



Guide for Engaging Families

Educators can increase youth and family engagement in school and in the classroom by reaching out to establish positive relationships with youth and families, demonstrating respect for diversity, and identifying ways to engage students and families in ways that are meaningful to fostering positive relationships and promoting student success and well-being.

SPECIFIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Build relationships

- Facilitate activities, involving sharing about hobbies, interests, goals
- Send positive messages home
- Use multiple modes of communication

Show respect for diversity

- Encourage sharing about culture, including holidays, artwork, languages, etc.
- Acknowledge diverse culture in communications
- Foster a culturally-relevant classroom

Promote school participation

- Provide opportunities for families to provide input and students to share ideas in class
- Reward attendance and participation
- Invite caregivers to volunteer, teach or read in class

Build Relationships with Families and Students:

- Use "All About Me" activities, where families, students, and teachers share their hobbies, interests, and goals.
- Send positive messages home.
- Communicate often and use multiple methods of communication, including phone calls, written notes, text messages, links to recorded video messages, etc.

Show Respect for Diversity:

- Invite families and youth to share important information about their cultural background, such as important holidays, celebrations, languages, and art.
- Acknowledge diverse cultures and identities in communications and lessons
- Foster a classroom that embraces cultural differences and assets.

Promote School Participation:

- Provide opportunities for families to provide input directly to you and for students to share their ideas and questions during class time.
- Reward attendance and active participation with verbal praise and other rewards (high fives, participation points, positive notes home, etc.).
- Invite caregivers to the classroom for opportunities to volunteer, teach a skill or read a book.

Overcome Barriers to Family Engagement



Families from various backgrounds face several potential barriers to engaging at school. Families with different language abilities or those who are English Language Learners may experience challenges with communicating with educators.

To address language barriers educators can:

- Acknowledge language differences
- Identify the family's preferred methods of communications
- Use clear and plain language in verbal and written communications, and, when available, utilize translation services.

Financial and Logistical Barriers: Time constraints, inflexible work schedules, childcare issues, and transportation barriers may prevent parents and guardians from physically participating in school activities and meetings. To overcome these challenges, educators can work with families to identify mutually convenient times for conversations and flexible methods of communication and engagement, such as home visits, phone calls, and notes home.

Prior Negative Experiences in Schools: Family histories with the educational system may also limit their engagement. Some adult family members of your students may have had their own negative experiences when they were in school. Consider the experience of parents/guardians who were educated during the school segregation era or those who had learning needs that were unaddressed by schools, or caregivers who were subject to exclusionary disciplinary practices, or those who were otherwise victims of prejudice and discrimination in schools.

As a result of prior poor educational experiences, some families may feel unsafe or unwelcome in schools. In educators' efforts to establish relationships with and engage families at school, it is helpful to consider their histories with the education system and how educators can help families feel more welcome in the school. Don't hesitate to ask parents, "What was your experience like when you were in school?" and "What can I do to help you feel welcome at school?"

Prepared for the MHTTC Network and NCSMH. All material, except that taken directly from copyrighted sources, is in the public domain and may be reproduced or copied without permission from SAMHSA or the authors. Citation of the source is appreciated.

