

# “Building Blocks” of Partnerships: Considerations for Trainees Preparing to Engage Families in Research

Family engagement in research (FER) moves boundaries by giving families a voice in research, but **many trainees do not know where to start developing skills in engaging families in research!**

**These blocks are yours to build with** – take what you need, in the order that works for your project and learning, to take steps toward developing practices for meaningfully engaging families in research!

## General Recommendations

- Family members’ help can be used in **ALL research phases**, not just when determining relevant research questions or disseminating knowledge!
- Do not let the amount of ‘extra’ FER-work discourage you! It’s ok to start small with **‘JUST’ ONE** family member.
- The personal experiences of a family member may not necessarily generalize to the whole target group of your research. **Choose wisely!**



## Determine your questions and aims

- How can the inclusion of family partners uncover questions related to your objectives?
- What type of family member are you interested in (e.g., child, parent, sibling)?
- How will family partners be involved?



## Search for partners

Consider reaching out to:

- Family groups and research organizations
  - *E.g., Solutions for Kids in Pain, CanChild*
  - *E.g., your provincial Supporting Patient Oriented Research [SPOR] group*
- Clinical or school settings (*e.g., care teams at hospitals, school boards*)
- Social Media (*e.g., advertising via CanChild on Twitter*)

## Trainee Mentorship in Developing Family Partnerships

Seek mentorship opportunities:

- **Research supervisors**
- **Formal training programs**
  - *E.g., Family Engagement in Research (CanChild/McMaster University)*
  - *E.g., Patient Oriented Research Curriculum in Child Health (PORCCH; Child-Bright Network)*
- **Experts in your field**
  - Seek researchers in your field who are champions in FER!
- **Your trainee groups and research organizations**
  - Your trainee peers may have expertise in FER and can offer advice

## Collaboration

- Communicate about expectations and preferences **EARLY AND OFTEN**. Consider using the Involvement Matrix.
- Family partners may have competing demands and their situation or availability can change suddenly.
  - Build flexibility into your plans: things will often take longer than you think.
  - Consider that your schedule may need to be outside your typical working hours.



## Managing Expectations

- Families do not want to spend time sharing ideas that cannot happen!
  - Be **clear** about the givens and realities of the project (e.g., compensation, project priorities)
  - **Discuss** what makes it valuable for them to participate and try to accommodate for that. Think outside the box!

Created for the McMaster University, CanChild, and Kids Brain Health Network Family Engagement in Research Program  
Nicole MacKenzie, Karen De Raeymaecker, Jael Bootsma & Anne MacLeod



Links for QR-codes:  
[https://researchgate.net/publication/328224558\\_Early\\_career\\_researchers'\\_perspectives\\_and\\_roles\\_in\\_patient-oriented\\_research](https://researchgate.net/publication/328224558_Early_career_researchers'_perspectives_and_roles_in_patient-oriented_research)  
<https://www.canchild.ca/en/research-in-practice/family-engagement>  
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0840470417744568?journalCode=hmfa>  
<https://www.kcrutrecht.nl/involvement-matrix/>