Tips, Tools, and Resources for Schools

At a Glance

Who's this chapter for?

This chapter is for schools, including education staff, school health services, and behavioral health supports.

What's this chapter about?

This chapter gives best practices for school staff who want to:

- Build trusting relationships
- Get and share the right information
- Protect student privacy
- Support youth in the transition to adulthood

How can schools build trusting relationships?

To build trusting relationships with families, school staff can:

- Make the family part of team
- Respect privacy and consent
- Keep families informed

To build trusting relationships with behavioral health providers and primary care providers, they can:

- Find the best way to communicate and use that way all the time
- Respond to questions when asked for information
- Share information about the child that others need to know

How can schools support privacy and communication?

To support better communication and respect for privacy, school staff can:

- Help others connect with the school
- Talk to family and youth about consent
- Share the behavioral plans used for classroom management

Tips for Building Trust

Sharing information works best when the child's network is built on honest and trusting relationships. Developing relationships takes time, but there are clear steps you can take to build trust with families and providers.

Building Trust with the Child, Youth, and Family

When working with families, ask questions instead of making judgments — every family has its own stories and challenges. Families want to be heard and respected. To build trusting relationships with the family, you can:

- Make the family part of the team
- Respect privacy and the limits of consent
- Keep families informed

Make the Family Part of the Team

- Learn about a child's culture, diagnosis, and related details before meeting with the family. When you know how to best meet the child's learning needs and challenges, you get the relationship off to a great start.
- Ask the family how they see the problem, what ideas they have for solving it, and what they want from you.
- Tell the family about strengths you see in the child.
- Remember that the family and youth have the final say in all decisions. Make sure they're part of education discussions and decisions.
- Make sure the family and youth know who to contact at the school and how to contact them for different needs. They also need to know who to get in touch with if the main contacts can't be reached.

Respect Privacy and the Limits of Consent

- Explain why consent is necessary — consent makes it clear what information will be shared and who can get the information.
- Set privacy expectations at the first meeting. The family's access to information will change as the child gets older. State laws protect an adolescent's privacy, and parents need to know that.
- Explain the boundaries of information sharing before the family or youth signs consent.

Keep Families Informed

- Families need transparency and openness. Deciding the right information to share or not share is a fine balance. Will the information be helpful or harmful? Sharing more is generally better.

- Set up a meeting with families of children new to your school before the start of the school year. That way, you and the family can create a relationship and agree on a plan of care for the year.

- Especially at the end of each school year, set up a meeting to talk about changes from one grade to the next. It's important to discuss the child's needs and show the family that information is being shared with the next grade's teachers and staff.

Building Trust with Primary Care Providers

Clear reasons and expectations can make all the difference in sharing and getting the information you need. When working with primary care providers:

- Tell them about the kinds of information that can and can't be shared

- Let them know about educational goals

- Choose a way to communicate that works best for everyone — from the right technology (fax, email, phone, text) to the best times to communicate — and use that way all the time

Building Trust with the Behavioral Health Team

Again, a trusting relationship with behavioral health providers makes it more likely you'll get and share the right information. When working with behavioral health providers:

- Tell them about the kinds of information that can and can't be shared

- Let them know about educational goals

- Choose a way to communicate that works best for everyone — from the right technology (fax, email, phone, text) to the best times to communicate — and use that way all the time

Getting and Sharing the Right Information

Getting and sharing the information you need often means asking the right questions. Because every family and provider is different, there's no one formula. Use the questions below for ideas about the kinds of things you may want to ask about.

Questions to Ask the Child, Youth, and Family

About Education Plans

- How do you think the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 (school education) plan is working?

- Do you have any ideas for helping the IEP or 504 plan work better?

About Consent and Boundaries

- To give your child the best care, here's who I think I need to talk to. Do you have any questions about why talking to these people is important?

- Can I have your consent to share your information with…? Can I have your consent to get information from…?

- Is there any information that you don't want me to share with…? Would you mind telling me why you don't want this information shared?

- Do you have any questions about how I'll keep your information private?

About Medical and Behavioral Health

- Have there been any recent changes in your child's health that I need to know about? Any changes in your child's social situation?

- Has your child had any recent hospitalizations? If so, what was the reason and outcome?

- What's the contact information for your child's behavioral health provider? What about for your child's primary care provider? And any other specialists your child is seeing?

- What about school has been difficult for your child? What does your child do to cope with that?

- What helps calm your child down in a crisis?

Questions to Ask the Primary Care Team

About Health and Learning

- Do you have any concerns about the child that may impact the child's success at school?

- What's important for me to know about the child's medical condition?

- Have there been any recent changes in the child's health?

- Does the child have any allergies?

About Medications

- What medications is the child taking?

- Have there been any recent changes in medications?

- How is the child responding to the medications?

About Treatment and Crisis Plans

- What is the child's treatment plan? How do you think the plan is working?

- Have you asked the youth or family for consent to share your treatment plan with me?

- Will you let me know me if you change anything in the child's treatment plan?

- Have you developed a crisis plan with the family?

- Have you asked the youth or family for consent to share the crisis plan with me?

- If the child is hospitalized, how can we best support the child's re-entry into the school?

- Can you provide documentation to support a lengthy absence from school? Can you provide documentation to support tutoring during that absence?

Questions to Ask the Behavioral Health Team

About Behavioral Health

- Do you have any concerns about the child that may impact the child's success in school?

- Can you provide written clearance for the child to return to school after a suicide attempt?

- What warning signs for depression should we look for?

- What de-escalation strategies work for this child?

- Does the crisis plan include the school?

About Medications

- What medications have you prescribed for the child?

- Have there been any recent changes in medications?

- How is the child responding to the medications?

About Treatment and Crisis Plans

- Have you asked the youth or family for consent to share your treatment plan with me?

- What is the child's treatment plan? How do you think the plan is working?

- How can the school help make the plan successful?

- Have you developed a crisis plan with the family?

- Have you asked the youth or family for consent to share the crisis plan with me?

- How can the school help avoid a crisis?

Questions to Ask Yourself Before Sharing Information

Before sharing information, asking yourself a few standard questions can help make sure you're sharing the right information with the right people.

Protecting Privacy

- Have we talked about how we're going to communicate back and forth? If I share information, how will I get information back?

- How will this information be used?

- Who will this information be shared with?

- Am I following FERPA guidelines for this information?

Getting Consent

- Have I asked the youth or family about their boundaries on sharing information? Does sharing this information honor their boundaries?

- What consent forms are needed and which ones are in place?

- What can be done without parental consent, if necessary?

Sharing with Other School Staff and with Providers

- Is this health information needed for the child's education or safety? (If not, the information should not be shared).

- What health information is **not** needed and should be removed?

Tips for Better Communication

When sharing and giving information, you can help everyone communicate better if you:

- Help others connect with the school

- Support information sharing

Help Others Connect with the School

It may not always clear to families, providers, and others in the child's network who they can contact at the school for different needs. You can make it easier for them by:

- Reaching out to behavioral health providers and others in the child's network to more easily share information about the child.

- Create a short document about the school that gives key contacts and hours of operation. You can give this information to providers and others in the child's network.

- Provide information about school re-entry programs.

Support Information Sharing

Some of the ways you can support information sharing in a child's network include:

- Sharing student information and giving support through the school's Student Assistance Teams. Teams may include a school nurse, school psychologist, vice principal, Special Education (SPED) teacher, and guidance counselor. They help students and staff with communication and privacy.

- Linking your communication systems to other providers.

- Share the behavioral plans you use for classroom management with others in the child's network.

Protecting Privacy

To help protect a student's privacy, you can:

- Remind providers and families that email is **not** a private system — email can't be trusted for sharing health information. They can give health information to the school nurse by phone, letter, or fax.

- Talk about consent with the youth and family.

- Make sure you get a signed release to speak with the child's primary care provider and behavioral health provider.

Email Is Not Secure

Email can be a great way to communicate, but it is **not** secure. When sending private information to someone, it's best to avoid email.

Sharing Information with SBHCs

Remember that when you share information with a school based health center (SBHC), it's the same as sharing information with any other health care provider. For example, you need to use the same communication channels with an SBHC as you would with the child's primary care provider.

Supporting the Transition to Adulthood

The transition to adulthood is a success to be celebrated — youth are growing up. It can also be a challenge to manage.

Massachusetts law requires schools to create a transition plan for any child on an IEP, starting at age 14. Keep in mind that:

- All members of the child's network need to know the activities and goals in the transition plan

- All members in the child's network need to make sure that the transition plan covers medical and safety concerns

- Students age 14 and older must be invited to IEP meetings where transition planning is discussed

> To learn more about supporting the transition to adulthood, visit the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education website, where you can also find a sample Transition Planning Form.

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