

Keep Connected Institute: Ideas from Participants

Keep Connected Institute participants engaged in brainstorming activities on setting up and facilitating the *Keep Connected* program. Ideas were generated from categories such as the shared family meal, developing leaders, feedback and improvement, the Parent Further website, at-home activities, and building community beyond sessions.

The following are participant ideas from the **July 31-August 2, 2017** workshop.

Shared Family Meal

- Work with local restaurants, stores, etc. for in-kind donations
- Limit table space for more socializing
- Provide table games: bingo with facts about other families, brain teasers, story cube dice
- Be sure to find out about dietary needs, including cultural food, allergies, etc.
- Ask families to take turns planning, shopping for family meal
- Invite special guests to dine with families: superintendent, mayor, or other key partner leaders
- If a parent has a business or aspiring catering service, have them provide food
- Use local resources within community (such as mom/pop shops)
- Have kids plan the meal (give a budget, cook together, serve their parents)
- Potluck to share favorite food or tradition

Developing Leaders

- Understand what leadership means to participants and do not make assumptions about what leadership is for them – recognition of leaders may be important, or not depending on the group
- Open opportunities to more people. Introduce group to other “leaders,” invite them to come to shared family meal
- Ask participants to become facilitators
 - Give them more background information
 - Provide sessions for them
- Ask parents to help with future recruitment or speak at community events they are a part of
- Post-sessions – involve parents as a resource to make future sessions better
- Parents may have increased self-esteem in asking to be a leader, especially if they have not typically had leadership roles
- Personal experience of participants helps invite other families and parents
- Provide a relationship building session (personality tests, colors quiz, leadership surveys)
- Look into free public speaking courses (e.g. Toastmasters)

- Gauge parents' comfort zone – leadership can be as small as being a discussion leader or translator

Feedback and Improvement

- Set aside time during parent advisory meeting to share informal and honest feedback (using question prompts)
- Provide an anonymous way of providing feedback at any session and to talk about the next session (Comments box)
- Emphasize the correct way to read data
- Positives of feedback:
 - Creates ownership of participants
 - Contributes to continuous improvement
 - Data for fundraising
- Initiate the conversation with families
- Pre-focus group – what the participants are wanting to learn
- End of program project or creative survey
- Be clear this information is essential, explain how it is used, be intentional about integrating opportunities for this

Parent Further Website

- Link to this via one's own organization's digital resources, or ask public library and other groups to add to their resource lists
- Share with school and other youth development staff
- Utilize the computer lab to connect to parents who may not have access to a computer or internet
- At-home resource – show parents how to use it
- Tutorial session – add an extra session to use Parent Further
- Have a computer that families can use before or after session
- Have a link on all materials – print it out, laminate it, or have it with a name tag
- Show to change the language on the site
- Incorporate quiz into “try it” family activities
- Ask youth to lead the introduction of the website

At-home Activities

- Digital scrapbook or journal
- Follow-up with at-home activities during sessions
- What works:
 - Things that capitalize on families' interests
 - Kid does the activity and shares learning with parents (or they do together)
- What does not work:
 - Activities that cannot be done by every family

- Encourage family time – family dinner, pizza night, game/movies, family fun night once a month
- Ask families for ideas – create a folder or binder to share ideas
- Provide materials for activities, like making slime
- Take family photos to share at the last session
- Activity idea: three positives, one thing to work on (family writes down each day or week)
- Keep expectations low
- Families can do highs/lows as a family at bed time
- Activities can be short, such as reading a book

Building Community beyond Sessions

- Facilitate access – sometimes people do not know how/where to register for other opportunities, and do not know scholarship support is available
- “Circle-up Sessions” – similar to our students’ sessions (free flow discussions or prompted answers with time limit)
- Go to community events or field trips as a group
- Offer additional classes or programs
- Connect families to community resources (less stigma when you are a part of a group)
- Bring in other community partners before/after *Keep Connected*