



FAMILY INVOLVEMENT:

How should I connect and engage my scholar's family?

INTRO. You can include your scholar's family through open communication and sharing resources and experiences when it is appropriate. It is useful to recognize differences between you and the scholar's family, as well as, being intentional about the mentor-family role relationship.

““ The mentors are a great help! They become one of your best friends, but also are like a part of your family. ”” - Scholar

I. CONNECT: HOW DO I CONNECT WITH MY SCHOLAR'S FAMILY?

PARENT ROLE. What a parent does is TWICE as important to a child's success than income or the school the child attends¹. So what does that mean for you? Building trust, understanding and acknowledging differences, and helping open doors while involving parents in the process will benefit you and your scholar.

CONSIDER. Think about your background and experiences. How are they different from other people in your life? How do you respond to people whose background is different from your own? Here is also an example reflection [tool](#)² to help get you thinking.

A. You can BUILD TRUST

First, practice cultural humility.



Figure 1: Narrative Humility Video³

Your scholar's family may have, for example, a different racial or socioeconomic background than your own. Alternatively, you may closely identify with your scholar's background. It is important to be conscious of any biases you might have and the influence those might have on your interactions. Also, be aware of overly identifying with your scholar's family.

BE! Be reflective and respectful of varying perspectives, experiences, and values. Your role is to support your scholars in realizing their potential. As it relates to cultural humility you can:

1. Honor scholars' inherent worth in word and deed.
2. Look for opportunities for cultural sharing.
3. Be humble and honest about whether or not you can or cannot relate to your scholar's background and family.
4. Be aware of biases and their influence on your words and actions.
5. Support your scholars in modeling and articulating their values and reflecting on the source – such as family – of those values, in part, by living your own.⁴
6. Be mindful of how cultural differences might impact your experiences and activities together (i.e. scholar doesn't eat meat or cannot go out on a Sunday, etc.).

DO! You can use this knowledge and thinking as you work with your scholar to plan cultural experiences. Additionally, it is useful in thinking about civic engagement and how that can enhance both you and your scholar's cultural understanding⁵, and enable your scholar to experience and engage with various perspectives and backgrounds. As you communicate with parents, these principles can also help create understanding and navigate challenges.

Second, know your role.

SET BOUNDARIES. Respect family boundaries for them, for you and for your scholar.

As your connection grows, your scholar may complain about family, or share family challenges with you. Assure them that you are there and:

1. Convey understanding of the frustration, hurt, or difficulty being faced.
2. If appropriate, help them find ways to deal with the problem(s).
3. Do not criticize family members.
4. Be an active listener and help them work through feelings with follow-up questions.

Although working with your scholar to solve problems is important for college and life, it is vital to remember – with situations like this – that we do not want to make the scholar feel like they are responsible for “solving the problem” alone. A young person may already feel the pressure of doing so when it comes to family and we do not want to instill the belief in them that it is their responsibility to “change or fix” things at home.

TIP: Avoid “helping” beyond your scholar-mentor relationship and PSP goals. For example, a family is having a confrontation and seeks your advice, or needs help buying something. Respectfully remind them of your role, but maintain [boundaries](#)⁶ (p. 7-9). Ask for help if you are unsure or help guide them to the right support for this particular situation.

B. You can have OPEN COMMUNICATION

You can also build trust and your relationship through open communication with your scholar’s family. Communication is key to your relationship with your scholar, as it is with the parents.

TIP: If your scholar’s parents don’t speak the same language as you, check with a local church or community organization for someone who might be able to help. For emails, use Google Translator or get the app for Androids. It isn’t a perfect tool but can help in a pinch. SMS Translator translates text messages. You can also check out the app, [iTranslate](#), to have on your iPhone for immediate translations. [HERE](#)⁷ are some other app translators.

Third, START WELL.

Below is an overview to help you in your first meeting with parents. To go deeper look at ‘[Making the Grade](#)’⁸ Do’s and Don’ts and Tips for Communicating Academics (p. 53-54).

1. Introduce yourself
2. Set up an initial schedule for meet-ups with scholar
3. Review guidelines and activity requirements (e.g. permission forms)
4. Ask parents what their goals are for their child
5. Share how you hope to support your scholar

Fourth, KEEP IT GOING.

BE! WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE?

1. Be open about concerns about the scholar when challenges arise (e.g. dropping grades) and think of how you can work together in your roles to address them.
2. Be honest and share feelings with both your scholar and family, where applicable. For example: scholar isn’t showing up to outings or at home when you arrive.
3. Be patient when challenges arise. For example: home phone or email is disconnected.
4. Be responsive to family calls or messages.

DO! HOW DO I GO ABOUT IT?

1. Create a mini-calendar with your scholar. Include:
 - Contact information, planned outings, phone calls, etc.
 - Give a copy to their parents
2. Say hello and check-in with family when you pick up your scholar.
3. Check-in with the family the day before an outing, perhaps with a brief text or email reminder.

PRACTICE. If you would like to look at some practice scenarios and responses related to your role and the information discussed above, check out [EdNW⁹](#) (p. 83-86).

II. FAMILY INVOLVEMENT: HOW DO I INVOLVE THEM?

Your scholar-mentor relationship can have a positive impact on your scholar's relationship with their parent(s).¹⁰ Just like every scholar and mentor, every parent is different. Some will be more hands-on with the mentor-scholar relationship and others will not. We expect parents to get to know the mentors, but remember that YOUR primary focus is on the scholar.

***First*, share experiences.**

DO! HELP THEM FEEL ENGAGED.

1. Share student progress and successes with them.
2. Update parents on the college process.
3. Show them pictures of your educational and cultural experiences together.
4. Remember, you are your scholar's confidant! Only share what is appropriate and makes your scholar comfortable. Also, allow them to be the one sharing whenever possible!

***Second*, share resources.**

DO! HELP BUILD THEIR "TOOLBOX". Your scholar's parent might express a scholar need. Maybe the best thing you can do is share a resource with them that addresses that need. Also, sharing college resources with parents is always useful as it can be a tough situation to navigate. Be careful and considerate as you share, remembering your role, but also being compassionate about the challenges parents face.

A) Share some of these!

- ✓ College Timelines
- ✓ 21st Century Skills
- ✓ QuestBridge
- ✓ Big Future College Guide
- ✓ College Planning for Parents
- ✓ Skill Building Tools & Tips

B) Share ones you find or like along your mentor-scholar journey!

HIGHLIGHTS and 'AHA' MOMENTS. How can you apply two of the things you learned?

1. Be cognizant of cultural differences and your approach
2. Create open-communication
3. Maintain boundaries
4. Share college planning resources

END NOTES.

¹ Michigan Department of Education. (2001).

² Suffrin, Todd, & Sanchez, Cross-Cultural Mentoring Inventory (2014). <<http://chronicle.umbmentoring.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Cross-CulturalInventoryRevised-Mentors.pdf>>.

³ TEDx, Cultural and Narrative Humility. (2014). <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QevGOGIEuLM>>.

⁴ Michigan State University, Extension, 2016. <<http://msue.anr.msu.edu/>>.

⁵ SDSU: Social Work, "Cultural Humility: A Lifelong Practice". 2016.

<<http://socialwork.sdsu.edu/insitu/diversity/cultural-humility-a-lifelong-practice/>>.

⁶ "Ongoing Training for Mentors", (2006).

⁷ Inc.com, "The Five Best Translation Apps for Business Travelers". 2016. <<http://www.inc.com/oscar-raymundo/top-translation-apps-for-business-travelers.html>>.

⁸ Mentoring Resource Center, "Making the Grade". (2005).

⁹ "Ongoing Training for Mentors", (2006).

¹⁰ Opportunity Nation, "How Does Mentoring Affect the Lives of Young People". (2012).

<<https://opportunitynation.org/latest-news/blog/mentoring-affect-lives-young-people/>>.