Fostering Home Visitor Peer Relationships

Strategies to Support the Home Visiting Workforce

Research-to-Practice Brief | November 2025

Introduction

The home visitor-family relationship is foundational to delivering home visiting services and keeping families engaged.[i,ii] Because home visitors focus their time and resources on meeting with families, they have fewer natural opportunities to engage with their work colleagues. Many home visiting programs have office spaces, but home visitors spend most of their time travelling to and from—and conducting—home visits by themselves. This limits their chance to organically connect with one another over shared lunch breaks or casual office conversations. It is important for programs to offer opportunities for home visitors to build relationships with one another, as research has found that different aspects of peer relationships can promote positive home visitor outcomes like job satisfaction.[iii,iv,v,vi,vii,viii,ix,x]

About This Brief

This brief focuses on the importance of peer relationships among home visitors and the strategies program leaders can use to foster these relationships. It is primarily based upon a scan of existing literature and resources conducted by the Institute for Home Visiting Workforce Development (Workforce Institute). It also incorporates voices from the home visiting field gathered through Workforce Institute engagement activities.

This brief focuses on home visitors' peer relationships, that is, their relationships with other home visitors. Specifically, it aims to—

- Define peer relationships in the context of the home visiting workforce
- Describe the importance of peer relationships as a form of workplace support
- Share concrete strategies that home visiting programs can incorporate to foster peer relationships among their staff

This brief is intended to help leaders of home visiting programs support and strengthen their workforce by promoting peer relationships. Opportunities for state leaders, network leaders, model developers, and researchers to facilitate and promote peer relationships are also shared.

Definition and Importance

Relationships and connections are critical to fostering a workplace climate that promotes staff well-being, retention, and high-quality service delivery.[xi,xii,xiii,xiv] Many types of supportive relationships—including with program leaders, supervisors, other home visitors, families, and children—can help home visitors (see sidebar).

Home visitors value their relationships with their coworkers and rely on them as a source of support. [xv,xvi,xvii,xviii] Relationships with coworkers are among the most positive factors influencing home visitor job satisfaction, according to a national study of the workforce.[xix] Of the more than 750 home visitors who completed the *Home Visiting Career Trajectories* survey, 66 percent reported that they were completely satisfied with these relationships; another 29 percent reported that they were somewhat satisfied.[xx]

Key Terms

Workplace relationships occur between colleagues at **any** level or position (e.g., home visitors and supervisors, home visitors and program directors).

Peer relationships occur between coworkers at the same level or position (e.g., home visitors and other home visitors).

Qualitative research reveals that home visitors view peers as a resource for talking about challenging situations, managing burnout, and dealing with work-related stressors.[xxi,xxii] Despite their positive views of peer relationships, home visitors report limited time with coworkers and an interest in having more informal opportunities to connect.[xxiii] Providing these opportunities is important because not having coworkers to count on can add to job stress.[xxiv]

> *"Peer relationships with other home visitors/support staff to know you're not in it alone [are a resource]."*
>
> *—Home visitor*

Strong relationships and communication with coworkers can mitigate burnout and promote job satisfaction. Researchers consistently find that multiple aspects of peer relationships can promote positive home visitor outcomes. Many studies on Early Head Start home visitors have found links between coworker support, cohesion, and communication and lower secondary traumatic stress and burnout and higher job satisfaction.[xxv,xxvi,xxvii] Although home visiting research has found that generally supportive workplaces and job satisfaction are associated with retention or intent to stay,[xxviii,xxix,xxx] there are no studies examining direct links between home visitor peer relationships and any measures of retention. Evidence from studies of nurses and family childcare providers, however, suggests that supportive peer relationships might reduce a provider's intent to quit.[xxxi,xxxii]

> *"More regularly occurring reflective supervision . . . and access to peer support groups could help me process emotional stress, reduce burnout, and maintain healthy, professional relationships with families."*
> *—Home visitor*

Many home visiting programs use formal peer connection strategies, such as peer mentorship and job shadowing with a more experienced peer. More than half (56 percent) of home visiting programs in the *Home Visiting Career Trajectories* study assigned peer mentors to new home visitors. Home visitor intent to stay in their job was statistically significantly higher at these programs compared to programs without peer mentors.[xxxiii] Home visitors referred to job shadowing as one of the most important parts of their training. Job shadowing also gives more experienced home visitors a chance to strengthen their leadership skills and experience.[xxxiv]

Program Strategies

There are many ways to foster supportive peer relationships within the home visiting workforce and across levels of the home visiting context. Effects may vary, however, based on employees' preferences, ideas, and desires for workplace connections. Program leaders should consider conducting a survey or having one-on-one conversations with their staff before implementing any strategies. The Institute for Healthcare Improvement's *"What Matters to You?" Conversation Guide for Improving Joy in Work*[xxxv] offers one example of how to structure such conversations. Incorporating

employees' perspectives can help them feel comfortable with and connected to any strategies implemented. This section presents strategies for programs to consider organized by three categories: peer relationships in the workplace, peer support structures, and peer connections across the field.

Peer Relationships in the Workplace

Research has found links between strong communication and positive home visitor outcomes such as job satisfaction.[xxxvi,xxxvii] Program leaders might consider working with their home visitors to identify and provide opportunities to **improve communication**. Potential strategies include—

- Creating a group chat
- Holding a morning huddle to connect before the workday
- Displaying a question of the week in an office common area to help staff learn about each other

Home visitors have expressed a desire for **informal connectivity activities**[xxxviii] such as—

- Hosting shared meals/potlucks during regularly scheduled meetings
- Creating ongoing group activities in break rooms
- Holding staff retreats (see box)

Example From the Field: Home Visitor Retreats

In northeastern Pennsylvania, nurse home visitors working for the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) program at Maternal and Family Health Services (MFHS) meet up regularly at quarterly retreats. Nurse Supervisor Ann Marie Jennings explains that these optional retreats—which have included goat yoga, a picnic, and guided visit to a state park—are offered to help home visitors reconnect with one another and relax.

MFHS serves approximately 325 families across 3 counties. Recognizing the need for a fun shared experience, program leaders started planning quarterly retreats for staff to come together, do team-building activities, and talk to one another. Retreats provide a break from the heaviness of day-to-day work and give new nurses a chance to talk to more established nurses about balance and self-care. Nurse home visitors have also used the retreats to learn about the different community contexts experienced by their colleagues.

Peer Support Structures

Research suggests that home visitors could benefit from the following peer support structures:[xxxix,xl]

- **Case presentations and discussions**. Dedicating a specific time for home visitors to share difficult work situations can help them feel less alone when a family on their caseload faces a challenge. It also provides a space for colleagues to brainstorm and collaborate on potential solutions.
- **Group supervision**. When offered alongside individual supervision, group supervision enables home visitors to develop a shared understanding of program requirements, available resources, and strategies for supporting families. Group reflective supervision has also been theorized to promote reflective functioning, a skill that promotes understanding and interpretation of others' feelings and can translate to home visitors' work with families.[xli,xlii]
- **Job shadowing**. Job shadowing complements home visitor training and professional development by providing practical experience through home visits.[xliii] Other benefits include building a relationship with an experienced home visitor, observing their work, and asking them questions.
- **Peer mentoring**. Peer mentors help new home visitors get used to a program and serve as a resource, especially during onboarding. Home visitors working at programs that assign peer mentors often report a greater likelihood of staying in their jobs than those working in programs without peer mentors.[xliv]

Peer Connections Across the Field

Program leaders might consider looking for local events where staff can come together with other home visitors in the community (see box).

Example From the Field: Home Visiting Wellness Summit

On May 22, 2025, over 250 home visitors, supervisors, and family support workers convened in Sacramento, California, for the Home Visiting Wellness Summit. This 1-day, in-person event followed 6 months of webinars and smaller, in-person gatherings all focused on workforce wellness. Attendees started the day hearing keynote addresses about why their job matters and the importance of self-care. Attendees could also participate in related workshops, including art therapy, "reclaiming joy through play," boundary-setting, and relaxation therapy.

The idea for this event originated from a 2021 study commissioned by First 5 California, which revealed wellness as a critical issue for the state's home visiting workforce. Using funding awarded by First 5 California to create a Regional Home Visiting Coordinating Collaborative for the region's 10 counties, First 5 Sacramento decided to include workforce wellness as a key topic area. The organization offered many types of events before the Summit, including webinars on topics like the neuroscience of self-care, leadership, and personal safety. First 5 Sacramento also offered gas cards to offset costs for staff driving to attend the Summit.

Workforce voice was incorporated throughout the Summit, from planning to evaluation. Similar involvement is critical to planning events that meet the unique needs of communities and programs, says Home Visiting and Parent Liaison Manager Alejandra Labrado.

The Home Visiting Wellness Summit offered attendees a chance to make time for themselves, get away from work stress, and learn new wellness skills and strategies.

There are also opportunities at the federal, tribal, state, and model levels for home visiting staff to connect, discuss their work, and build relationships.

- The annual National Home Visiting Summit, organized by Start Early, includes Communities of Practice and networking opportunities for attendees with different roles and interests.
- The free app Knock, provided by the Institute for the Advancement of Family Support Professionals (IAFSP), offers an online community for the home visiting workforce.

IAFSP also facilitates a monthly Connect + Discuss session for participants to discuss and reflect on a topic (e.g., burnout, balance).

- The Workforce Institute operates a Learning Collaborative for home visiting programs and a Community of Practice for supervisors to learn from each other.
- Several states (e.g., Arkansas, Oregon, Texas) host gatherings for home visitors across models and locations to convene in person.

Considerations

When adopting a strategy to promote peer relationships, there are important considerations for planning, implementing, and evaluating the strategy. For example, when planning a strategy—

- Talk to home visitors to gauge their interest and what they might like to do
- Figure out if there is a budget for activities and/or find ideas for free activities
- Consider logistics like location, frequency, and transportation

While implementing a strategy—

- Conduct frequent pulse checks with home visitors to assess their experience
- Revisit logistics as needed

To evaluate how a strategy affects staff—

- Examine changes in job satisfaction before and after implementing the strategy
- Record home visitor turnover rates the year(s) before and after adopting the strategy
- Interview home visitors or hold a listening session to hear what they like and dislike about a strategy and what areas they think the strategy affects

Opportunities for Research

The impact of peer relationships in home visiting is an important topic for future research. Although there is existing research describing some benefits of strong peer relationships (e.g., improved job satisfaction), there is still a need for more research in this area. Starting points for future work include—

- Examining associations between different types of peer relationship strategies (e.g., weekly team lunches, job shadowing) and understudied home visitor outcomes, such as retention
- Describing the peer relationships of staff who are not home visitors (e.g., supervisors, program leaders, outreach coordinators)

- Interviewing home visitors to understand what they consider the most beneficial aspects of peer relationships and how peer relationships fit into the larger system of workforce supports (e.g., value of peer recognition and validation)

Opportunities for Funders and Policymakers

Funders and policymakers can help home visiting programs foster an environment that enables and supports peer relationships. Specifically, they might consider—

- Offering flexible funding that can be used to implement strategies to promote peer relationships
- Ensuring that home visitors' workloads do not lead them to feel overstretched and like they do not have time to build relationships at work
- Providing technology (e.g., apps) needed to engage in relationship-building strategies

Conclusion

Peer relationships help programs expand, support, and retain a qualified home visiting workforce. Home visitors report the importance of their peer relationships at work,[xlv,xlvi] and research finds links between these relationships and outcomes such as job satisfaction.[xlvii,xlviii,xlix,l,li] There is also some evidence that specific strategies to bolster peer relationships (e.g., job shadowing) can be beneficial.[lii,liii]

Home visiting program leaders, policymakers, and funders can choose from many strategies that promote and support peer relationships in the workplace. Research opportunities include studying the effectiveness of these strategies and understanding why home visitors think they are beneficial.

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 Suggested citation: Fisk, E., Joraanstad, A., & Sparr, M. (2025). *Fostering home visitor peer relationships: Strategies to support the home visiting workforce*. Maternal and Child Health Bureau; Health Resources and Services Administration; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

This project is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under grant number: 1 UU6MC50283-01-00, totaling $4,499,239.00 with 0 percent financed with non-governmental sources.

Disclaimer

The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by, HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to Ann Marie Jennings, Alejandra Labrado, and the home visiting workforce members who shared their time, expertise, and stories.