

Tip Sheet: Outreach for Family Engagement and Partnership

By [*Green & Healthy Homes Initiative*](#)

Here are some tips on reaching out to families and asking them to become engaged with and/or partner with your program.

What should you say when reaching out to families that you would like to engage in your program design and improvement?

- Articulate that these are the goals:
 - To seek family input.
 - To identify deficits with the lead poisoning prevention program.
 - To determine the ways engaging families can help the program achieve the stated goals.
- Let families know why their involvement will be helpful; be specific regarding what you will need from them.
- Family engagement should be mutually beneficial. Let families know how they will benefit if they choose to engage with your program or provide input on outreach materials.
 - Direct payments can be an effective incentive to engage families.
 - Other options to support families that choose to engage may also be effective. To identify non-monetary incentives, conduct focus groups with prospective families to find out what may incentivize their participation.

How should you “ask” families/parents to advocate on the issue of lead poisoning prevention?

- Avoid placing too much emphasis on the pain associated with having a child that ends up with lead poisoning.
- Frame the “ask” in the context of your program’s desire to (1) work toward a time when no family will ever have to deal with lead poisoning and (2) ensure that families of children affected by lead poisoning can access appropriate resources effectively and efficiently.
- Share that any feedback the family provides will help the lead program better serve other families.

How should you conduct an interview with a parent or family member about their story?

1. Schedule the meeting at a time that is convenient for the parent(s) and in a location comfortable for them. Partner with their child's school or child care center so that child care is provided during the interview.
2. Understand that, for a variety of reasons, the parent you are interviewing may have an emotional response when talking about programs that have an impact on communities. They may have not had a positive experience with other programs. They may be uncertain about the purpose of your program. Moreover, they may not be convinced that their stories and opinions will have a significant impact. Acknowledge that these conversations can be emotional experiences, practice empathy, and when the interview is over, clearly communicate that you have captured what they said. Finally, let them know how their stories will impact the work your program is doing.
3. Be aware of your own beliefs and internal frames of reference before beginning an interview. This self-awareness will affect how you interpret and react to what the parent has to say.
4. Start by establishing rapport with the parent so that they feel comfortable telling you about their experiences.
5. Avoid jargon, and do not try to correct or educate the parent you are interviewing. The parent should be doing most of the talking.
6. Don't be afraid of silence. The parent might need time to collect their thoughts or reflect upon a topic.
7. Listen actively, the key to effective interviewing and influencing the interviewee's willingness to share the important details of their story. You will likely not be able to solve all of their problems, but listening is critical for being able to provide information on how your services may benefit them, and/or how they may benefit from referrals to other programs. Listening also helps the parent feel that they do not have to shoulder their problems alone.
8. Acknowledge their strengths.
9. Hold yourself accountable for considering parents' opinions when you make program changes and ensure your program evaluation closes feedback loops. Report back to community members on how their stories and opinions have shaped the work you do.
10. Connect the parent to relevant social services.
11. Connect the parent to opportunities for advocacy.
12. Actively perform self-evaluations on how well you are connecting with families in your organization.