

TIPS FOR BUILDING CLINICAL RAPPORT WITH FAMILY MEMBERS

The Provincial Family Advisory Committee for Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario (YWHO) is made up of family members across Ontario with experience navigating the mental health system for their children or youth. The committee was consulted about building clinical rapport with family members. They were asked to offer tips for clinicians working in local YWHO hubs about how to build rapport with family members within a clinical setting.

Three main themes emerged from the consultation: **create a welcoming atmosphere, foster open communication with all family members and build trust.**



CREATE A WELCOMING ATMOSPHERE

- Building good rapport starts right at the first encounter between clinician and families.
- Let the family member know that they are an important part of the mental health care team.
- Invite the family to participate in developing the treatment plan for their child and family.
- Recognize that there are many different kinds of families. Try not to come with preconceived stereotypes about the family member for which you are providing service.
- Ask the family member about what kind of support they might need.
- Create a physical space where families see things that help them think ‘yes, I should be here!’ This could be access to flyers aimed at families or services offered for families, etc.



FOSTER OPEN COMMUNICATION

- Let the family member know that you need to hear from them.
- Invite the family member to talk about their challenges and goals.
- Ask the family member if they need help understanding mental health care terminology.
- Be mindful of how you as a clinician communicate.
- Often the family member is frustrated with lack of resources or how to get resources. Provide validation whenever possible.
- Often family members do not know ‘what’ help they need. Provide specific options, along with asking, ‘how can we support you?’
- Honour each family voice in a respectful way. Never be dismissive.



BUILD TRUST

- Let the family member know that they are not to blame for their child's mental health care challenges (do not blame the victim).
- Follow up with family's frustrations and let them know their voice was heard.
- Admit any mistakes within the mental health system and expressing desire to improve.
- Be willing to take your time with families. If time is limited, provide opportunities for family members to express themselves or the opportunity to ‘come back’. It is key to follow up with this, as families often feel dismissed and will not reach out again. Follow-up shows they are not forgotten.
- Try to nurture hope while being realistic.