



Increased emphasis on family engagement has shown that families are essential to building learning environments where students thrive (Wood, Bauman, Rudo & Dimock, 2017). Translating family engagement strategies into practice while also making room for self-care is a difficult task (Ferren, 2021). Finding that balance between compassionate self-care and compassionate family engagement is an essential task, one that will impact the nature of learning outcomes (CASEL, 2020). Engaging families with compassion is one strategy that requires careful understanding when relating to families and where empathy towards, and communication with families guide the commitment to decision-making processes across school structures (Gilbert et. al, 2017).

## Get **Ready** to learn more about compassionate family engagement.

It is important to understand what is meant by the words *compassion*, *families*, and *engagement*. In building understanding around these concepts there is a greater ability to apply strategies and practices that are practical, sustainable, and effective.

### **What is compassion?**

Compassion involves being present and available to others in order to address and alleviate barriers and challenges that emerge across different aspects of life (Ivtzan et.al 2016). For those in education, compassion is practiced in relationships with students and families but is also part of a self-care that keeps educators' "reservoir of well-being" full. This has been referred to as Compassion Resilience (<https://compassionresiliencetoolkit.org/schools/compassion-resilience/>).

### **Who are families?**

The family consists of any combination of two or more people, bound together over time, by ties of mutual consent and/or birth, adoption, or placement, and who take responsibility for various activities of daily living, including love (Rose & Hebblethwaite, 2020). Families in the context of family engagement are seen as partners.

### **What is engagement?**

Engagement, as described in family engagement, is shared responsibility with families, where schools and community agencies collaborate with families in order to create supportive learning environments where students can thrive. Engagement involves the commitment of educators and families and a willingness to collaborate beyond the boundaries of the school building.

Therefore, **compassionate family engagement** is.....

a collaborative, culturally competent, and compassionate process that is inclusive of all family members with a focus on decision-making, planning, and implementation across all educational settings, in the best interest of the child, and also recognizes the self-care needs of the educators and other school staff.

## Get Set

A **Family Engagement** framework that is trauma-sensitive accounts for diversity, equity, and inclusivity, while balancing the self-care needs of educators and other school staff. The following six features are adapted from the Virginia Tiered System of Supports (VTSS) Family Engagement Framework.

1. **Family Empowerment:** Families are valued, encouraged and supported to be leaders, advocates, and equal partners in their children's education.
2. **Leadership:** School leaders demonstrate ongoing commitment to trauma sensitive approaches and practices. Facilitate opportunities for sharing leadership with families.
3. **Multi-tiered/Dimensional Approach:** Efforts to partner with families are differentiated by intensity of need. Communication approaches consider and accommodate potential traumatic triggers.
4. **Positive Relationships:** Honoring situational, cultural, historical, experiences of families lead to greater understanding and respect among all.
5. **Data-Based Outcomes & Goals:** Goals that are reflective of the culture and experience of those in the community and outcomes evaluated in a way that does not risk re-traumatization.
6. **Collaborative Problem Solving:** For students receiving interventions, family participation is encouraged, obtained and utilized in a way that minimizes the risk of triggers.

**Go** Explore the following resources to support your efforts in developing a stronger understanding of compassionate family engagement

### Compassion:

- [Greater Good Science Center](#)- Based at UC Berkeley, this resource reports on groundbreaking research into the roots of compassion, happiness, and altruism as well as offers a protected platform in which a user may take and save multiple quizzes regarding such behaviors.
- [SPENT](#)- An interactive game that seeks to promote compassion through perspective-taking by challenging the user to manage their money, raise a child, and make it through the month getting paid minimum wage.
- [Harvard's Project Implicit Association Test](#)- A resource that enables individuals to better understand their own implicit biases and reflect on how those biases influence our beliefs, actions, decisions, and attitudes and subsequently either promotes or inhibits our ability to be compassionate.
- [Compassion Fatigue and Teacher Resilience](#)- The COVID-19 pandemic has required teachers to help children and families cope with the crisis. Teachers, particularly those who fail to engage in self-care or lack resilience training, are at increased risk of burnout

or compassion fatigue. To mitigate this risk, this report provides examples of strategies districts can use to strengthen resilience among emotionally burdened teachers.

### Family Engagement:

- [TTAC Online Family Engagement Resources](#)
- [National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement](#) (NAFSCE)
- [Principles of Effective Family Engagement | NAEYC](#)- A discussion of successful family engagement practices encompassing six principles.

## References

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