutions that clinicians and staff have not yet thought about

Family partners are critical allies for quality and safety.

Working with families helps build a shared agreement around safety and quality priorities. This shared agreement fosters partnerships in care, enhances the care experience, and improves outcomes.

As a staff liaison, PQCNC will provide you with regular coaching calls to support you every step of the way! **Please contact Tara Bristol Rouse**, Director of Patient and Family Partnerships, at [tara.bristol@pqcnc.org](mailto:tara.bristol@pqcnc.org), to set up your first call.

## Examples of how family partners can support the work of improvement teams

Family partners can provide direct input on what is most important to them about their infant’s care. In this way, they can help us implement meaningful and effective quality and safety improvements.

Family partners can contribute by:

- **Participating in discussion groups.** Bringing family partners together for a discussion (in-person or by phone/video) can serve as a forum for receiving feedback on specific processes and resources that impact patients and family members during the care experience.
- **Revising or helping create educational or informational materials for family members.** Our family partners can work with us to help create or revise forms, letters, handouts, instructions, and other materials.
- **Serving on our project team.** We can invite family partners to participate in improvement team meetings, monthly webinars and/or in smaller workgroups (in-person or by phone/video) to give us feedback and ideas.
- **Assisting with education.** Family partners can share their experiences as part of our efforts to educate and inform staff and providers about our project work as part of continuing education efforts, staff meetings and other venues.



## How are family partners selected?

The staff liaison for family partners coordinates family participation. They reach out to colleagues to request names of family members that they feel would make good partners. The staff liaison then maintains this list of all potential family partners, which they use to identify family members who are best suited for the project based on their available time, areas of interest, and experience. The staff liaison can contact family members directly to invite them to a project, or ask the referring provider to make the initial contact. Once a family member has accepted the invitation, the staff liaison will serve as their primary contact.

## Ways to get started working with family partners

There are countless ways that we can partner with families. Getting started often involves small steps, such as working with advisors on one specific issues or project. Below are examples of ways the staff liaison can help us begin working with family partners.

- **Invite 2-3 family members to a team meeting to discuss their hospital stay.** Ask them to share what went well, what could have gone better, and what ideas they have for change and improvement.
- **Ask families to give feedback on educational or informational materials,** such as family handbooks, instructions for home care after a hospital stay, or care transition instructions.
- **Invite families to present at staff orientations and in-service programs** to share their perspective of care and how illness or hospitalization affects patients and families.
- **Explore your hospital and unit through the eyes of families by doing walkabouts with family members** to explore how your unit welcomes families and encourages their participation in care and decision-making.

## Steps for working with family partners

Use the checklist below to ensure effective collaboration when working with family partners.

### Before the first meeting with family partners:

- Prepare a brief written introduction on the project, including a list of team members
- Provide a copy of any current materials or tools you want to revise
- Identify specific issues on which you would like input or feedback
- Identify specific questions you would like family members to answer
- Specify the number of meetings and length of meetings you anticipate this project will require
- Provide the anticipated start and end dates for the project, along with anticipated meeting times

### During meetings with family partners:

- Actively listen to feedback and ideas from family members
- Make sure that everyone in the group – staff and family partners – is encouraged to participate in the discussion
- Stay focused on the current project
- Identify a plan for follow up at the end of the meeting
- Provide email or other contact information to accept additional comments or feedback
- Develop and share ideas about how best to follow up once you have completed the project (e.g., meeting, conference call, project report)