



Family Engagement 101¹

As a very brief introduction to Family Engagement, the following is provided to support consistency in messaging and language.

Family: family is a circle of care and support that offers enduring commitment to care for one another, related either biologically, emotionally or legally. It takes into account those who the [child/youth/family] identifies as significant to their well-being.

Family Centred: family-centred care is a foundational piece of family engagement; family engagement cannot exist in the absence of family-centred philosophies. Family-centred is a philosophy and evidence-informed approach to practice focused on meeting the needs of both the clients (child/youth) and the family (family as defined), and where the family is seen as a primary component and unit of attention.

Family Engagement: Family engagement is an **active partnership** between families and service providers. It involves service providers and families listening and **two-way communication** and seeing **family as allies**.

¹ Dostaler, T. & Canon, S. (2011). Developing a family engagement training strategy. Ottawa: The Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health.

Family Engagement - Hart's Ladder of Participation²

Partnership

Co-Production

Organizations practicing the highest fidelity family engagement employ partnership and co-production of policy, programming, and governance.

Examples:

- Together with the organization, families develop and implement programming
- Together with the organization, families develop and write policies
- Together with the organization, families participate in procedures such as hiring, board selection, research and evaluation

Consult

Inform

Family Involvement is often mistaken for meaningful family engagement. The information is more unidirectional and families offer input. They are not seen as true allies and partners, but rather informants.

Examples:

- Newsletters
- Focus group or consultation group to give input on specific planning that has been predeveloped
- Surveys, client satisfaction interviews, beta testing websites

Tokenism

Decoration

Manipulation

Disengaging activities where intentions to engage families are not done in a meaningful or collaborative way.

Examples:

- One family member on a committee without orientation, support, and without voice
- Inviting families to events as PR or "photo ops" when the families have not been involved in the planning of the event
- Talking families into a position; asking families to represent the voice of the organization as their own
- Taking the work of families and "translating it into organizational language or format"

² Hart, R. A. (1997). Children's participation: The theory and practice of involving young citizens in community development and environmental care. UNICEF/Earthscan, London.