



# FAMILY ENGAGEMENT:

FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS  
WORKING TOGETHER

**NFF** NATIONAL FEDERATION OF FAMILIES  
*Bringing Lived Experience to Family Support*

**NFS  
TAC** NATIONAL FAMILY SUPPORT  
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER  
*Providing Family Support Across the Lifespan*

 **MHTTC**  
Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network  
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

 **NCSMH**  
NATIONAL CENTER FOR  
SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH

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# BRINGING FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS TOGETHER ON THE CONCEPT OF "FAMILY ENGAGEMENT"

Family engagement is a **collaborative and strengths-based process** through which the workforce, families, and children build **positive and goal-oriented relationships**.

It is a **shared responsibility** of families and staff at all levels that requires **mutual respect** for the roles and strengths each has to offer.

Schools and families don't always have the same ideas of what "family engagement" looks like.

TO FORM SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS, SCHOOLS CAN MOVE FROM FAMILY INVOLVEMENT TO FAMILY ENGAGEMENT.

## FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

- Define family involvement
- Assess your school climate
- Consult with a group of representative families to understand their desires
- Gather data for a demographic profile from a short survey
- Establish goals with families—define your goals and determine how you'll accomplish them together
- Raise awareness of your school community's desires, get the word out through multiple channels, and help families understand what they can do to get involved



## FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

- Ask families how, when, and where they can be a part of the school community
- Ask families about the climate of your school; make improvements
- Consider the desires of your families in policies, programs, and engagement activities
- Create a demographic profile that informs decisions
- Share the goals you established with parents and work with them to accomplish, assess, and revise them
- Engage families and the school community in reaching goals together

# IMPROVING FAMILY ENGAGEMENT



When families of children with mental health and substance use challenges are **welcomed, respected, and included**, school mental health providers and other staff are one step closer to **forming partnerships with families to reach goals that best support the child's success.**

The provider in the picture to the left seems to have welcomed this family who looks happy to be working with her. What could be a barrier to co-creating a plan *in partnership with* a family for their child's well-being?

*Instead of the desk to creating a physical barrier with an appearance of authority between you and the family, find a seating arrangement that puts your body language in a position of collaboration.*

Remove barriers!

## BARRIERS TO FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

- Transportation
- Child care
- Work obligations
- Scheduling conflicts
- Bad weather
- Tokenism

## BARRIERS TO FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

- Fear
- Suspicion
- Distrust
- Pride
- Being unwanted, unwelcome, disrespected, or overpowered
- Power imbalance
- Cultural uniqueness
- Misunderstanding
- Mismatched beliefs about family, teacher, school mental health, and administrator roles

## ASSESS YOUR FAMILY ENGAGEMENT BELIEFS, SKILLS, AND STRATEGIES.

Complete NFSTAC's [Family Partnership Checklist](#).

This checklist was developed for the behavioral health workforce to reflect on and improve the skills and practices that result in effective family partnership. Any provider or school-based mental health professional can use this checklist!



# FAMILY ENGAGEMENT RESOURCES

The mission of the [National Center for School Mental Health \(NCSMH\)](#) is to strengthen policies and programs in school mental health to improve learning and promote success for America's youth. The resources below were curated by NCSMH from the resources available through their free [School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation \(SHAPE\) System](#).

Explore resources to improve family engagement.

- [Communication for Collaboration Checklist](#) and a [Collaboration to Learn and Grow Checklist](#) from [The Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center](#)
- [Developing a Written Parent and Family Engagement Policy: A Guide for Districts and Schools](#) from the Tennessee Department of Education
- [Partnering with Families in Continuous Quality Improvement Tip Sheet](#) from The Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program
- [Best Practice Guide for Engaging Fathers: A Toolkit for Children Services Staff](#) from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services
- Family-School Compact [example](#) and [template](#) from Nutmeg Elementary School
- Family engagement professional development [resources](#) from the [IRIS Center](#)
- [Attendance Works's "Caring Conversations Worksheet"](#)





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# FAMILY ENGAGEMENT RESOURCES

The SAMHSA-funded MHTTC Network provides free technical assistance and training to the mental health and school mental health workforces across mental health prevention, treatment, and recovery support. The following resources were developed by the MHTTC Network and focus on supporting the mental health workforce in engaging families.

For a comprehensive list of related resources and upcoming events, please visit [MHTTCnetwork.org](https://MHTTCnetwork.org) for a searchable [Products and Resources Catalog](#) that includes free curricula, fact sheets, recorded webinars, and other resources in addition to our [Training and Events Calendar](#) that lists all of the training and TA events available across the Network.

Explore resources to improve family engagement.

- SSW MHTTC's [Centering Peer and Family Support: Multidisciplinary Collaboration](#)
- Nat'l American Indian & Alaska Native MHTTC's [Collaborating and Communicating Effectively with Parents](#)
- Central East MHTTC's [Engaging Families in School Mental Health](#)
- New England MHTTC's [Family Compassionate Conversations: Community Wellness](#)
- New England MHTTC's [Family Compassionate Conversations: Wellness in Latinx Families](#)
- NE & Caribbean MHTTC's [Family Inclusion: The Role of Families in Recovery from Mental Illnesses](#)
- SSW MHTTC's [Family Member/Support Person Engagement During Care for First Episode Psychosis: Challenges and Strategies to Move Forward](#)
- Pacific SW MHTTC's [Family Navigator Model: A Practice Guide For Schools](#)



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# FAMILY ENGAGEMENT RESOURCES (CONT'D)

Explore resources to improve family engagement.

- Mid-America MHTTC's [Family Peer Support: Being Part of the Mental Health Team](#)
- Mid-America MHTTC's [Family Peer Support: How Families Can Foster Independence: Employment](#)
- Mid-America MHTTC's [Family Peer Support: How Families Can Foster Independence: Housing](#)
- Mid-America MHTTC's [Family Peer Support: How to Orient Families and Their Loved One Toward Recovery](#)
- Mid-America MHTTC's [Family Peer Support: Outcomes](#)
- Mid-America MHTTC's [Family Peer Support: Preventing Crisis and Relapse](#)
- NW MHTTC's [Family-Led Crisis Planning](#)
- Central East MHTTC's [Guide for Engaging Families](#)
- New England MHTTC's [Helping Families Navigate Therapy](#)
- NE & Caribbean MHTTC's [Implementing Family Inclusion Standards](#)
- SE MHTTC's [Learning From and With Students, Caregivers, Advocates and Systems Leaders](#)
- New England MHTTC's [Mental Health and Children: Perspectives from Family on Screening, Diagnosis, and Supports](#)
- NW MHTTC's [More than a DSM Code: Addressing Stigma Experienced by Families](#)
- New England MHTTC's [Motivational Interviewing for Loved Ones: Empowering Families with Therapists' Best Tools for Encouraging Behavior Change](#)
- SE MHTTC's [On-Demand: Focus on the Family: Using Person and Family Centered Care for Mental Health](#)



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# FAMILY ENGAGEMENT RESOURCES (CONT'D)

Explore resources to improve family engagement.

- Pacific SW MHTTC's [Our Young Children & Suicide Prevention: A Brief for Parents and Caregivers](#)
- SSW MHTTC's [Parent Peer Support/Family Partner Panel](#)
- Central East MHTTC's [Parent Peer Support: Better Outcomes for Children, Youth & Families Across Systems](#)
- New England MHTTC's [Providing Culturally Relevant Services to Families of LGBTQ+ Youth](#)
- MHTTC Network's [School Mental Health Best Practices 'Always and Now' Learning Series Module 2: Teaming](#)
- SSW MHTTC's [Schools Can! Create Compassionate and Connected Communities - ABC Summit 2021](#)
- New England MHTTC's [Stakeholder Voice, Engagement, and Advocacy to Enhance Collaborative School-Based Mental Health Services](#)
- New England MHTTC's [Take HEART Community of Practice- Compassionate School Practices: Vision, Plan, and Monitor for Success](#)
- NE & Caribbean MHTTC's [The Family Experience](#)
- NE & Caribbean MHTTC's [The Secret Sauce for Building Successful Home-School Partnerships](#)
- NW MHTTC's [Wraparound Family Partner Orientation](#)





# MOVING TOWARDS FAMILY-DRIVEN PARTNERSHIP AND SUPPORT

Schools, school districts, and their school mental health systems are in different places on their journeys moving from family involvement towards family engagement. Once they have **trained ALL staff on effective family engagement strategies** and **created welcoming environments and family-inclusive policies**, they are ready for the next step of offering family-driven support. **Family Peer Specialists can be valuable assets to bring families and schools closer to the same definition of success** for the child they are supporting.



When support is **family-driven**, families have a primary decision-making role for their own children. Their lived experience voice is heard at all levels, including the support their child receives and the policies and procedures governing all children in their community, state, tribe, territory, and/or nation. Family-driven means:

- Identifying families' dreams, strengths, challenges, desired outcomes/goals, and the steps required to achieve those outcomes/goals
- Designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating services, supports, programs, and systems
- Choosing supports, services, and providers who are culturally and linguistically responsive and aware
- Partnering in decision-making at all levels

*For more resources on family-driven partnership and support, explore NFSTAC's [Glossary of Terms!](#)*

Move towards family-driven partnerships and support.

Families have been at the vanguard of social justice work, demanding equity and inclusion for their children before the term "social justice" was popular. Family peer support IS social justice, bringing us closer to genuine family-driven partnerships.

# FAMILY PEER SPECIALISTS: LIAISONS AND SUPPORTS FOR FAMILIES NAVIGATING SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH

**Family Peer Specialists (FPS)** are parents, family members, or caregivers with lived experience parenting a child or as primary caregivers for another family member with mental health and/or substance use challenges who can speak about and use this lived experience to support other families with similar experiences to advocate for their child's or family member's well-being, supporting them in navigating systems, and offering other necessary resources.



Connect families with a Family Peer Specialist from their [local National Federation of Families affiliate](#).

Family Peer Specialists have four central roles: 1) Offering **peer support** to family members, 2) **mentoring them to become confident advocates** for their children's desired supports and family-driven systems, 3) helping them **navigate multiple systems**, and 4) **teaching skills** to maintain personal and family **well-being**.

## PEER SUPPORT

- **Listen and relate** to families' concerns, challenges, and desired supports
- **Connect** families to reduce isolation
- **Normalize** mental health and substance use challenges
- **Share** successes and challenges to co-learn
- **Offer** resources to reduce discrimination and access services

## MENTORING

- Methods for **speaking their values**
- A road map to **becoming equal partners with professionals** in service delivery
- Strategies for **promoting the best interests** of children
- Strategies to speak out **against discrimination**

# FAMILY PEER SPECIALISTS: LIAISONS AND SUPPORTS FOR FAMILIES NAVIGATING SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH (CONT'D)

## SYSTEMS NAVIGATION

- **Education:** Attend IEP meetings, advocate for services
- **Mental Health and Health Care:** Arrange for transportation to appointments, demystify insurance
- **Justice:** Prepare families for experience, find representation
- **Housing:** Connect families to temporary housing, support permanent housing applications

## SELF-CARE/FAMILY WELL-BEING SKILLS

- **Encouragement** and **hope** that recovery is possible
- **Self-care** and **community care** strategies
- **Conflict resolution** skills
- **Connection** to mental health and substance use **providers**
- **Resources** for **crisis** prevention and support

Encourage family members interested in becoming an FPS to explore NFF's [national certification](#).

The [National Federation of Families](#) (NFF) is a national family-run organization linking more than 120 state and local affiliates and national partners focused on the concerns of families of loved ones with mental health and/or substance use challenges. NFF is the national [certifying body of Family Peer Specialists](#) (FPS) and offers [resources](#), [training](#), and [advocacy support](#) to FPS and family-run organizations.

The [National Family Support Technical Assistance Center](#) (NFSTAC)—run by NFF—is a SAMHSA-funded Center of Excellence offering free [training](#), [technical assistance](#), [resources](#), and [support](#) to families, FPS, family-run organizations, and other stakeholders interested in family peer support.

Request **free**  
**technical**  
**assistance** from  
NFSTAC!

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