

Family Engagement Toolkit

How to create a culture of family involvement in your youth program

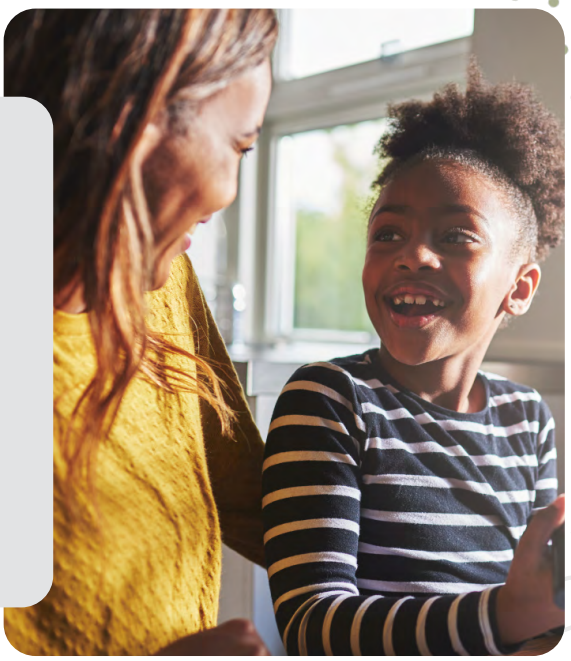
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Introduction

Family engagement is crucial for the success of youth programs as children's healthy development and academic achievements begin at home. Research indicates that strong connections between program staff and families are a hallmark of high-performing programs. Partnering with parents and caregivers and establishing regular communication can improve attendance, academic achievement, and relationships at home.

Learn how to effectively communicate and develop a family engagement plan that fits your program.

1. Principles of Communication
2. The Four I's
3. Stay Connected
4. Build a Family Engagement Plan



1. Principles of Communication

Whether communicating in-person or electronically, be sure to follow the principles of communication.

Be Positive and Respectful

Always maintain a positive and respectful tone. Communicate the good. The only outreach shouldn't occur when something bad has happened. Share small wins like helping friends, reading independently, etc. Always start with the assumption that others are doing their best.

Keep It Two-Way

When you ask for feedback, practice active listening and find ways to incorporate families' voices and suggestions into your program. Ask for help when you need it. This might include asking for supplies, field trip volunteers, or support with practicing a 15-minute reading block before bed.

Be Proactive

Build trust over time through consistent proactive interactions. Once trust is established, families are more receptive to your support. If you need to discuss a behavioral or performance concern, address it immediately with the family. They want to help, so let them.

Stay Solution-Oriented

Employ a strengths-based approach to partnering with families by highlighting what families are already doing well and tapping into support and resources. Tie feedback to what's important to the child and their family and talk about how integrating feedback will lead to growth and opportunity.

2. The 4 I's

Use the research-based 4 I's developed by the **National PTA** to boost family engagement by ensuring communication is:



Inclusive

- Respects diverse backgrounds and languages
- Lets families know they matter



Integrated

- Provides flexible meeting options, such as virtual meetings
- Gathers important information in one place to simplify access



Individualized

- Is personalized to each child and their family
- Honors preferred name and pronouns



Impactful

- Empowers families with strategies for engaging with their kids
- Offers specific feedback that allows families to support their child's successes

3. Stay Connected

Meaningful communication is continuous and flows in both directions.



Download our Social Media Toolkit to learn how to bolster your online presence and start sharing your program's story with your community.

Newsfeed & Social Posts:

- Create posts about upcoming events
- Share progress on enrichment activities
- Celebrate success stories
- Keep an active online presence across social media channels and encourage families to follow you

In-Person Communication:

- Greet each family at pick-up and say goodbye at drop-off. Take advantage of these moments to engage directly, answer quick questions, and check in.

Direct Messaging:

- Send personalized messages to families
- Celebrate wins, acknowledge growth areas, and offer opportunities to talk in person

Learning Supports:

- Offer take-home resources, activities, and tips for extending your program activities

4. Build a Family Engagement Plan

A family engagement plan helps you build relationships to support youth and their community. Start writing your own plan with this quick-start strategy.

1. Facilitate family-to-family support

Ensure there are opportunities for families to continuously participate in events designed specifically to include them, in a safe and respectful environment where they can learn from each other.

2. Develop staff skills in practices that support families

Use professional development coursework in addition to live meetings and trainings to educate staff on family engagement expectations. Strive to offer a consistent onboarding experience to ensure all staff feel confident getting started.



Read more about ways to boost family engagement

to effectively involve families at every stage of your program.

3. Develop engagement metrics and strategies for effective promotion

Engagement comes in many forms: visiting your website, calling to ask about enrollment, showing up to events, supporting students at home, and so much more. Where are you most interested in focusing your efforts?

4. Evaluate the strategy at regular intervals

Ensure benchmarks for engagement are measurable, objective, and specific. Amorphous goals such as “Get families more involved” make it impossible to assess how successful you are. “Get 20 more parents to come to our showcase this month” is a much more useful goal.

Fun Family Engagement Example Activities:

- Plan a summer enrollment day that offers comprehensive support to educate the community and get kids signed up.
- Invite your families to meet at a local park at intervals throughout the year to stay connected.
- Plan fun events that encourage family, and community participation such as carnivals, talent shows, pet parades, and more!
- Have a parent-only night with a raffle, live music, or other features to get them talking to each other and connected to your program.
- Recruit parent volunteers to showcase their talents!

Let Arly Help

Arly has supported programs to help youth achieve great things for decades. Our family portal and communication app can help strengthen family engagement, empowering families to keep their child's information current and stay connected day-to-day. You've got this. We can help!



Arly is the comprehensive youth programming platform that streamlines all your management tools and resources in one place so you can focus on what matters most: **creating high-quality, impactful experiences for your community.**

Ready to boost family engagement and ensure families feel like partners in your program?

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