Best Practices for Parent Engagement in Youth Programs

Samantha Mullin
Samantha.Mullin@lvhn.org

Margaret A. Hadinger Ed.D.
Lehigh Valley Health Network, margaret_a.hadinger@lvhn.org

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Best Practices for Parent Engagement in Youth Programs

Samantha Mullin*
Mentor: Margaret Hadinger, Ed.D.
Lehigh Valley Health Network, Allentown, Pennsylvania

INTRODUCTION

- Youth programs that provide a hands-on, work-based, and interactive form of education can positively influence a student’s future career aspirations
- Parents have a greater impact on their child’s education—they are in constant contact with their student while youth program leaders currently affect the student’s perception of education (1)
- Parent engagement is defined as parents and staff working together to support and improve the learning, development, and health of children and adolescents (4)

Challenges:

- Urbanization affects children when they are faced with the repercussions of high-poverty areas, such as substance abuse, community violence, racism, etc. (3)
- Mental health of urban African American and Latino youth can be compromised, especially when there is a lack of supportive resources for the affected population (3)
- Minority or low-income parents are underrepresented in parent involvement in schools and youth programs (1)
- Parents may be embarrassed about their own educational level or linguistic abilities and may have a lack of understanding about the structure of the school or program(1)
- More importantly, parents of socioeconomically disadvantaged and minority students can and do make the most positive contribution to their child’s educational advancements (1)

RESULTS – Best Practices

1. Educate parents on their role in education
   - Emphasize that parent involvement is needed and valuable
   - Communicate that parent involvement and support makes a significant difference in their child’s education
   - Parents do not need to be highly educated or have lots of free time to be engaged and have a positive impact on their child’s education
   - Parents interact with their student on a daily basis so their attitude toward education is the most important

2. Inform parents of their students’ program expectations
   - Parent workshop/shadowing day
   - Weekly parent newsletter
   - Welcoming orientation
   - Personal videos sent from mentors and students

3. Offer all materials in the primary language of the families
   - Partner with Interpreter Services to accommodate ESL families
   - Acknowledge cultural values
   - Handouts

4. Meet them in the middle
   - Find a place outside of the program location, such as home, community park, religious institution or grocery store
   - Recognize technology access of the population
   - Expand event invitation to all family members i.e., other guardians, grandparents, siblings, etc.
   - Accommodate different schedules, preferences, and capabilities
     - Offer child care services (e.g. Lehigh Valley Children’s Center)
   - Comfort and confidence will increase parent participation

5. Offer networking events
   - Family Night – one night a week during the program
     - Allow parents the opportunity to learn more about the program and the department in which their student is working
     - Support parents in building a social network of other parents and employees

DISCUSSION

Benefits of Parent Engagement:

- Allows parents to extend their own knowledge to help child (1)
- Contributes to growth of parents’ ability to serve as resources for their child with regard to academic, social, and psychological aspects of their youth development (1)
- Increases parents’ own skills and confidence which could lead to furthering their education or upgrading their jobs (1)
- Helps students expand career aspirations/postsecondary plans (1)
- Creates a direct line and flow of communication between the parents and the youth program coordinators (2)
- Allows the parents to understand and become educated on their role in their child’s education and the program in which their child is participating (1)
- Creates a welcoming and comfortable environment for the parent, especially when they feel that they are needed in their child’s growth and development (2)

Future Directions:

- Implement 5 “Best Practices” into the Summer Work Experience (SWE) program – LVHN partners with Building 21 Allentown High School to bring rising seniors into various departments throughout the network to gain exposure to work-based, interactive skill development

REFERENCES


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