



Trauma Responsive Schools Guide: Family and Community Engagement

The *Trauma Responsive Schools Guide: Family and Community Engagement* is part of a collection of resources developed by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) Treatment and Services Adaptation (TSA) Center on Resilience, Hope and Wellness in Schools and the Center for School Mental Health for The SHAPE System (theSHAPESystem.com) that provides guidance to help schools become more trauma responsive. This guide includes background information, action steps and resources to support your school or district's quality improvement in **family and school engagement**.

Background:

The *Family and Community Engagement* domain includes indicators that represent your school's ability to understand, engage, and support families and the surrounding community. Your school's Family and Community Engagement score is a composite of four indicators:

- (1) **Staff consideration of racial and ethnic sensitivity** - Staff are trained to be aware and considerate of racial and ethnic sensitivities (i.e. language barriers, immigration status)
- (2) **Family and community engagement** - School routinely provides opportunities to engage families and the broader community about trauma and its impact
- (3) **Cultural sensitive resources for families** – Racially- and ethnically- sensitive resources and services are made available to the families of students receiving Tier II and Tier III interventions
- (4) **School partnerships with diverse community organizations** - School maintains partnerships with community organizations serving ethnically diverse groups (i.e. churches, health centers) to further support the families in need

Family and community engagement consists of developing and implementing policies, procedures, and activities for incorporating community priorities and resources into support services and understanding racial/ethnic sensitivities. The indicators in this domain represent various strategies to improve and maintain family and community engagement. These strategies also highlight the need to acknowledge and accommodate students and families based on their unique identities to facilitate engagement and improve the school's ability to support them. The process of developing and implementing such strategies should be conducted through collaborative meetings with a range of stakeholders to ensure that these strategies adequately address the unique needs of students, families, the school, and community.

*Schools thrive and
student outcomes
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Importance of Family and Community Engagement

Schools thrive and student outcomes improve when schools partner with families and communities. Also, schools are able to respond effectively to the needs of students when they actively involve families and community organizations. It is important that these efforts are sensitive to the unique racial/ethnic and cultural backgrounds of students, because it can facilitate and strengthen relationships between students and school staff. Specifically, schools that make such efforts demonstrate to their students that they value their cultural, emotional, and intellectual needs, which can improve school connectedness and achievement.

Elements of Family and Community Engagement include:

- ✓ Assessing current levels of family and community engagement in the school
- ✓ Training staff on cultural sensitivity
- ✓ Providing culturally sensitive resources and services to students and families
- ✓ Establishing partnerships with community agencies who serve diverse populations
- ✓ Creating programs and opportunities that occur regularly to engage families and the community
- ✓ Assessing the implementation and effectiveness of family and community engagement efforts

Action Steps:

1. Train staff to be considerate of racial and ethnic sensitivities.

- Gather information to understand the racial and ethnic factors that are relevant to community served by the school
- Examine the school's physical environment to ensure students' racial and ethnic identities are reflected in the physical spaces of the school
- Examine school data to determine whether certain groups are over- or under-represented in certain spaces (e.g., special education; honors classes; suspensions)
- Celebrate the cultural diversity of staff and students via school events and curriculum
- Conduct all-staff training on culturally responsive teaching strategies, including:
 - Highlight the importance of culturally responsive teaching and staff's ability to be sensitive and supportive to students from diverse backgrounds
 - Building teacher-student relationships that are cross cultural
 - Providing education about the effect of historical trauma, racism, and implicit biases on student performance
- Provide opportunities for students and families to share their histories and cultures with teachers and administrators
- Provide staff and services of similar backgrounds as students in order to ensure understanding and to build and maintain safety and trust.
- Consider an individual's ability to be sensitive to racial/ethnic and cultural differences during the interview/hiring process for school staff to determine fit for school's culture before hiring them

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- Provide ongoing coaching and support, including include regular opportunities for training, self-reflection, and consultation about culturally responsive educational practices
- Include items that assess student perceptions of cultural sensitivity in annual school climate assessment
- Create opportunities for feedback in real time in order to track progress and address any concerns

2. Increase family and community engagement.

- Identify parent and community liaisons to serve in advisory role for engagement strategies
- Identify school staff members to serve as liaisons to families and related community groups to focus on trauma and/or mental health of students
- Foster ongoing relationships between school, families, and communities in order to build and maintain safety and trust
- Gather input from families and communities through surveys, conducting focus groups, and/or engaging in conversations with existing groups about their perceptions on the importance of trauma education, how well they are supported by the school, and quality of planned programming
- Create mechanisms for families to safely voice concerns and/or ideas to school
- Proactively communicate with families about school safety plans (e.g., natural disasters, violence, terrorism) and important issues that are a source of stress for them (e.g. immigration policies, police interactions)
- Connect families to resources for important services that cannot be provided within the school (e.g., domestic violence shelters, food pantry, legal aid)
- Provide opportunities for families to learn about stress and coping, and how to support their children's development of coping skills
- Provide opportunities for education and conversation about trauma in the school/community (ex. a column in the weekly newsletter, or regular health fairs or expos)

3. Provide culturally sensitive resources for families.

- Conduct training for staff on cultural responsiveness.
- Provide access to interpreters and written documents in languages spoken by students and families (contract, if necessary)
- Enlist parents, community members, and cultural brokers to review interventions and offer consultation based on appropriateness and cultural relevance
- Proactively provide information about available Tier II and Tier III services to families (i.e. at back to school nights, parent teacher conferences) and allow them to directly refer their students for services
- Encourage school and community-based providers to communicate with families of students receiving Tier II and Tier III services for trauma symptoms beyond the initial outreach to obtain consent for services and provide mechanisms for ongoing communication throughout treatment
- Create accountability system to track progress and setbacks

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4. Create school partnerships with diverse community organizations.

- Identify organizations embedded in the community to partner with, engage all stakeholders involved to ensure goodness of fit, and invite potential partners to your school to explore goodness of fit
- Enlist parent or community volunteers to serve as liaisons or community connectors
- Generate shared understanding of needs related to cultural responsiveness, including discussing the type and duration of services provided
- Develop Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) with community organizations
- Provide school space for community meetings in order to foster trust, communication, and collaboration
- Create opportunities for school personnel to make connections and meet with diverse community organizations
- Conduct a regular assessment to evaluate functioning of partnership between the school and community organization
- Create annual opportunities for these organizations to connect with students and families by allowing them to participate in school events (e.g. Open house, health fair, etc.)
- Create accountability system to track progress and setbacks.

Resources:

(1) Considerate of sensitivities

- Race - the Power of an Illusion: Three-Part PBS Documentary About Race in Society, Science and History
http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm
- Quick Facts About Race from PBS
http://www.pbs.org/race/001_WhatIsRace/001_00-home.htm
- National Education Association Diversity Toolkit
<http://www.nea.org/tools/30417.htm>

(2) Culturally sensitive resources and services

- Trauma Informed Interventions: Clinical and Research Evidence and Culture-Specific Information Project
http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/CCG_Book.pdf
- Webinar: Adapting Trauma-focused Treatments for Culturally Diverse Populations
<https://learn.nctsn.org/enrol/index.php?id=333>

(3) Diverse community partnerships



- School-Community Partnerships: A Guide
<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/partnership/scpart1.pdf>
- Strengthening Partnerships: Community School Assessment Checklist
<http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/csassessment.pdf>
- Video: Establishing Real-World Connections in Projects
<https://www.edutopia.org/video/real-world-connections-keys-pbl-series-1>

(4) Opportunities for engagement

- Critical Practices for Anti-Bias Education: Family and Community Engagement (Teaching Tolerance)
<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/publications/critical-practices-for-antibias-education/family-and-community-engagement>
- Webinar: Making Child Trauma Services Culturally Relevant Through Partnerships with Youth and Families
<https://learn.nctsn.org/enrol/index.php?id=333>