

# Addressing Implicit Bias: A Barrier to Family Engagement

## A Tip Sheet for Clinicians from the DC CoP

In October 2020, the DC CoP met to discuss family engagement and how implicit bias can impact building relationships with caregivers.

Authentic family engagement supports the student and should be a partnership between the caregiver and the clinician and/or teacher.

This tip sheet summarizes the discussion and provides strategies and suggestions for decreasing the barriers caused by implicit bias.

### Definition of Implicit Bias

Implicit bias, also referred to as unconscious bias, involves thoughts and attitudes that we hold toward others that are not intentional. Implicit bias includes stereotypes and attitudes that can affect our perceptions, actions, and decisions. The contributing factors of implicit bias within a school setting may be influenced by how the different actors within a school view particular families or students.

## What are potential interventions, strategies, and solutions to decrease implicit bias and build authentic, trusting relationships with families?

### The Individual

#### Be Self Aware

- Implicit bias can result in behaviors that show favoritism as well as discrimination. We enable negative implicit bias by being complacent.
- Call out implicit bias when you witness it. Hold yourself and your colleagues accountable and make them aware of any negative assumptions.

#### Get to Know People

- Get to know families by asking questions and listening actively to their responses.
- Look for commonalities. Find a connection with caregivers and students you can build upon.
- Be authentic and open. It is ok to be less formal and share your personality even in a professional setting.
- Demonstrate care and empathy. When building trust, it is crucial to understand the other person's perspective and appreciate the challenges they may be facing.
- Be respectful. Practice good manners and respect boundaries.
- Ask questions if you don't understand something said or described.
- Be a listener and a learner. There's no need to always portray yourself as the expert.



## Engage with Families

- Create safe and welcoming environments. It takes a lot of courage for some families to enter into a school building and we need to ensure that we are welcoming and creating a safe space that does not perpetuate a toxic or unsafe environment.
- Check in regularly with caregivers and family members to see how the family is doing.
- Assume the best. We sometimes have no idea what families are experiencing or what's happening in the household.
- Treat families as an expert and partner. Caregivers are the expert on their own child and should be treated that way.
- Meet families where they are. Ask how you can help them attend meetings or communicate their concerns to the team. Suggest meetings in community spaces or other locations outside of the school where they may feel more comfortable.
- Reach out to families that are not engaged. Connect and speak with all families, not just those with whom you are comfortable. Explore the obstacles that prevent family members from participating and offer to assist in mitigating these obstacles as they could be facing any number of challenges.
- Be visible and engaged. If families see you as a part of the school it normalizes your presence and helps reduce stigma around behavioral health. They may view you as an ally rather than outsider and feel comfortable asking questions about therapy, what it is, and how it might provide support.
- Always be an advocate for the student.

## The System

- Admit that implicit bias may be involved in decisions or treatment of the child and ask how you can support them to improve the outcome for their child.
- Use person-centered and strength-based approaches to address implicit bias. Be consistent in identifying and building on the students' and family's assets and strengths and recognize their individuality.
- Set and help enforce policies that promote authentic family engagement and positive interactions with caregivers and family members.

## Offer Professional Development on Implicit Bias

- City at Peace conducts local training and Kindred provides technical assistance on how to create a more equitable school environment.
- Find and share resources for self-assessment/screening of our own biases as a way to reflect a commitment to personal growth.

## Resources

- [Implicit Bias in Schools, A Practitioner's Guide](#) (paid resource)
- [Implicit Bias in the Classroom: 7 Classroom Management Mistakes—and the Research on How to Fix Them](#)
- [Project Implicit](#)
- [Implicit Bias, UCLA Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#)
- [DC Developmental Disabilities Council](#)