



FULL LIFE AHEAD FOUNDATION OF **HOPE**  
HELPING OTHER PEOPLE ENVISION

## **H.O.P.E.**

### **Helping Other People Envision (The Full Life Ahead Planning Process)**

#### **Full Life Ahead Planning: Families, Friends, and Professionals**

##### **What is the Full Life Ahead H.O.P.E. Planning Process?**

Full Life Ahead Planning Process (H.O.P.E...Helping Other People Envision) occurs when a group of family, friends and professionals create a "reliable alliance" for the purpose of creatively, energetically, and joyfully translating great expectations into realities and promoting the preferences of the individual and family.

##### **How Do We Create An Action Plan?**

###### **A. Inviting Support**

Identify someone to facilitate your group. The role of the facilitator is a key one because the facilitator makes sure all other tasks are carried out. The facilitator needs to be a person, whom you can trust, that is willing to make a commitment to become a part of a reliable alliance, has strong communication skills, and is able to connect verbally and emotionally with all group members.

Identify the family members, friends, community, and professionals who are already involved in your life. Think through how each has contributed to supporting your family. Identify your family's definition of helpful support.

What are your son or daughter's great expectations for the future? What are the great expectations of other family members? Consider a couple of the highest priority great expectations and think of the people who you already

know and even those who you do not know who could help make those great expectations happen.

Think through the interests, strengths, and needs that might link your son or daughter and your other family members with a wider circle of supporters. (Does your child want to play soccer, take an art class, or listen to rock bands? Does your family want to be part of a religious community or go to community sporting events?) Develop an awareness of friends, extended family, and professionals who may be able to support you in pursuing your interests and strengths.

To the maximum extent appropriate, involve your son or daughter as a H.O.P.E. team member. Encourage that involvement. Provide opportunities for him or her to be involved in a comfortable role. There may be meetings when he or she chooses not to participate or chooses to attend only a portion of the meeting. Age, attention span, and comfort (with being the center of conversation, particularly when frustrating community barriers or behavioral challenges are being discussed) are all considerations in deciding when and to what extent that your son or daughter might participate or want to participate.

Issue invitations to join the group. Do this after you have considered a whole range of people. Invitations can come from the individual with a disAbility, you or other family members, or the facilitator. One way to extend the invitation is to invite people to come to the first meeting to find out more about what is involved. By giving them a chance to participate in a meeting and meet others prior to making a definite commitment, you give them more information about what is involved. You also should tell them from the outset that, **if active group participation does not work out for them for any reason**, they can always withdraw from participation...and you will still be friends. Have nametags. Everyone will be more comfortable!

Let everyone know that people can join at any time. You may discover new people to add, as new issues and great expectations emerge. Anyone within the group is welcome to invite people that they feel can add to the current situation that is trying to be solved. Sometimes the best solutions come from participants that none of us previously knew!

## **B. Creating Connections**

Let each individual know how valuable his or her support is. Affirm the positive contributions and strengths of everyone. If some people tend to "be on the fringe" of the group, seek ways to get them more involved and to help them be connected.

Create a sense of connectedness. Help people enjoy themselves, feel comfortable, and develop a sense that they, too, can derive support from this reliable alliance.

Listen for and celebrate the special events and occasions in the lives of group members. For example, when someone in the group is in a play, acknowledge and celebrate it. When sadness occurs in the lives of group members, provide consolation and support. Try to let everyone (including the individual with a disAbility) feel the group cares for and about each one.

Create an informal atmosphere for socialization through the meetings. Have food available for snacking and refreshment. Arrange seating so that it is comfortable, e.g., people sitting in a circle in a living room or family room, as contrasted to sitting around a table.

Infuse laughter and joy into each gathering. Avoid somberness.

Turn a crisis into an opportunity. Experiencing a crisis can help create a sense of reliable alliance when people have an opportunity to share disappointment, hurt, and frustration. Often individuals and families have been conditioned to keep their major worries to themselves and to conceal their biggest problems. When a crisis does happen, the more the individual and family shares with the group and is open about their feelings, the more the group has an opportunity to respond and to create a sense of truly being a reliable alliance. Remember that every crisis is an opportunity for more connections and for problem-solving.

## **C. Sharing Great Expectations**

Share your priority great expectations for the future. From the first meeting, give other members of the group an opportunity to affirm and even embel-

lish these great expectations by beginning to develop “what if” and to “why not” attitudes.

Listen for the expression of great expectations and acknowledge and underscore those when they are shared.

Recognize that great expectations evolve over time. The great expectations that people have at the beginning may seem like only moderate expectations at a later time. Thus, **the unfolding of expectations should be viewed as an exciting and dynamic process.**

**Seek to stay open to ideas that truly push the limits of possibilities.** Encourage seemingly outlandish thinking. Hold back from dismissing options simply because you’ve never heard of a person with a disAbility who has had success with the option. **Embrace the opportunity to be a pioneer.**

#### D. Solving Problems

Solve problems. The facilitator has a key role in guiding the group through the steps of systematic problem solving. The beginning of the process requires focusing on a particular great expectation and specifying what needs to happen for that expectation to be realized.

**Do dynamic brainstorming.** Encourage everyone to freely brainstorm without the feeling that their ideas will be censored or immediately evaluated. One of the key contributions of having diverse membership in the action group is to broaden the range possible options that are identified and considered. Thus, **brainstorming should be a highly open and creative process.**

Consider the specific options that are most likely to be successful in addressing needs and barriers and in building on strengths. Do a careful analysis of the pros and cons of different options.

Select the most appropriate option and delineate a specific implementation plan. This implementation plan should identify the people who are going to take action, how the group can be supportive, and when a progress report should be made to the group. The responsibilities for follow through need to be

spread across different group members and involve people who are not in the group, as long as group members can help with coordination and communication with those people. One of the key components of action groups is the action that happens between meetings in getting tasks accomplished in order to help great expectations be realized. Thus, people need to leave the meeting with a clear understanding of what they need to do and a commitment to get it done on the timeline that has been specified.

Promote systematic problem solving in a way that is participatory, creative, dynamic, and organized. A facilitator will be far more successful in the role if she or he has experienced success in individual and group problem solving in the past. Facilitators need to have a balance between structure and rational problem-solving, on the one hand; and warmth, openness, and flexibility, on the other hand. **They need to energize the group with the belief that practically anything is possible.**

Set a comfortable pace and seek to make progress at every meeting and in implementing the action plans between meetings. Keep people interested by noting that the individual's life is truly getting better because of the great expectations that are being accomplished. Progress is essential to keep motivation high.

Get everyone involved. Direct specific questions to the individuals who are not having a chance to participate and either directly or indirectly communicate to the people who are dominating the process that others need to have a greater turn.

Limit your efforts. Systematic problem solving can only be accomplished on one or two issues during a meeting. One mistake that some people make is to try to work on too many things simultaneously. By focusing on one or two issues and developing a systematic specific plan, great progress will be made over time. Thus, the facilitator needs to keep the group directed on what is manageable to accomplish during a given meeting.

Summary: Every meeting should end with a clear summary of the implementation steps that need to occur before the next meeting. The facilitator will write up a copy of all of the flip chart notes and the sign in list with emails and send to all participants so that everyone will be "on the same page".

## E. Celebrating

Celebrate progress. **Every meeting needs to have opportunities to celebrate progress.** The facilitator needs to model and other group members will quickly join in affirming progress, strengths, and positive contributions.

Allow and encourage gratitude. **It is very important for the individual with a disAbility and family to let people know how much their support is appreciated and how good they feel about the progress that is being made.**

Eat and drink. Special snacks can be added to the meetings as an element of celebration. This might include a birthday cake for some group member, a special menu that consists of people's favorite foods, or some seasonal remembrance such as Valentine candy for everyone. **In the South especially, food brings people together, light snacks or a light meal will bring people together in a light-hearted manner.**

Develop the "joy quotient." Set aside time to "party" rather than to "problem solve." There might be a time at the end of a school year or even just in the middle of winter to have a get-together that is characterized totally by frivolity and enjoyment. All different kinds of diverse ideas can be considered from having a chance for people to watch a sporting event, sing along with a group member who plays a guitar, have different group members put on an impromptu talent show, or have a cook-out in the backyard. **The key is that people are having fun together, feeling positive about the great expectations that are getting put into place, and deriving a sense of connection and nurture from each other.**

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