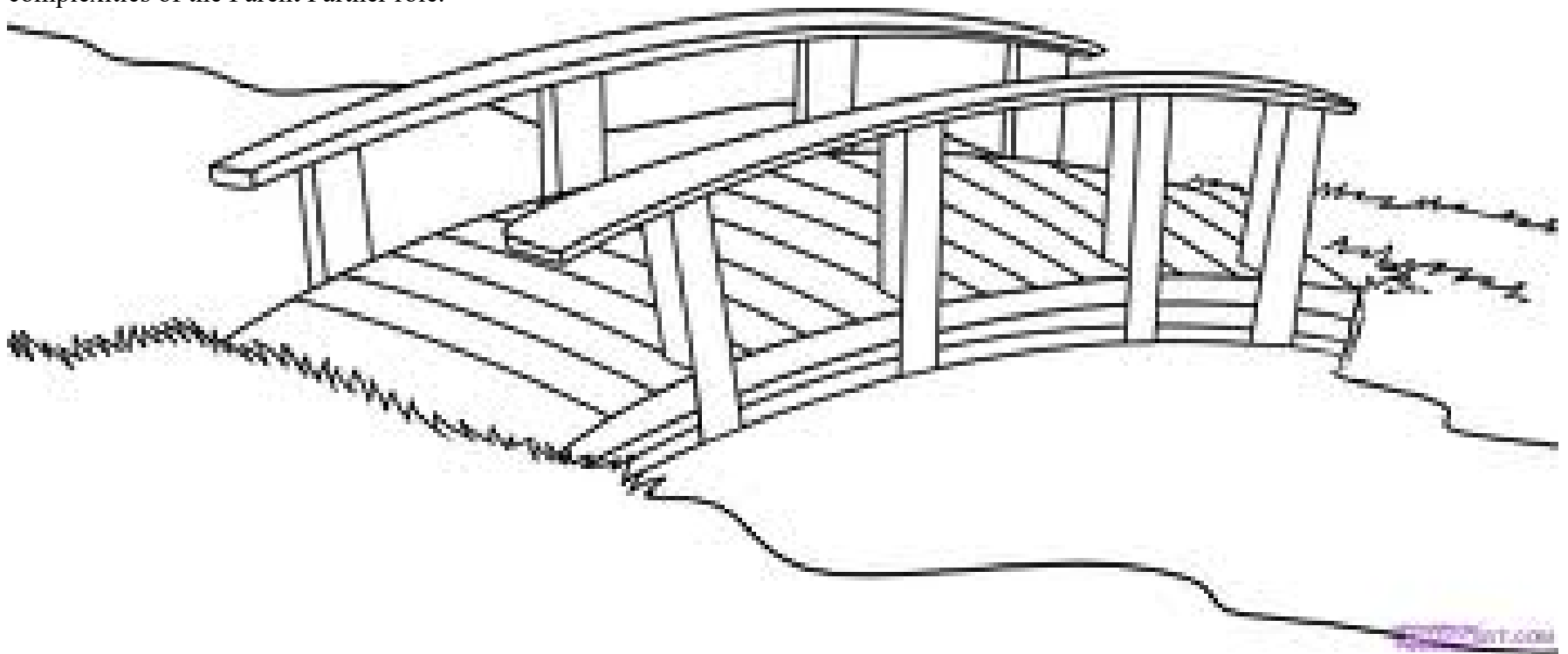


THE PARENT PARTNER BRIDGE

According to Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, a bridge is a structure carrying a pathway or roadway over a depression or obstacle. Webster also defines a bridge as a time, place, or means of connection or transition. Bridges are a key force in overcoming obstacles and helping families achieve their goals. Parent partners (parent, family or youth) are the bridges that help families succeed in getting where they want to go, across all systems. By breaking down how bridges function, you also may gain further insight on the complexities of the Parent Partner role.



Parent Partner: The Universal Bridge

According to Merriam-Webster's online dictionary, a bridge is a structure carrying a pathway or roadway over a depression or obstacle. Webster also defines a bridge as a time, place, or means of connection or transition. Bridges are a key force in overcoming obstacles and helping families achieve their goals. It is my opinion that partners (parent, family or youth) are the bridges that help families succeed in getting where they want to go, across all systems. By breaking down how bridges function, you also may gain further insight on the complexities of the Parent Partner role.

In visioning the role a parent partner and the analogy of a bridge, both do fairly similar jobs: the partner is a pathway tool that can be used to connect families to their informal supports and the community. By showing the way, the partner aids families to overcome obstacles in their lives and connects families to sustainable supports that may prop the family up again if needed in the future. Partners also use their life experiences as a once-walked pathway for families to reference as life's obstacles pop up and knock people off track. The partner can also be used as a bridge between the family and systems, the family and the community, the family and their future, and the family and any needed resources. A partner is a universal bridge to connect families with success.

Using partners as the original structure to connect families with the needed resources is a great tool. However, just as bridges need to be maintained, updated and replaced, so do partners. Bridges have been around for years, and over time, may not be the best ways to get from one location to a different location. In fact, because over time they are used again and again, these bridges become broken and or unstable, and thus can harm a community that is solely dependent on them. This scenario is similar with Parent Partners. If the family becomes reliant on the partner, and then the partner leaves, the family may not be able to get to where they want to go. Therefore it is important that families are educated on how to find new bridges and that partners replace their roles with that family by finding new ways to overcome depression and obstacles in their lives.

According to Phyllis Theroux, "Mistakes are the usual bridge between inexperience and wisdom." Partners have lived the life that leads them to wisdom. This wisdom can be a great pathway of change in helping other families go from a life full of obstacles and depression to life filled with opportunity and happiness.

-Jarred Vermillion