



# FACILITATING *KEEP CONNECTED*: SKILLS AND CHALLENGES



## Structure of *Keep Connected*

- Separate **youth** and **parent** sessions, combined family session
- **Key messages** in each session with guided discussion
- Interactive learning
  - Parents and youth discuss their own experiences and learn from others
  - **Very little presentation of content**
- Family rituals and routines
  - **Shared activities and practices**
  - Family meal



- Know the families you serve
  - What are their needs?
  - How might specific parenting adults and youth respond to the materials?
- Take time to learn and understand the material
  - Program design may not be as familiar
  - Adults and youth may get bored if “read to”
  - Preparation helps to remember goals and timing of activities



- Don't try to be an expert
  - Give others time to share perspectives, experience
  - You won't always have the answers, and that is okay
  - Share your own experiences



- Respond to cultural or other group dynamics, but otherwise adjust sessions minimally
- Focus on key activities

- Set shared ground rules or expectations
  - Spend time on introductions
  - Revisit expectations throughout
- Find common themes among families
- Be welcoming, warm, and non-judgmental
  - Thank participants for sharing
  - Share that you are excited to see them
  - Be willing to open up to participants

*“Even though we come from different backgrounds, we share the same expectations for our children. We go through the same struggles.”*

- Keep Connected facilitator

*“I always thanked them for sharing, cause it’s not easy to do. . . . So I think they felt valued, that they were able to open up and not be criticized on anything that they said or judged.”*

- Keep Connected facilitator



## “The Talker”

- Use a talking piece to guide discussion
- Post a “parking lot” to address questions or topics later
- Revisit ground rules and expectations

## For Youth

- If youth talk over each other, quiet the group and establish order of who shares next
- Gently remind youth of your expectations of allowing everyone to share
- Use proximity if youth are off-task



## *“The Over-Sharer”*

- Post a “parking lot” for issues that come up that are important to address, but not on topic for the evening
- Push back on advice giving
- If needed, politely interrupt and remind participants of the boundaries of discussion
- Be mindful of reporting needs for families in crisis



## *“The Reluctant Participant”*

- Bring in everyone’s voice very early in each session
- Share first (briefly) as a facilitator
- Use wait time. Invite participants to reflect before sharing
  - Jotting notes
  - Sharing with a partner first before sharing with whole group
- Don’t rely on whole-group discussion

### For Youth

- Invite youth to participate if they have not yet done so
  - “[Name], I would love to hear what you have to say about that.”
- Establish group norms that everybody gets a chance to talk for each discussion



## *“Schedule Disruptions”*

- Involve families early in the recruitment process to determine a workable schedule
  - Coordinate back-up dates with participants if the need to re-schedule arises
- If participants miss a session, follow-up to share what they missed and invite them to join you next time
- Plan in advance for schedules of participants, schools, and community events
- Use the time well to build relationships if few show up



### *“Middle School Energy”*

- Plan for youth to be energetic after sitting in school throughout the day
  - Before starting the youth session, do some quick stretches or jumping jacks
  - Allow for movement during some activities
- Consider creating expectations for potential distractions
  - Fidget spinners, objects brought from school, cell phones
- Play soft music during times when youth need to focus on the activity





Keep Connected: Watch Facilitation in Action

Middle School Youth: Strategies for Student-Led Discussion  
<https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/stra>

- Establish the learning goal of the day.
- Provide expectations for speaking and listening.
- Ask youth to reflect before they discuss.



## Leading Keep Connected: Facilitation Tips

### Keep Connected

- Keep Connected Home
- Keep Connected in Context
  - Guiding Principles
  - Why Middle School?
  - Aligning with Other Approaches
- Fundamentals of Family Engagement

### Utilize time management to keep sessions on track

- Plan ahead with materials and have all handouts and activities set up before the start of each session.
- Use a clock or designate a timekeeper to signal when it is time to transition.
- Use a stopwatch on PowerPoint slides.
- Consider doing highs/ lows or introductions during the session.

