

Child and Youth Mental Health and Substance Use (CYMHSU) Collaborative

Youth, Young Adult and Family Evaluation Team Recommendations on Youth and Parent/Family Engagement

“It is not our opinion, it is our experience that really matters.”

The *Youth, Young Adult and Family Evaluation Team* of the Child and Youth Mental Health and Substance Use Collaborative strongly believes that the experience of growing up with a mental health or substance use challenge, and that of parenting a child or youth who is unwell, provides a unique and important perspective that is different from having knowledge or experience in the field. Engaging youth and parents/families with lived experience is a core goal of the Collaborative. It is the aim of the team to strengthen the capacity of Local Action Teams to deepen their engagement for the benefit of children, youth and parents/families, and to improve and develop responsive systems of care.

Based on the results from a survey of 307 Local Action Team members across BC, the *Youth, Young Adult and Parent Evaluation Team* developed recommendations for Local Action Teams. The team believes the Collaborative can really shine in the area of youth and family engagement, and is already doing a great job in this regard in many communities. The team would like the CYMHSU Collaborative to rally around these recommendations and support their implementation so this good work can be extended to all 64 LATs.

1. **Develop “community agreements”** in each LAT that outline what needs to happen for youth and parents/families to participate fully and safely in each LAT. For some LATs this will consolidate what they are already doing, and for others it will create positive environments for youth, parents/families and other LAT members. The Abbotsford LAT Community Agreement is recommended as a template. This template points out that all LAT team members should feel valued. Asking all team members if they feel valued may be a way for LATs to begin the discussion about youth and family engagement.
2. **Review and discuss LAT members’ perspectives** about youth and parent/family engagement. Does the LAT believe that youth and parents/families should be at the centre of all processes that affect the health and mental health of children and youth? Do team values need to shift to accommodate this CYMHSU Collaborative priority? How do LATs actions reflect “youth and families at the centre”? Make it safe to be truthful.
3. **Ensure the LAT is clear on why it is important to have youth and parents/family members on the LAT.** Discuss what will be expected of them, and how they fit into the overall objectives of the LAT.
4. Once the role and purpose of youth and parents/families are well defined, **work collectively to recruit other youth and parent/family members.** Look to other community support groups, advocacy groups and people or patients that you know with an interest in building a better child and youth mental health and substance use system.

5. Ensure Team Leaders and Co-Chairs **model good patterns of youth and parent/family engagement**. Is there one or more champions on the LAT who, although not a youth or parent/family member with lived experience themselves, is able to champion this cause?
6. **Ask for youth and parent/family ideas and input.** Build a time slot into the beginning of each agenda (20 minutes) that provides youth and parents/family members with opportunity to share their experiences and observations. Discuss agendas with youth and parent/family members before the meetings. As new issues arise, get input from youth and parents/families. If you don't feel you have time to solicit youth and parent/family input, why is this the case?
7. **Offer youth and parents/family members with an opportunity to tell their stories**, or parts of their stories. Plan very specifically how this will happen, summarize how this will happen and ask about the people the youth and parents/family members would like to have there for support. De-brief the event in the moment, and bring the experience up in other meetings.
8. When input is provided, incorporate it into the LAT. **Build youth and parent/family ideas into LAT products.** Are there unique "asks" that you have of youth and parents/families? Which other LAT members will help with these requests.
9. **Acknowledge the amazing, brave youth and family members** who voluntarily attend LAT meetings and are engaged in Working Groups. Let them know they are an integral part of the team. Schedule meeting around youth and parent/family members schedules.
10. **Share your own family experiences** with child and youth mental health and substance use. This helps reduce the isolation that is felt by youth and parents/family member representatives who may feel alone in the group.
11. Where there are more than one youth or parent/family member, **consider establishing separate working groups** where youth or parents/family members can get support from their peers. Develop a system to ensure that information flows to and from the LAT to the separate working groups, and ensure each group has a voice at LAT meetings.
12. **Use tools to help level the playing field** for youth and parents/families. Hand out orange cards to all LAT members at meetings that can be raised when jargon is used.
13. **Keep track of how many youth and parent/family members are involved** with your LAT, and share it with the Collaborative so we can assess our progress over time.