

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

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

#### Family Quotes

- “I have a daughter with health care needs. She has an oxygen tank with her all of the time. We decorated her oxygen tank with her, with a Cat in the Hat theme. Her classmates loved it! They complimented her, and thought it was fun, and so she feels better about it. Another time, she asked for us to cover it with white paper so her classmates and friends could sign it.”
- “Have your child know who they are – not fitting themselves into groups, or changing to fit a group.”
- “We live in a rural, mostly White area, and our adopted daughters are darker complected. My hope was that if there were issues fitting in, it would be with just a few, not the majority of students. I wanted them to be prepared for what I anticipated they would encounter. When they were little we would speak to them in Spanish and people would notice and make fun of us. Those types of things make you feel like you don’t belong. I talked to them about situations like this so they wouldn’t be surprised. We taught them that most people don’t feel this way – they will fit in. They can ignore others and ask for help from adults.”
- “My kids are involved in 4H. They have a sense of community with kids who don’t even go to their school.”
- “We talk about who they are so that they have a strong sense of who they are. We talked about this so that they weren’t confused and wanting to belong with every group, but to interact with peers that would “fill their bucket.” Surround themselves with others who would build them up – not break them down.”
- “I am a White parent of a Black son, and we lived in a predominantly White community. My son would come crying when he was feeling excluded. We talked with him, coaching him through different instances when he felt he did and did not fit in for several years. Now he’s in college and he navigates different groups of peers well and is able to find friend groups that build him up. It took years to learn those strategies.”

## **Strategy 2: Support your child's relationship with their teacher.**

### **Family Quotes**

- “Relationship, relationship, relationship. Relationships can break barriers. Do I trust this person with my child? The way you get to trust is through communication. Building relationships is key.”
- “Don't be afraid to go and talk to the teacher.”
- “Let the teacher know what you work on at home...For example, we are all working on self-regulation together. I'm working on self-regulation with my daughter, her mom is working on self-regulation too at home, and the teacher is too in school.”
- “Create a partnership and let the teacher know that you support them too”.
- “Communication is critical. When my daughter was in first grade, we had an issue on the first day of school. The teacher told her not to color in a certain way. The teacher didn't even know it was an issue, and was appreciative that I brought it to her attention.”

## **Strategy 3: Experience family and school routines and traditions together.**

### **Family Quotes**

- “We share our weekly goals with each other on Sundays as a family”.
- “I have 3 kids, and every year we do a “birthday day out” for each of them. They get one-on-one time with me and my husband.”
- “I have 2 autistic boys, and they thrive off of routine. We work on good communication with the schools about routine. If we had an issue at home, I'm always in contact with the paraprofessionals/aides. If the school has an assembly, we talk about how we can work it into the visual schedules. Help them get through their day without meltdowns.”

## **Strategy 4: Continue to build nurturing relationships at home.**

### **Family Quotes**

- “I am teaching my kids self-praise. If no one is there to do it for them, they can say, “Hey self, you did a great job!”
- “When kids hear or see the stress in the household; they take the stress in whether you want them to or not; Let the child see that you are making mistakes

by taking responsibility, talking through it, and apologizing, sharing what you could have done instead. Being okay to say I screwed up but I will get through this.”

- “When you’re divorced and co-parenting, open communication between mom and dad is important; Sometimes my kids’ dad was not feeling like he was getting the same type of communication from the school.”
- “One thing that is helpful is reassuring your child, ‘You are who you are no matter what and don’t let anyone tell you different.’ When it comes to instant gratification or needing praise - reassure your child – ‘Love yourself, and be who you are.’”
- “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 year old and a 12 year 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 yr old. The conversation is so short...to get to the point where we actually delve 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?'"

## **Strategy 5: Encourage healthy habits and problem-solving.**

### **Family Quotes**

- "At bedtime, I set up 5-10 minutes time with my kids. Not reading or homework time. Just a simple positive prayer for the day. Then giving thanks to those who helped them during the day. We say sorry to anyone who they hurt – we ask forgiveness. Or we say sorry to anyone who hurt them. We wish them a good sleep. We put positive thoughts inside of them. That's my personal experience. My little one reminds me now, "Is it time to say prayer?"
- "I have a grandson with ADHD and PTSD. He is currently on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) at school with a behavioral goal focused on self-regulation. It has been a journey this year. My grandson is really struggling, and he is a couple years behind in that regard. We do a lot at home. We do a lot of "calming skills." If he is very dysregulated I ask him to lay on the floor and close his eyes for me. And take some deep breaths for me. I ask him to take a break sometimes. He kind of fought me initially, but through consistency, I've really been able to get him on that routine. As far as school supports, I've really been advocating with him this year, and talking to his teachers."
- "My son is not able to say "I'm very overwhelmed", "I need a break." I've really advocated for him with his teachers, to help them get on the same page about how they can notice these things with him and help him take a break if he seems dysregulated."
- "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 things 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 6: Experience routines and traditions together.**

#### **Family Quotes**

- "We do movie nights. We all go and spend time together."
- "For my child with autism, I use picture schedules, and videos on youtube if we are going somewhere new, to get to know the place first. He is verbal, he has moments when he gets frustrated and needs help expressing his needs, but it has improved along the way. If you don't take them into different situations, they won't know how to regulate their bodies. As much as I want to keep him in a bubble, I can't. It would be more harmful than good for him."
- "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 7: 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 8: 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.”