



THE CORE ELEMENT OF ENGAGE

Using the ParentingWell® practice approach, the first step in establishing a positive, family-focused relationship with an individual is asking about their family situation and whether the person is, hopes to be, or has ever been a parent. Respectful, non-judgmental questions about parenting and family life along with other significant domains (e.g., work, education, and training) promote normalization, community inclusion, and the person's engagement with the practitioner, with the community, and with others who may offer support.

The process of relationship-building with a parent begins even before the person steps through the door. For example, respect is conveyed by the ways in which appointments are made and kept and in which phone calls are received and returned.

The purposeful sharing of your own experiences with a parent may help to build trust and confidence in the relationship.

The initial engagement process lays the foundation for conveying and exchanging information, for making plans to address identified challenges and goals, and for promoting recovery and resilience.

Engagement is a process that continues throughout any relationship. Talking with parents about important life domains and attending to engagement over time will enhance your alliance with them.

TRANSLATING PRACTICE PRINCIPLES



Family-focused

- Respects the individual's priorities and goals, including those related to parenting and family. The decision not to parent or relinquish custody may be the individual's choice, which must be respected. This path may involve feelings of success in making a well-considered personal choice, and/or feelings of loss and lost opportunity, which may be perceived because of a behavioral health condition.
- Acknowledges that the person may have previously unexpressed questions, concerns, and aspirations for present and future functioning as a parent and goals for family life.
- Recognizes that parenting is an important part of everyone's life—whether it is about having been parented or about being a parent.
- Stays alert to ways in which their own family experiences contribute to how they think about and respond to individuals as they describe parenting and family life.



Culturally-sensitive

- Understands that cultural context and identity inform expectations for and experiences of family life as well as opportunities for family and community inclusion or isolation.
- Reflects on the ways in which culture and identity shape how individuals assess and frame their behavioral health and treatment experiences; how they think and feel about themselves; and how they take care of their children.
- Realizes that discussing cultural considerations with each person highlights differences and similarities with the practitioner's own culture that may either enhance or interfere with the relationship.

CORE ACTIVITIES

- Contacts the person/parent prior to the face-to face meeting to (re) introduce themselves and clarify their role, to remind the person/parent about the appointment, to ask them how they want to be addressed (e.g., first name, Mr. or Ms., pronoun preference, etc.), and to offer to answer any questions the person/parent might have.
- During the first meeting, welcomes the person and asks initial questions about parenting and family status (e.g., Are you a parent? Do you have children?).
- Explains the rationale for asking questions about family members and relationships, especially as they relate to children, and for understanding that the questions may raise positive feelings along with negative feelings or challenges.
- Identifies family and household members, including children of any age and legal status, if known, along with a co-parent, if there is one.
- Determines the person's pregnancy status or future hopes and plans for children and family.
- Ascertains where children are living and who is caring for them.
- Obtains information regarding custody and visitation arrangements, if relevant, and the extent of the parent's contact with children.
- Asks how the person experiences conversations about parenting and family life. Addresses and respects feelings, considering parent's concerns about content and pacing of conversations.
- Acknowledges and addresses any reluctance the person may have to talk about parenting and family issues at this time.

TRANSLATING PRACTICE PRINCIPLES



Strengths-based

- Understands that a welcoming, responsive, respectful approach conveys hope, promotes empathy and acceptance, and builds trust.
- Strives to provide non-judgmental responses to the person's expression of challenges in caring for children and balancing recovery with family life.
- Questions their own assumptions about how well people living with behavioral health conditions can parent and if it is possible to believe they have strengths and can realistically hope for change.



Trauma-informed

- Recognizes that previous relationships may have been traumatic. Parents with behavioral health conditions may have had negative experiences with practitioners (and systems) in the past and may have difficulty trusting a new practitioner.
- Considers that the person may be worried about how the practitioner will respond in talking about parenting issues (e.g., if the person has had other practitioners who expressed negative attitudes about their capacity to parent).
- Realizes that trust may only be built over time but that asking the initial questions opens the door to future, important conversations and relationship-building.

CORE ACTIVITIES

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- Provides parents with an understanding of the ways in which their health and wellbeing may affect their parenting and children.
- Suggests ways in which their parenting and family experiences affect their own wellbeing and recovery.
- Provides information and/or access to resources about children's developmental ages and stages when opportunities arise or if parents ask questions or express concerns.
- Provides transparency regarding risks and vulnerabilities, mandated reporting, and the ways in which these issues, should they arise, will be handled in collaboration with the parent to achieve the shared goal of family wellbeing and safety.
- Encourages the person/parent to talk about parenting, children, and family relationships in future sessions.