



WHAT IS CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT?

Culturally responsive family engagement redirects attention from what families lack to **what families inherently bring to their child's education**. This means appreciating the diverse identities, lived experiences, and strengths of your students' families, particularly those with marginalized or non-dominant identities. A non-dominant social group is one that historically had and/or currently has less power, resources, or influence compared to others.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT BEGINS WITH YOUR MINDSET

- view families as assets and focus on the contributions they make to their child's education
- honor families as the experts on their child and commit to learning from them
- embrace diverse family structures
- reflect on your beliefs about families and how implicit bias may influence your beliefs
- check your blindspots and interrupt deficit thinking about families



In psychology, "blindspots" are areas where we're unaware of biases in our thinking and perception.

These unconscious assumptions and judgments can shape how we view people and situations. Blindspots can affect how we engage our students' families, especially when there are differences in culture, background, or values. Checking your blindspots means reflecting on how your own identity and beliefs about families influence your relationships and communication with them.

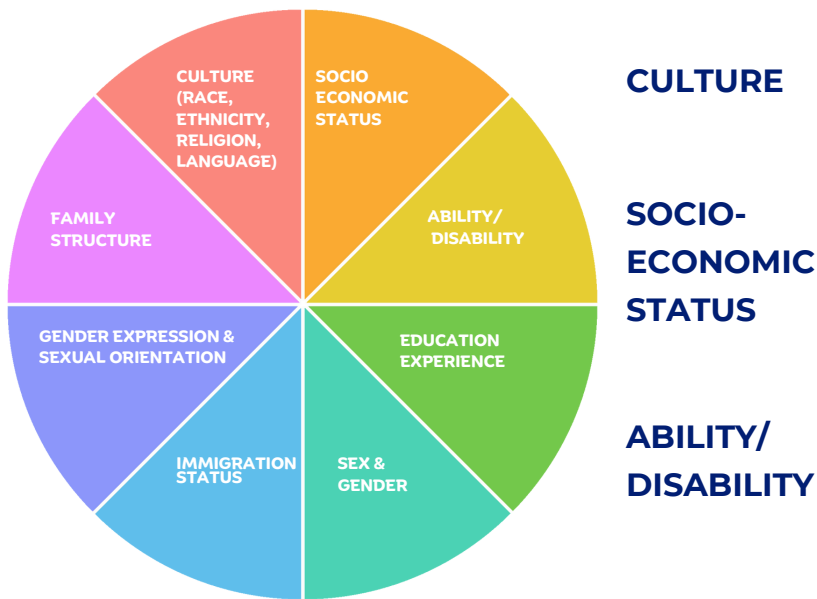
PAUSE & REFLECT

What core beliefs do I hold about my students' families?

How might these beliefs limit or empower me to build trusting relationships with them?

IDENTITY WHEEL

Reflecting on different parts of your identity (e.g., culture, family structure, socio-economic status, etc.) can help to uncover blindspots. The Identity Wheel guides you in exploring key aspects of who you are. Consider the categories below and write words, phrases or experiences that represent each part of your identity. Then, use the reflection questions on page 3 to think about how your experiences and perspective might affect your connection with families.



CULTURE

**SOCIO-
ECONOMIC
STATUS**

**ABILITY/
DISABILITY**

EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

SEX & GENDER

IMMIGRATION STATUS

**GENDER EXPRESSION &
SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

FAMILY STRUCTURE

IDENTITY WHEEL REFLECTION



- How did I feel when I completed the Identity Wheel? (*This could include emotions such as discomfort, enlightenment, surprise, etc.*)?
- What parts of my identity were most prominent or significant to me during the exercise?
- What parts of my identity do I feel most comfortable sharing with others, and which do I tend to hide or keep private?

***Your social identity is a key to understanding how you navigate the world.
— bell hooks***

- In what ways might my identity influence how I perceive the families of my students?
- What aspects of my identity help me connect with families, and are there others I can leverage more effectively?
- How might my identity shape my expectations for what families should do to support their child's education?
- What privileges or challenges might my identity bring to how I engage my students' families?



ONGOING PRACTICE

Like your students' families, your identity is shaped, in part, by your life experiences. These experiences change over time, and so do you. It's important to remember that understanding your own identity is not a one-time exercise but an ongoing reflective journey.

As you continue to build relationships with your students and their families, remain aware of how privileges, cultural norms, and/or assumptions impact your interactions. Check your blindspots, and look for new ways to connect with families that reflect a deeper understanding of their needs and values.

Keep reading for more on culturally responsive family engagement

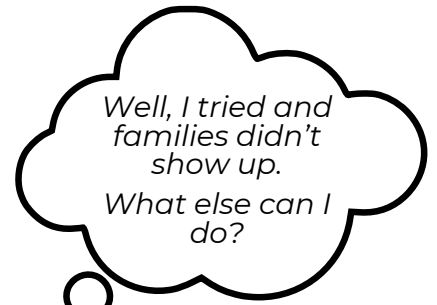


ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

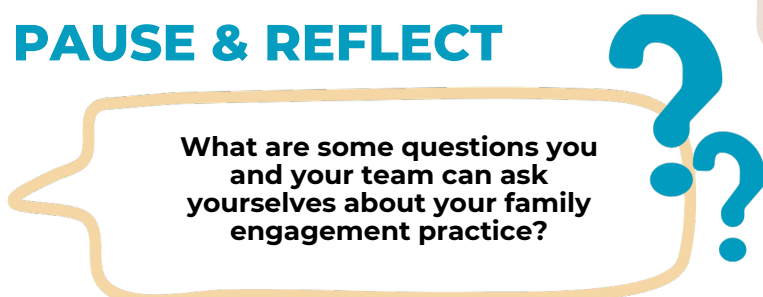
Sometimes, educators spend a lot of time and effort planning events for families at school but find themselves disappointed when attendance numbers at the events are low. This can lead to negative beliefs or mindsets about some families' investment in their children's education.

But a culturally responsive way of thinking is to take a stance of curiosity about why families didn't attend the event. Culturally responsive practitioners ask themselves and their teams hard questions:

- Is the topic of the event relevant for families? Do they find it important? Is it centered on their needs and priorities?
- What's going on in families' lives that may have prevented them from attending?
- Does the event need to happen at school at this time or is there a better way?
- How can we reimagine our approach to family engagement so it's responsive to families' preferences and priorities?



PAUSE & REFLECT



STRATEGIES FOR CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT



Approach partnerships with families with the belief that **all families want what's best for their child** and allow this to be your starting point in building partnerships.

Get to know your students' families. Invest time to **build relationships** with them. Make it clear that you want their partnership.



Make listening to families core to your family engagement practice. **Learn about their identities, experiences, and perspectives**—act from a place of curiosity and humility.

Translate written materials into all of the languages spoken in your school community, and **provide interpretation support** when needed for conversations with families. Ensure that families have access to information in the language in which they are most comfortable communicating.



Practice perspective-taking and empathy. Think about how families experience their relationship with you and your school community. **Strive to see things from their perspective.**

Think about the narratives that exist about families, particularly those with marginalized or non-dominant identities, and **challenge deficit thinking or biased mindsets about families.**



AUDIT INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS



Review your instructional materials with a lens for inclusion. Consider whether the resources offer accurate representations of the experiences and histories of non-dominant populations in your school community. **Invite families into the process!** Families may have recommendations for books, authors, and other ideas to help ensure their identity and culture are represented in their child's learning.

NURTURE STUDENT TALENT

Data shows that females of color are underrepresented in the fields of science, technology, engineering and math. As an educator, you have a unique window into students' innate interests and talents. Your communication choices can help to counter inequities in access and representation.



Make it a regular practice to **reach out to families about their child's strengths**, particularly students with marginalized or non-dominant identities. Talk about your observations - what's going well, where their child is thriving - and ask families for their perspectives. Build momentum for working with families to remove barriers by finding, creating and/or advocating for opportunities to leverage their child's strengths and support their continued growth.

CLOSING REFLECTIONS

The most impactful family-school partnerships communicate to families that they are seen, valued and respected. Culturally responsive family engagement means **meeting families where they are with what they need!** There's not a singular "right way" for families to partner with you or the school. Each families' unique circumstances and experiences will influence their partnership needs and preferences. Take the time to learn about your families and from your families. They are their child's first teachers after all!