

Deeper Clarification on Engagement

When you are working on engagement with a youth, family member or system partner, you are working to communicate effectively and have your audience pay attention to you. This is done in a way that promotes trust and respect. Asking what the youth and family want out of the HFW process, validating what they are going through, and having Support Partners as a part of the HFW team helps with engagement. This is what sets HFW apart from traditional services.

Our Five Day HFW Team Training binder cautions us not to make conclusions or assumptions about needs, and to not provide solutions. When engaging youth and families, we want to keep the end in mind. How will the youth and family sustain self-efficacy once HFW ends? What is our purpose for working with the youth and family? The HFW process promotes building teams that brainstorm ideas to help youth and families meet their goals. Providing solutions from the beginning will not help youth and families manage their behavioral health challenges, and will not help foster independence. In everything that we do, it is with purpose and intent. This will help when the youth and family are in the Transition phase, because they have learned from the beginning how to use their supports rather than depend on a service or you as the HFW workforce.

Things to consider:

1. **Treat others how you want to be treated.** Think about how others have tried to get to know you. What did you like about them? What did they do that you liked? What did they do that you did not like? Did they do anything that made you feel relaxed and easy to talk to?
2. **Be yourself.** If you try to be something that you are not the youth/family will pick up on it. Your relationship needs to be built on trust and respect. Meaning, the youth and family needs to know that you are committed to help them achieve their goals.
3. **Be open.** Just because you are not in a supportive role does not mean that you cannot share your life experiences. This is not to “one up” or “dump” on them. The sharing should be purposeful. Sharing experiences is to illustrate that you too have gone through situations and you are willing to use these experiences to help others.
4. **Know your material.** When entering a home, be confident about who you are and what you know about the process. If you are not confident in the process the youth and families will know this, doubt your ability to help improve their situation and become discouraged.
5. **Practice your skills.** This is why we do behavioral rehearsals and peer to peer exercises. This will prepare you for teaching the youth and family this process.
6. **Have a purpose.** Always have a purpose to your visit. Know why you are going out to visit a family and your agenda. What information do you need to gather?
7. **Adjust as needed.** Don't be thrown off if the family wants to talk about something else. If you get stuck on what you want to talk about rather than what the family wants, you will lose their engagement. Adjust if they are talking about another domain and go with it.
8. **Conversation piece.** When asking questions regarding each domain, make it a conversation rather than an assessment. We are showing the youth and families that HFW is different in the way we engage families. This is one of those ways. Families may feel that they have to act a certain way or be something that they are not when being questioned. It can feel less personal and genuine when families are being questioned rather than engaged in a conversation about them.

9. **Barriers to engagement.** Families are guarded when talking to providers. They have built walls to protect themselves and their family because of negative experiences. How will you be different?
10. **Start from the beginning.** Families may tell you one of their biggest needs at the beginning of the Engagement Phase. If warranted, immediately begin a stabilization plan. This is one of the fastest ways to build engagement. Do a brief functional assessment on the behavior/situation and come up with a plan to help stabilize the need. If possible include others that are potential team members. This will show the youth/family that you are here to help them reach success, how to include others, integrate plans, and building trust and respect from the beginning.

Ways to do this:

1. Take youth/family member out of the home. Go to the park, go for coffee/tea, or something that they are interested in. Be careful of spending money or this may set the expectation that this is what you do. Be creative in ways to get to know them.
2. Lean toward them to show you are interested. Repeat back to them what they just stated, letting them know that you are listening. Allow them to finish sentences or statements before commenting.
3. Look for items around the house to comment on. This may lead to a discussion in a domain.
4. Ask them if it is okay for you to write down the conversation. Let them know at any time that they can review what you are writing down.
5. Share stories of success with the youth and family. Make sure that the stories are relevant to where the family is at. These can be personal or from other families that you have worked with.
6. If family members like to write, ask them to write down some of the information in each domain. When putting together their Discovery or Strength, Needs and Cultural Discovery, use their quotes and examples. Suggest that they design the cover page.
7. Be creative when gathering information for the the Discovery. Have the youth and family sit together and start talking about each other's strengths. Caution: make sure ahead of time that the parents have something good to say about the youth. You do not want to do this and the parents have nothing good to say about their child. Each of the family members hear what other feels or thinks about them in a positive way. Hearing these positive things may help mend relationships because they did not know that family members thought about them in such a way.
8. Ask family members what their favorite cartoon, superhero, movie, singer, etc. is and why. These may identify their interest, culture, or some other history lesson. It may also lead into another domain such as their childhood or how they feel regarding a family member.
9. If the youth is creative and would like to put his/her ideas down on paper as a song or a poem, encourage it. They may want to draw a picture sing a jingle of what they would want for their vision. Encourage any interest that the youth/family has. (Remember safety)
10. Have fun while engaging with the youth/family. Use humor when appropriate. Leave the traditional ways and think outside the box.