

How Families with Adolescents in Ohio Support Mental Health and Well-being in Partnership with Schools

Strategy 1: Help your teen know they belong in the school community.

Family Quotes

- “My daughter had a hard time fitting-in at school after COVID remote learning. Not having friends, and social anxiety. She was really depressed being at home by herself. She really had a hard time. We talked about what she was feeling. I would turn everything off, the television, the phone, and just listen. “What can I do for you? At home and at school.”
- “My daughter is finding her way by being active in a school club. I’m encouraging her to step out of her comfort zone. It was uncomfortable for her, trying something different. She’s somewhat of an introvert. So that was kind of a goal – to have her sign up for one club. This year, she’s a captain of a club. She has a leadership role and has to talk in front of people. I didn’t ask her to run for captain, it just fell in her lap. I told her, ‘It’s ok to be scared and nervous.’ My daughter felt like people all had their own social groups. I let her choose. I said, ‘I really need you to keep an open mind about what you want to do, and the choices you want to make.’ She went to all the clubs they had an informational day. Now she is part of the Girls 2 Women group at Cincinnati Public.”
- “I’ve noticed that when my kids are in sports, they do better academically and socially. They care more. The routine and schedule help them. If they have from right after school at 2:30 pm until bedtime to get their homework done, it gives them a lot more time to procrastinate. If they’ve got practice, it puts things on a tighter timeline and it makes them feel like they have to be more productive with their time. The short time between school and practice—they’ve got to utilize that. There is less time for distraction. Also, with sports, they have one additional person in their coach, who is not their parent, talking with them about their work and emphasizing that they need to take care of themselves.”
- “Extracurriculars have been the best way to fit in. Softball, band, soccer...these have helped them connect with others and make friends. Their school is large and each year kids may be in classes with kids they don’t know. When the kids see friends from extracurricular in their classes, they have relationships, a sense of teamwork, and a sense of belonging that carries over into the school.”

- “My daughter is part of student council – this gives her a sense of belonging. She is doing things with other kids to help other people. Like the local dog shelter.”
- “I have an adopted daughter from Cambodia. Growing up, my daughter always belonged to groups, but there was always something that made her feel different. We wanted her to feel like she belonged in many places, but also wanted her to have a group specific to her. We found a camp of all kids and families adopted from Cambodia. She went there for many years. This was a place that was special for her, and the kids call themselves “Ca-merican”. Sometimes belonging at school is not enough – having this group was life-changing. It gave her something school never could. As parents, we needed to find something Cambodian, and we found it through a web search.”
- “It’s hard for my daughter for mental health. She does not feel she belongs in the school. It has been a struggle. I am able to communicate with her and make space. I coach her as a teenager, where she fits in at the school, and how “she stands out” at school. I explain the biases that other students may have.”

Strategy 2: Support your teen’s relationships with their teachers.

Family Quotes

- “Build rapport with the teachers...parents need to be there more to get to know the teacher and the teacher to get to know them. Being a part of the school district helps tremendously.”
- “Whenever the teacher or school calls, I always try to answer. If I’m not available, I call back. Communication is key and is two ways. Engaging with each other on a weekly basis. There is always a bigger goal. We can agree on that bigger goal, even if we disagree about some things - it’s about the success of the child and educational goals.”

Strategy 3: Experience routines and traditions together.

Family Quotes

- “Trying to spend time when they are available is important. The boys like to play disc golf, so we try to do that with them. Be a part of their worlds.”
- “We take 1 week out of the year to go on vacation. With my husband’s schedule, we can only travel in wintertime. We try not to travel during holidays because my boys don’t do well in crowds. We have had success communicating with the school about our plans.”

- “My older son is a junior. We are really involved with his core group of friends and their families. We travel and do things together, which has kept us connected with his social group.”
- “Sunday nights are family nights. I just got a Teen bible devotion to connect them with us. That’s usually the night we don’t have anything going on.”
- “One of my sons was a big reader in middle school, so I read what he was reading. Now we stay connected with WhatsApp. We post and share random things. Sports is a unifier across the family. The Reds, the Browns, the Buckeyes. Not necessarily academic based.”

Strategy 4: Encourage healthy habits and problem-solving.

Family Quotes

- “My daughter is hard on herself. I’m trying to help her create balance. Every night, we talk about her day. I say, “Tell me what made it good.” I have to pull. One thing we are always working on is giving her permission to forgive herself, and be okay with making mistakes. They happen. Then you have to know that none of us are perfect. In order for us to grow every day, to be the best version of ourselves, you have to give yourself some grace. She was sad because she had studied for AP chemistry, and she’s been having a difficult time with it. She didn’t do well on a test. She was trying to figure out where she went wrong. I can’t tell her what she missed as her parent, but I try to lead and guide her to backtrack. “When did you start studying? Did you have notes? Did you go to your teacher’s study session?” All the things that led up to the test. “What could you have done differently?” There are some thing that she might pick out. I’m trying to let her discover. People think when they are in high school, you need to step back. You still have to keep in touch. That phone, what are they doing, staying up late. But she’s hard on herself. I’m giving her permission to cry, to be sad, and for all those things, and to be happy, but then channel that, once you get to that point, to get out of it. Find her own solution. Helping her walk through the process of it.”
- “I didn’t have any experience with this as a parent of my child, the mental health issues. I’ve really started fresh here as a grandparent. Joining lots of groups to learn as much as I possibly can.”
- “My son struggles with ADHD. He’s 14 and going through some teenager stuff. We are focused on problem solving skills. He was dealing with some bullying with some older kids. The tough thing is that, next year, he’ll have a new set of teachers. This is tough for us because we’ve been able to establish these relationships over this year.”

Strategy 5: Continue to build nurturing relationships at home.

Family Quotes

- “My son went through a very tough time. He had a hard time keeping up with the academics of his private high school. He was a very good athlete, but I had to help build his confidence in his ability to do the work. It was extremely tough for him emotionally. His senior year, we took him out of that school because he was having such a tough time. He ended up doing extremely well in the public school his senior year. That time we had—me keeping his morale up and helping him understand that not everything is for every child, helping him understand he was capable—it was very valuable as a dad. And his academics ended up being straight A’s his senior year. I really feel that knowing your children and knowing what they’re capable of is very helpful.”
- “I have an almost 17 years old and 12 years old. Both are boys. It is hard to navigate how to have meaningful conversations with them. When they don’t want to talk, they are like, “Meh.” So when the opportunity comes, I drop everything and just focus on them. My older son got home from work yesterday, decided to sit on the couch with me, and told me about what was going on with his girlfriend, and his friends. Before, if it would be before dinnertime, I felt like I wasn’t really focused on him. I would feel the need to move onto the next task. Now, when they decide to open up, I make sure to drop everything.”
- “With my older child one thing I have learned to do (he is 16), I’ve been talking to him, not like a peer, but starting to let him know that I experience things just like him, but in my own way. Saying things like ‘I have a presentation today, and I am nervous.’ Or, ‘I did not have a good day today.’ It gives him the power to love back on me.”
- “I take her to school just one day a week; spending time together chatting during breakfast and on the way to school.”
- “I find it an uphill task to have an open conversation with my 10 years old. The conversation is so short...to get to the point where we actually develop into what she is thinking, feeling and doing. When she was younger, she shared more. The older she gets, the more she keeps in. I can only do reaffirmation after getting a sense of what is going on. I have to keep asking - after dinner, just before bed... ‘So how was your school? How are you feeling? What was the best part of your day? What was the worst part of your day? Who did you hang out with the most today?’”