

How Families with Young Children 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.”
- “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.”
- “Create a partnership and let the teacher know that you support them too”.

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.”
- “We do movie nights. We all go and spend time together.”
- “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.”
- “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.”

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.’”

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.”