



Best Practices **Family Engagement**

It has been well-documented that family engagement in a child's social, emotional, and academic endeavors leads to greater success in all aspects of the young person's life. But what exactly is family engagement? What does it look like? And how do Boys & Girls Clubs of Southwest Washington (BGCSW) and other youth-serving organizations effectively and consistently engage caregivers in a meaningful way?



Family Involvement v. Family Engagement

Parents and caregivers are often involved in their child's schooling and extracurricular activities, from attending events to helping with homework. Family engagement takes this involvement a step further by promoting collaboration among caregivers, teachers, and other youth development professionals to provide wrap-around support for youth. It encourages open lines of communication between parents and outside partners and creates an interconnected network of resources for youth and families. At its best, family engagement is centered around meeting needs through active listening, restorative practices, and cultural humility.

Family Engagement at Boys & Girls Clubs of Southwest Washington

At BGCSW, family engagement efforts are a key pillar of our mission to enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to become productive, caring, responsible community members. We understand that engaging family members in the work we do at Club increases a young person's chance for success in all areas of their lives.

But what does this look like? It all starts with building rapport. BGCSW staff make an effort to share positive updates with parents and caregivers, such as behavior improvements. This ensures that the relationship is built on positive experiences so that if an issue arises, trust has been built. Too often, parents are only contacted when something negative occurs, which leads them to dread any contact with the organization. By engaging caregivers on an ongoing basis, we are building positive relationships that help all parties better understand how to support and care for youth.

Family Nights

In addition to ongoing communication with parents and caregivers, BGCSW Club sites regularly have Family Nights to foster connections and offer important community resources. Two Clubhouses recently hosted Self-Love Labs, where youth and their families participated in a variety of mental health and wellness-centered activities. Adults and young people worked together to build self-care kits, write affirmations, plant seeds, and were even able to enjoy a meal together. Another Clubhouse brought in community partners to teach a yoga class and provide healthy smoothies for Club youth and their families. These unique, engaging events provide caregivers the space to foster relationships with their children as well as other families and community members.

Other Engagement Efforts

BGCSW bridges the gap between a young person's day at school and evening at home. This often involves acting as a liaison between school personnel and caregivers to ensure all parties are communicating and collaborating to provide comprehensive, individualized support to youth. If a homework strategy or behavior management technique works at school, it can be shared with Club staff and caregivers for use outside of school, or vice versa. These coordinated efforts by all members of a child's support system provide consistency and wrap-around care, which increase the young person's chances for success.

BGCSW and other youth-serving organizations are also uniquely positioned to connect families with other community resources that they may not otherwise be aware of or have access to. By reducing barriers to critical services, BGCSW is working to address systemic inequalities and ensure that all of our community's young people have access to valuable opportunities.

Parent & Caregiver Feedback

A recent survey distributed to BGCSW families revealed the positive impact of these engagement efforts. When asked, "What do you value most about Club?" caregivers responded with the following:

"The positive relationships that my family and my son have formed with all the staff and the support and love they show my family.

"I appreciate staff has taken time to get to know the family situation at home better to support my child while at club.

Family Engagement & Positive Outcomes

Taking a step back, we can see how family engagement plays a major role in the Formula for Impact, Boys & Girls Clubs of America's research-based theory that provides best practices for positively impacting youth. By creating a high-quality, outcome-driven Club experience for the youth who need us most, we are promoting growth in the three core youth development areas: academic success, good character & leadership, and healthy lifestyles. At the center of an optimal Club experience are the 5 Key Elements for Positive Youth Development. Engaging families and caregivers in these key elements is crucial, particularly in building positive relationships with adults, providing opportunities and resources, and offering positive recognition.

Family engagement involves proactive efforts by youth development professionals to create a comprehensive network of support. Through ongoing communication, family-centered events, and connections to community resources, caregivers and youth feel seen, heard, valued, and supported. This collaboration means better outcomes for youth, leading to happier, healthier, more successful community members.

BGCA Formula for Impact

Young People
Who Need Us Most

+

Outcome-Driven
Club Experience

=

Priority Outcomes



5 Key Elements for Positive
Youth Development

High-Yield Activities

Targeted Programs

Regular Attendance



Academic Success



Good Character &
Leadership



Healthy Lifestyles

1 Create a safe, positive
environment

2 Generate fun and foster a
sense of belonging

3 Encourage supportive
relationships with peers
and adults

4 Provide opportunities
and set expectations

5 Offer recognition for positive
behavior



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programs, family
engagement efforts, and
ways to get involved.