

Relationship with parents



Practical tips for practitioners

Navigating family dynamics between a young person and a parent can be tough. However, positive family functioning can lead to increased educational and social success for a young person. It is important to try to positively influence parent-young person relationships without crossing any boundaries.

Where available, Home School and Community Liaison (HSCL) Coordinators and School Completion Programme (SCP) staff are very well placed to offer practical supports. We suggest using this pack to explore the barriers and that may be facing a young person who may be struggling with parent-young person relationships before accessing supports.

How might relationships with parents be affecting the young person's relationship with school and their education?

When a young person is struggling with relationship issues, they may be avoiding school because:

- They may no longer believe in their educational capabilities. A toxic relationship with parents can lead to low self-esteem and self-worth for the young person.
- Tension at home may lead to a lack of completed homework, no clean uniform, lack of lunch etc.

The anxious energy the young person might have may lead to struggles with sleep and setting a routine. This can lead to poor concentration in class due to tiredness or worry.



Relationship with parents

Tune in

- Before opening up a conversation about school attendance, it is a good idea to allow the young person to express how they feel about their relationship. They may be feeling, fear, anxiety and/or sadness among many emotions. The young person may need significant time to explore these difficult feelings. Actively listening without judgement and responding with empathy can help them feel more comfortable sharing.
- The young person may be very resistant to attending school and respond defensively or angrily when you begin to explore the issue. It is important to remember that anxiety can often present as anger in young people and to use this opportunity to validate and empathise with what the young person is feeling and tune into the feelings that may live under surface emotions.
- Conflict is normal in parent-young person relationships. However, a young person shouldn't avoid school to spite their parents or because they're distracted from the conflict. In the end, the only one who suffers from school avoidance is the young person. Here are some alternatives you could suggest to the young person for solving parent-young person conflicts:
 - o Talk to your parents about boundaries. Tell them what you like and don't like in a respectful manner. For example, "Mum, I don't like when you just barge into my room without warning, it leaves me on edge. Would you please knock before you come in?". By asking for boundaries to be set, you are communicating your needs to your parents in a non-confrontational way.
 - o Identify things your parents do that upset you and tell them. If you find it hard to bring things up, write it down and use the list as a crutch for the hard conversation. Even bring it up on a car journey or while doing a small effort task such as gardening or baking. The distraction of the task may make it easier to talk about how you feel.
 - o Telling parents what they did wrong is not enough. Make sure they know what change you would like to see. Identify what they could do instead. For example, if they go through your stuff without you knowing say, "I don't like when you go through my stuff without telling me. Please ask before doing so."

Communication

Sitting a young person down to have a conversation about their struggles can be daunting for them. Instead try and approach the subject while they're doing something. For example, bring them for a walk outside, or ask them to help with simple tasks such as stapling pages together. Young people find it easier to talk when not all the focus is on them. You may have lots of questions that you want to ask but it will be more supportive if you can hold back and respect their boundaries. Let the young person share information at their pace.

What can you do as a practitioner?

Communication

Worksheet: You and school (barriers)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 7.
- This worksheet can be used to explore the practical and emotional barriers to attending school the young person may be facing.
- Throughout the discussion, encourage the student to record any key barriers they identify.
- Finally, explore potential solutions to the barriers facing the student.

Worksheet: You and school (positives)

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 8.
- Use this worksheet to explore what may entice or encourage the young person to attend school. This information can be useful when creating a return to school or school attendance plan.

Worksheet: Communication between you and your parents

- See Appendix A, Worksheet 23.
- Use this worksheet to explore the young person's communication with their parents and prompt conversations about their relationship with them.

Remember: Some of what they say may seem minor or unimportant in their current context, but it is very important to listen to the young person and not to dismiss anything they are saying. You can show you care and are really listening by validating their feelings and experiences.

It's important to empathise with the young person. Try and see things from their point of view. Acknowledge what they are experiencing or feeling and let them know it's ok.

You can say, "I hear you. It can be difficult to concentrate on school if you've just had a big fight with your parents."

Or "I can understand that. It can be lonely if you don't have your parents' support'."

Remind the young person of their strengths. Show them all the ways they have been resilient so far and explain that this identity crisis is just another one of those steps. Pointing out their strengths might show a young person certain aspects of themselves they didn't recognise.

You can say, "Look at all the wonderful things about you - you're kind, caring, funny. This side of you will help you to mend your relationship with your parents."



Practical tips for practitioners

- Suggest activities that could be completed as a family to increase the positivity in the relationship.
- Where possible, work collaboratively with the young person, school and family to create a school attendance plan. This will be a sensitive area if family tensions are high. Ensure you have informed the young person of your intended plan, so they don't feel ambushed by a meeting with the school and parents.
- Work on developing a daily routine and a sleep routine with the young person if necessary.
- Ask the young person questions about themselves and their interests. A positive attitude may provide the young person with the support they need. Speak positively about school and celebrate successes, talents and good work.
- Try to encourage parental involvement in meetings by remaining mindful of scheduling of meetings, locations, travel cost etc.
- Ensure parents are equipped with knowledge on how to work collaboratively with their young person.

You can find information about relevant services and how to access them here:

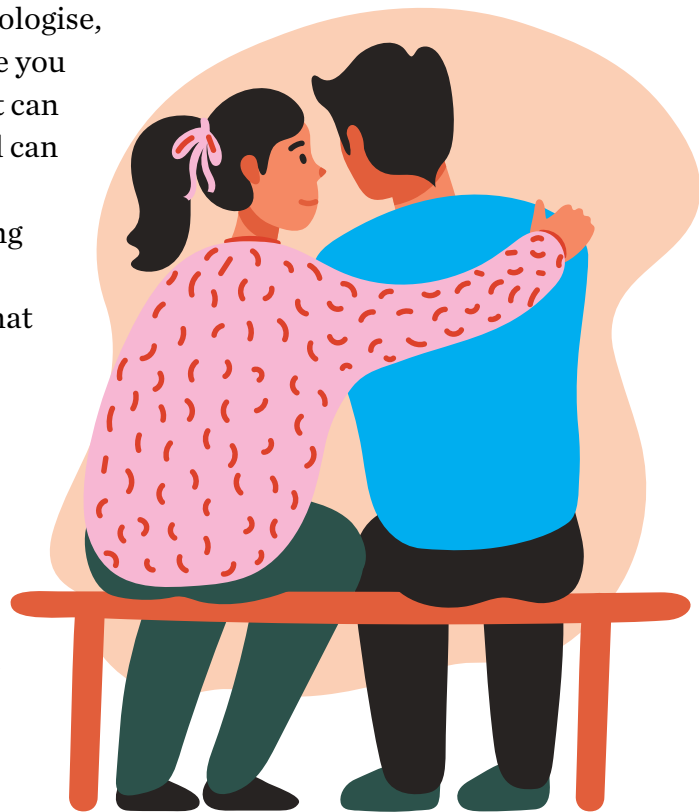
- <https://onefamily.ie/parenting-10-ways-to-relate-to-your-young-person/>
- https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Young_people_Wellbeing_d3.pdf



Practical tips for young people

Tips for fixing your relationship with your parents:

- Make sure you spend time with you parents. You might want to spend all your time with your friends, boyfriend/girlfriend but don't forget to spend time with your parents too. Try to bond through watching a TV series together or going for walks together. Even if you're not ready to talk about big issues in your life, spending quality time together can begin to fix your relationship.
- If your parents refuse your request, it can be quite upsetting. Try to offer a compromise or ask your parents to take some time to think about your request again before making a final decision.
- Thank your parents when they do something helpful. If they provide you will good advice or respect the boundaries you set up, then thank them and tell them you appreciated what they did. This will help to let them know what you like them doing and what they should avoid.
- When conflict arises, even if your parents are in the wrong, try and be the bigger person and make the first step towards solving the peace. This step doesn't have to be a big apology or admitting you did something wrong. Start small – compliment your parents (e.g. "This dinner is so delicious") or do something together (e.g. watching TV in the evening.). This will help to break the tension from the conflict.
- It's important that if your parents have wronged you in some way, that you provide forgiveness. When your parents apologise, it can be hard to let go of the grudge you may be holding. But holding onto it can build up anger and resentment and can eat away at you inside. Forgiving someone doesn't mean you're saying their behaviour is ok, it just means you're accepting that they know what they did was wrong and that you're choosing to let go of the negative emotions.
- Sometimes talking can be too difficult. Instead write a letter to your parents outlining all your thoughts and feelings. By explaining things clearly through a letter, you are also giving your parents time to read and process what you're saying.



Worksheet 7:

You and school (barriers)

When you think about school, what are the things that make you not want to go? Look at the list of words below and explore what memories, feelings and words come to mind. You can add your own words and ideas if you like. As you discuss, write the main things that make you not want to go to school (barriers) in the spaces provided below.

Friendships	Value of Education	Effort	Transport		
SNAs	Lonely	Teachers	Embarrassment	Lunch/food	
PE/Sports	Tiredness	Safety	Anxious	Rules	Yard
Homework	Trips	Exams	Students	Strict	Unfair

Barriers

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What do you do to manage these problems at the moment?

Who can you talk to or ask for help from when you experience these barriers?

Worksheet 8:

You and school (positives)

Think of a great day in school. What did that look like? What makes you want to go to school? Look at the list of words below and explore what memories, feelings and words come to mind. You can add your own words and ideas if you like. As you discuss, write the main things that make you want to go to school (positives) in the spaces provided below.

Friendships	Value of Education		Future Career		
Transport	SNAs	Fun	Teachers	Achievement	
Lunch/food	PE/Sports		Relaxing/Rest	Safety	
Joking	Rules	Yard	Homework	Trips	Exams
Students	Interesting	Fair			

Positives

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What can be done to make school a more positive place?

If you were principal, what would you change?

Worksheet 23:

A positive parenting approach works best

Thinking about yourself as a child or young person, what kind of relationship did you have with your parents? Be mindful that this exercise could leave you with strong emotions if your memories of home as a child were not positive. You may want to talk about this with someone.

Circle the words below that describe what you experienced as a child and young person from your parents/carers.....

caring	nagging	blaming	kindness	threatening
patience	trusting	listening	teasing	being there
rules	anger	affection	being too busy	love
encouraging	showing an interest	knowing clear boundaries		
fear	being valued	shouting	feeling looked after	

Thinking about the words you have circled which words would you describe as helpful and unhelpful parenting approaches.

Write the words below

Helpful Parenting Approach	Unhelpful Parenting Approach
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Worksheet 23:

A positive parenting approach works best

Thinking about you and your child or teenager what are the most **helpful parenting approaches** that will enable you to support your child to return to school?

Add extra spaces if needed.

Return to school

Make sure I am fully available to meet my child's needs

Setting firm and fair boundaries and consequences

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Thinking about the parenting approaches you have identified above that will be most effective in supporting your child's return to school, use the space below to identify the changes and supports that will help you develop those parenting approaches.

What can I do to help as a parent?	What do I need to change? My action plan
e.g. I need to be fully available to support my child with this	I need to change my schedule, so I have more time to connect with my child
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Worksheet 23:

A positive parenting approach works best

What's tricky about My Action Plan?

e.g. I find it too stressful in the morning and don't know how to change our routine.

What supports will help me with My Action Plan?

I need someone to help me draw up a routine chart that we can all follow, and maybe ask someone to walk the kids to school

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