



## MMP Staying Virtually Connected: Family/Caregiver Engagement

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### **Keeping Relationships Strong: Connecting with Families/Caregivers**

#### **Family/Caregiver Engagement**

Connecting with families has always been important. Connecting with families in these unprecedented times is crucial.

Family Caregiver engagement is an important aspect of youth serving programs - parents/caregivers are crucial adults in the lives of young people - they have a large presence, influence and major role in the developing child and adolescent.

Youth programs connection with family/caregivers is crucial in creating a trusting relationship. This looks different depending on the age and the mission and manner in which programs operate.

The Elements of the Effective Practice are used as a guiding post for the pivot of practice - these are our benchmarks for best practices.

**Family engagement involves efforts by the mentoring program to support positive engagement of the mentee's parent or caregiver and/or other members of the mentee's family in the mentoring process.**

- Orienting and training Family/CG
- Activities to bring together mentor/mentee and family/CG
- Periodic Check-ins with family/CG
- Coaching for mentors in partnering with family/CG

Read more about the [Elements of Effective Practice](#)

#### Core Values

The research of Karen Mapp provides a nice framework through 4 Core Beliefs for schools. These are still appropriate to consider now when engaging with families.

1. All parents have dreams for their children and want the best for them.

2. Partnerships with families are essential to the academic achievement of children.
3. All parents can support their children's learning.
4. The responsibility for building partnerships between school and home rests primarily on the school staff, especially school leaders.

*Adopted from "High Expectations"*

Read more from Karen Mapp - [Karen Mapp Working with Families and Caregivers: Family Engagement as a Core Element of Effective Practice](#)

These are very difficult and uncertain times. The landscape keeps changing and there are so many unknowns. Mentoring and youth serving programs can use this time to reach and connect to families and caregivers and provide an extra dose of support to some or become a connector/broker to new support systems for others. This outreach may make it easier for young people to stay connected to mentors, youth workers and teachers.

### **Some Things to Consider in this time of COVID-19**

- How are you entering this family? Was there a previous relationship or is this your first time calling? Who has held this relationship prior?
- Clarity is helpful during times of crisis. Be clear about what you know and share that. Help to bring information to the parents/caregivers.
- Be ready to listen. Listening and affirming one's situation can go a long way. It can also help you to better understand the family's situation. Being heard can mean a great deal to someone who is feeling isolated and could help to build a connection
- What are you "asking for" and when are you asking for it. Oftentimes programs want families/caregivers to offer support and sometimes in a very particular manner. Knowing what you are asking a parent/caregiver to do and evaluating if it is the appropriate time and space to be able to ask is important.
- Remember this is all new for everyone - We are in this together in these unprecedented times we are here to support each other as a community.
- Watch your assumptions - We always need to bring cultural humility to our work. Be aware of your assumptions, your implicit and explicit biases. This pandemic is affecting communities differently and may mean different things to different communities. The impact of COVID19 is having different effects within different communities. Beware of the lens you are bringing to the situation.
- **Sheltering in place may not be safe** for some people. People surviving violence may be experiencing increased isolation and danger caused by social distancing. Be aware of these facts and have resources at your fingertips. A simple question - do you feel safe in your home can help get someone the resources they need. [Futures Without Violence](#) has a specific resource page for you to use. It includes a parent hotline for parents who may need support for their own behavior.

## Getting Ready for OUTREACH

- **As a program, define what you are able to offer.** For many programs match support and family/caregiver engagement is pivoting like other parts of programming. It is important for programs to consider what this pivot means for this part of your work. What services can you offer now and what services do you need to refer elsewhere. For example, some match support specialists have moved to deliver food, others can not do this service. Please consider your programs availability and limits.
- **Line up resources.** Get to know the resources that are out there for your community before you start making calls. Warm referrals are always the best. Be “warm” during the time of “sheltering in place” The more resources you have at your fingertips the more helpful you can be. Share resources with families- offer suggestions if they are open to them and request them.
- **Develop audit questions.** Many programs are first checking just to see how families are doing. Develop a list of questions you want to ask - what areas do you want to assess? Have a list so all staff can be consistent and make sure they are reaching out to families in a consistent manner.

## Taking the time for the RELATIONSHIP

- **Reach out to everyone** and make connections. Families/caregivers all need a call to get informed about the status of your program if nothing else. Programs have asked families/caregivers for consent as programs began - we need to keep people in the loop about what is happening now.
- **CONNECT FIRST.** Take the time to say HELLO, how are you? It goes a long way. Give people space to express their concerns, frustrations, share what they know and ask questions.
- **Honor limits.** Families may need to set limits right now. Families/caregivers may have a lot going on that they may or may not have shared with you. Families may have different work schedules or various responsibilities caring for family members. Families/caregivers may have limited data or time to share their devices. Listen carefully and honor the limits being set forth.
- **Offer Clarity** Share what is known. Tell what is happening with your programs. Help people to increase their knowledge.
- **Support the Mentoring Match.** If match activities are happening ask about how it feels, how it is going and if they have suggestions/requests moving forward.
- **Provide support and care.** Remember to be transparent regarding what you can and can't deliver.
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## CONNECT VIRTUALLY

Now is the time to think creatively and perhaps create some new possibilities for family/caregiver engagement.

- **Virtual Introductions.** If the family/caregivers have not met the mentor or youth worker take the time for an introduction. Mentoring or programming that we site

based may now be moving, virtually, into someone's home and it is important for families/caregivers to have the opportunity to meet this "guest" in their home.

- **Virtual Family/Caregiver Engagement Activities.** Develop ways to engage on line with or without mentors. Can you host a family/caregiver game night, dance party or check in, maybe even a talent show? Can you bring people together to have some laughs or share a story? Many programs are moving the events they may have had in person to on-line events. Check out the resources on the [MMP website](#) for more ideas.
- **Family/Caregiver Training.** Many programs have worked very hard to get adults to come to trainings. Now may be just the right time. Parents/caregivers may be very interested in a number of topics for learning and/or connecting. They may be much more likely to "log on" as opposed to coming out to an event. Topics could be about the current situation and a time to share resources i.e. teaching some skills to support on- line learning, sharing community resources or talking about the challenges of being home all day with children. Or programs can branch out and offer trainings on self care, exercising or other topics regarding parenting, social emotional learning and more.
- **Increase Check-Ins.** Family situations may change quickly. It may be helpful to ask if you can give a call every other week or within a time frame that is appropriate for your program and staffing pattern. What worked this week may not next week if someone gets sick or if someone's work schedule changes. Family needs and schedules may change often right now.
- **Honor Family/Caregivers.** This is always a cornerstone of family engagement and now is not the time to stop honoring adults for the support they bring to the relationships. Perhaps it is sending needed gift cards or deliveries of needed goods. Programs can do virtual events and videos or letters of appreciation and gratitude offer a great deal.

### **Resources for Family/Caregiver Meetings**

There are several online platforms that help folks stay connected. Your program may opt to use one of the few below or another platform to facilitate virtual closure. Be considerate of access needs and provide options that work for many.

- [GotoMeeting](#)
- [Zoom](#)
- [Google Meet](#)

### **Additional Resources**

- [E-mentoring Supplement](#)
- [Family Engagement Inventory](#)