



What are **Natural Supports?**

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Natural supports refer to the support and assistance that naturally flows from the associations and relationships typically developed in natural environments such as the family, school, work and community. **These relationships and the support and assistance they offer, maintain and enhance the quality and security of life for people with disabilities.**

A natural support is something that you or your family can access for fun, for encouragement, or for assistance because it has already been established through natural relationships or typical routines. This support is available to you, regardless of any "disability" issue, just like it is available to others! Everyone has interdependent relationships in life.

Natural supports are already there! They might not be especially "helpful" at this moment. They might not be especially "attractive" at this moment, but nevertheless, they are there for you just like they are there for other people in this world.

You WILL have to put more energy into their development than others do. You may have to be patient, persistent, and maybe even insistent on your right to access.

Why would I want to access natural supports? Using natural supports promote feelings of belonging and participation in LIFE! They draw on people's natural

inclination to care for others and form relationships that last. They do NOT contribute to artificial relationships, but rather people are together because they desire to be together. They have longer staying power!

Developing and using natural supports makes more sense for your long-term sanity! They are not dependent upon "funding" or "eligibility". They do depend upon YOU though and your persistence to find them and make them fit into your life.

Natural Supports can be a "who."

Friends ▪ Family ▪ Neighbors ▪ Community group members ▪ Co-workers ▪ Church Members ▪ Volunteers ▪ Peers and others.

Natural Supports can be a "what."

Family events Holiday celebrations ▪ Community events Community group activities ▪ Recreation activities ▪ Churches ▪ Community locations ▪ Volunteer experiences ▪ Social events ▪ School time and activities

Tips for accessing natural supports:

Don't limit your options to specialized programs. Explore a variety of resources and programs in your community. Options need not be limited to specialized or segregated programs for individuals with disabilities. While participation in special programs is at times beneficial, regular programs offer a wider range of opportunities and are offered at more locations.

Move toward inclusion. If special programs are chosen, consider transitioning at some point into a program of similar nature where skills can be carried over. For example, participation in Special Olympics swim training can lead to taking a swim class at the local community center.

Tell others WHY this is important for your child. Remind others that your child wants to participate in his community just like all of his friends and other children. Let them know how important this is for his self-confidence and self-esteem.

Resistance to participation. Sometimes others don't understand why you would want to participate and will direct you to programs with special supports. You may have to spend more time explaining why it is so important to your child and family that you participate. Ask the question, "What will it take?" You may have to assist with "modifications", give suggestions, or even be willing to model assisting your child to participate.

Ask your support program to help you.

When you do access special support services (therapies, special education, etc.) ask for goals that will directly work toward community participation. If family and friends are not comfortable around your child, ask for services to include them, so that more folks know about your child than just you! If you are not able to go out in your community, ask for your therapist to go with you and give suggestions for participation.

Fight the isolation. Too many families become isolated when they have a child with a disability. It is a progression in our

culture that you must FIGHT! You are not doing your child any favors to isolate him. While you may feel that it is a temporary solution due to overwhelming environments, you CANNOT make isolation be your long-term solution. That is no solution and will only create new problems.

Get emotional support. Find somebody (possibly another parent in a similar situation) that can give you moral and emotional support when you reach out and get bit! There is a lot to be said for talking to somebody that has been there or is experiencing similar feelings. It is natural to need emotional support when life throws you curve balls.

Think long-term. What you do everyday is your child's "program". LIFE is your program! Get out, get about, and get on with your life! Don't let today's problems keep you and your children from experiencing life and all it holds. Make sure you have developed a set of supporters that care about your child like you do, so that he will have lots of opportunities in the future.

Be patient. None of this happens overnight. You will have setbacks. Some people will never understand, don't let them get you down. Keep your eye on the goal. Cut yourself a break now and then.

But.....

Don't give up!

Think of the long-term benefits for your child to have the opportunity to participate and for your family to HAVE A LIFE!
