Planning Guide
for Workshop Facilitators

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1. Welcome to *Keep Connected*!

The middle and high school years are a time of great change for kids and families. New opportunities. New worries. New challenges. New relationships. It can be both a scary and exciting time.

**It’s easy for families to get disconnected** as kids grow up and other demands pull families apart. Yet, staying connected is really important for both kids and parenting adults. Keeping these relationships strong is also important for kids’ success in school and in life.

*Keep Connected* gives parents and youth an opportunity to **learn keys to positive family relationships** and to try new ways to stay connected even as kids grow up and become more independent. Although participants learn about the importance of relationships, the goal is to help them reflect, share experiences, and work together to **experience stronger, more developmental relationships**, guided by a research-based framework.

In the pilot testing, both parents and youth reported growing closer through the experience. They also said they were communicating better, showing more care to each other, and making better decisions together. Our hope is that others will experience similar results. Search Institute is continuing to seek opportunities to build increasingly strong evidence of the efficacy and impact of *Keep Connected* when implemented effectively.

This planning guide provides background and tools for facilitating the parent, youth, and family workshops that are at the core of *Keep Connected*. It supplements the online materials (including downloads, videos, and tips) available to registered *Keep Connected* users at www.parentfurther.com/keepconnected.

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1 *Keep Connected* is designed as a two-generation resource for family education and support. It includes time for youth and parents separately, and then brings them together for shared activities. Because it may be practically challenging to have both parents and youth participate in all sessions, we also have provided for each lesson an extended session for parents only, which can replace the family session when necessary.
2. How Keep Connected Was Developed

*Keep Connected* was developed by Search Institute as a cornerstone resource for its strategic focus on understanding and strengthening the developmental relationships young people experience across the different parts of their lives—in this case, in their families. Major activities have included the following:

1. **Foundational research**—*Keep Connected* is based on Search Institute’s Developmental Relationships Framework (Table 1) and the research behind it. This research has included focus groups with parents, youth, educators, and youth workers across the United States, national and community surveys of youth and parents about developmental relationships, and reviews of the literature on the dynamics of family relationships, particularly during middle childhood and early adolescence. More background on this research can be found in:


   Also guiding Keep Connected was extensive Search Institute research on family strengths and family engagement focused on families with children ages 10 – 15.

2. **Prototype project (Spring 2016)**—Search Institute partnered with five organizations to develop and test an initial version of *Keep Connected*. The partner organizations were I. J. Holton Intermediate School, Austin, MN; The Georgetown Project, Georgetown, TX; Jubilee Housing, Washington, DC; Communities in Schools of Durham, NC; YWCA Tri-County Area, Pottstown, PA. Partner sites were selected through an application process. Formative feedback was collected through observation, surveys, and focus groups with youth, parents, and facilitators. The feedback led to revisions in the materials.

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### TABLE 1: Search Institute’s Framework of Developmental Relationships

*Keep Connected* is based on Search Institute’s Developmental Relationship Framework, which is shown here. Each action can be done by both young people and adults in relationships. *Keep Connected* focuses on strengthening these kinds of relationships in families. In addition, other relationships also matter in young people’s lives, including relationships with teachers, friends, youth leaders, mentors, and many others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Express Care</strong></td>
<td>Show me that I matter to you.</td>
<td>- Be dependable</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Be someone I can trust.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Listen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Really pay attention when we are together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Believe in me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Make me feel known and valued.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Be warm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Show me you enjoy being with me.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Encourage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Praise me for my efforts and achievements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Share Power</strong></td>
<td>Treat me with respect and give me a say.</td>
<td>- Respect me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Take me seriously and treat me fairly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Include me</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Involve me in decisions that affect me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Collaborate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Work with me to solve problems and reach goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Let me lead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Create opportunities for me to take action and lead.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenge Growth</strong></td>
<td>Push me to keep getting better.</td>
<td>- Expect my best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Expect me to live up to my potential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Stretch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Push me to go further.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Hold me accountable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Insist I take responsibility for my actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Reflect on failures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Help me learn from mistakes and setbacks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Provide Support</strong></td>
<td>Help me complete tasks and achieve goals.</td>
<td>- Navigate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Guide me through hard situations and systems.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Empower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Build my confidence to take charge of my life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Advocate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Defend me when I need it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Set boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Put in place limits that keep me on track.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expand Possibilities</strong></td>
<td>Connect me with people and places that broaden my world.</td>
<td>- Inspire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Inspire me to see possibilities for my future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Broaden horizons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Expose me to new ideas, experiences, and places.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Connect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Introduce me to more people who can help me grow.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To learn more about the developmental relationships young people need to thrive, visit [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org)

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3. **Pilot project (Fall 2016 – Spring 2017)**—Revised materials were tested in a pilot project with five partners, most of which were also part of the prototype project. The five partners were: I. J. Holton Intermediate School, Austin, MN; Jubilee Housing, Washington, DC; Communities in Schools of Durham, NC; Toberman Neighborhood Center, San Pedro, CA; and YWCA Tri-County Area, Pottstown, PA. Continuity across the two projects gave insight into the opportunities and challenges of moving beyond an initial test of the resources. Site leaders participated in a pilot training institute to prepare to lead the program. Once again, formative feedback was collected through observation, surveys, and focus groups with youth, parents, and facilitators. The feedback led to revisions in the materials, which resulted in the current version of the resources.

3. **Principles that Undergird Keep Connected**

*Keep Connected* is grounded in several principles that grow out of Search Institute’s research on developmental relationships, family strengths, and youth development (particularly our research in Developmental Assets). In addition, it reflects many key practices in fields of family engagement, support, and empowerment. Formative evaluation during the prototype and pilot phases of development confirmed that youth and parent participants experienced these principles through the workshop series.

1. **Strengths**—Consistent with Search Institute’s history and best practices in the field, *Keep Connected* emphasizes identifying and building on strengths in families and communities. It recognizes that all families face challenges, and some of those challenges are severe. However, it also recognizes that resilience comes through discovering and nurturing strengths, even in the midst of those challenges.

2. **Culturally responsive**—The *Keep Connected* format and sessions will be designed to encourage integration of specific cultural values and practices into sessions, drawing from participating families’ own experiences, cultures, and traditions.

In the pilot testing, families from different cultural backgrounds (particularly African American, Latin American, and European American) all reported being fully engaged in the experience. Parent materials are currently available in English and Spanish, with additional languages being developed in response to expressed need.
3. **Relationships in families**—*Keep Connected* is not primarily a “parenting program” that teaches skills and techniques. It offers structure, tools, and a safe environment for exploring and strengthening youth-parent relationships. This approach is evident in two emphases throughout the experience:

- **Two-way relationships**—Relationships are two-way streets, which both parent and youth having responsibilities in the relationship and each influencing and responding to the other.

- **Two generations together**—*Keep Connected* provides experiences for parenting adults and youth (both together and separately) that reflect best practices in the family engagement field. This approach helps families practice and become comfortable with shared activities to strengthen relationships.

Both parenting adults and youth who participate in *Keep Connected* report closer relationships based on their participation, and they report new family practices that reflect the Developmental Relationships Framework, such as more shared decision making and more mutual expression of care and affection.

4. **Relationships around families**—In addition to focusing on relationships within families, *Keep Connected* emphasizes openness and trust building between the leaders and participants and among participants. It recognizes (and reinforces) that families have and need supportive networks. This emphasis is expressed through these approaches during the workshops:

- **Interactive learning**—*Keep Connected* parent and youth sessions tap participants’ own experiences, expertise, and questions as integral to learning. (The sessions involve very little presentation of content by facilitators.)

- **Story telling and sharing**—Families learn and connect through sharing and hearing their own stories and the stories of others. Youth and parents talk about their own experiences, traditions, and other stories that matter to them.

5. **Family rituals and routines**—A key to sustaining strong family relationships is for families to integrate shared activities and practices into their everyday lives. *Keep Connected* includes a shared project in which families create a “Family Pledge to Keep Connected.” This highlights their expectations for
routines and practices they will work to maintain and adapt through middle school and high school.

Feedback in pilot sites suggests that families are making ideas and practices that are part of Keep Connected an ongoing part of family life. At the end of the workshop series, families talk about the things they are doing now that they weren’t doing before (such as using the “highs and lows” activity that is modeled in the program). Informally, some who participated in the first prototype project report continuing to use the practices and activities they learned up to a year after completing the series.

6. **Parent leadership**—Not only will parents actively shape the content of their shared learning experiences, but some parents may be eager to serve as parenting mentors for other parents in the future. This may include serving as future facilitators.

4. **Session Content and Structure**

Keep Connected is an interactive workshop series designed encourage participants to learn from their own experience and from each other—within Search Institute’s research-based framework of developmental relationships.

The core of Keep Connected is a series of six family workshops plus a graduation celebration for families. Each session includes time when youth and parents meet separately as well as time for parenting adults and youth to work together as a family⁴, as illustrated in the diagram on the next page.

**What families learn through Keep Connected**

Through this six-session workshop series (plus the graduation celebration), families:

- **Discover** five keys to powerful parent-youth relationships (based on Search Institute’s Developmental Relationships Framework).
- **Reflect** on what they enjoy about each other and how they can grow together.
- **Try** practical strategies for enhancing family life.
- **Celebrate** their journey together into the teen years.

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⁴ In some settings, it may not be feasible to include youth in the workshops. An “extended parent session” is offered for these situations. It revises the family workshop portion to be appropriate for parents only.
Applying the structure to your own context

Use these guidelines in establishing a schedule for local use:

1. **Shared family meal:**
   Feedback from families consistently found that a shared family meal is not only a practical need (to make it possible to participate), but it also is a valued time to connect as a family and with other families.

2. **Length of each session:** Each session lasts two hours, including the shared family meal and the workshop. Families need to commit to this length of time in order to take full advantage of the interactive workshops.

3. **How often?** Different sites have tried weekly, bi-weekly, and monthly sessions. Having them together increases the intensity of the experience, but is more logistically challenging. Spreading them out can risk losing continuity and less retention. Again, these choices are best made based on local realities.

4. **Social time:** As families get to know each other, they often begin to ask for more opportunities to connect socially. These are not integrated into the materials, but they are important opportunities to build on the *Keep Connected* experience to create community among and ongoing connections with the families your organization seeks to engage, support, and empower.
Overview of Each Session’s Content and Key Messages

The chart below gives a general sense of what happens in each session and the key messages that families explore together. It also highlights activities families do at home together to follow through on each workshop.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUMMARY</th>
<th>KEY IDEAS</th>
<th>AT HOME ACTIVITIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1. Thriving Through the Teenage Years: The Power of Family Relationships** | • Kids do best when they have strong relationships with parents through the teen years.  
• But, those relationships change through the teenage years.  
• Five key actions help to keep these relationships strong. | Families use a checklist to explore their relationships. |
| **2. You Already Care—How Do You Show It?** | • All of us care about each other in our families.  
• It can be harder to express care as kids grow up. So, we have to find ways to adjust so it works for everyone.  
• Expressing care begins with really listening to each other. | Families try simple ways to express care, including planning a shared family meal. |
| **3. Sharing Power—Even When It’s Not Comfortable** | • Sharing power focuses on treating each other with respect and giving each other a say.  
• Sharing power can be a hard in family relationships. But, it’s important, particularly during the teen years.  
• We share power in different ways for different issues.  
• You can turn power struggles into power sharing. | Families practice negotiating and try organizing a family meeting. |
| **4. Challenging Growth without Pushing Away** | • In positive relationships, we push each other to grow in different parts of life so that we can each be and become our best selves.  
• Challenging growth is best when it focuses on someone’s own goals or priorities, not on things other people wish they would do.  
• We grow most in the “Growth Zone,” where we are stretched to grow, but also guided and supported so we can succeed. | Families practice giving feedback and reflect on how they can use setbacks to learn and grow. |
5. It's a Big World Out There: Helping Each Other Discover Possibilities

A big part of growing up is discovering new options for the future. Families grow together by trying new things, going new places, and meeting new people. In this session, families explore options that fit for them.

- We support or help each other in different ways as we grow up.
- A great way to expand possibilities with each other is to explore things you’re curious about.
- Having a specific plan to try new things can be a fun way to expand possibilities for each other.

Families set up “lifelines” to support them as they expand possibilities.

6. Growing Together through the Teen Years

Families work together to identify a commitment they will follow through with to create a “good habit” or routine to keep connected until high school graduation.

- Our expectations or hopes for the future affect what we do today.
- “Good habits” help us stay on track with the things we want to do, including helping us overcome barriers that come up.
- We can help to keep our relationships strong by thanking each other and committing to specific actions we will do together.

Families commit to maintaining their shared activities or rituals that keep them connected. They receive tools to help them stay on track.

Celebrating Your Family’s Journey Together: The Graduation

The workshop concludes with a family graduation celebration in which youth express their hopes for their family relationships when they graduate, families share their pledge to keep connected, and families are affirmed for their commitment to each other.
5. What’s in the Facilitator’s Guide

This facilitator guide provides extensive material to support facilitation on each session for people with different levels of experience and facilitation styles.

Although the number of pages may seem overwhelming at first, it is designed to give facilitators everything needed to engage families in the sessions. However, it will not be effective if used as a plug-and-play guide—reading the script to participants without adequate preparation. Here are the sections of the materials and how they are intended to be used:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Purpose/Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>A brief summary of the session to orient facilitators and other program leaders to what happens in the session.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Objectives</td>
<td>The learning focus that should be in mind while planning and leading sessions, as well as when checking to see whether participants are internalizing the key themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities at a Glance</td>
<td>A one-page summary of the session, including estimated times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This section also highlights key activities to be sure are part of the sessions in order to engage participants in the session’s most important themes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator Planning Worksheets</td>
<td>These worksheets are designed as tools to help facilitators prepare for and organize each session: parent, youth, and family (or extended parent session if youth are not participating with their parents). They identify each activity’s purpose, facilitation method, supplies, and estimated time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitators then can use the “facilitator notes” section to document what they need to guide each activity. A well-prepared facilitator will be able to use these sheets as their primary guide when leading sessions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Online Materials

The facilitator guides of all sessions are also available to download from the Keep Connected Implementation Toolkit (www.parentfurther.com/keepconnected). It includes:

- The current facilitator guides (including any updated or corrected versions);
- Color versions of handouts;
- Available language versions (of parent handouts); and
- Other available resources.
**Preparation, Materials, and Supplies**

This nuts-and-bolts checklist documents all the supplies and materials needed to lead each session.

**Detailed Facilitator Guides**

These are step-by-step guides for each session, including the curriculum for parenting adults, youth, families together, and the extended parent session (if youth are not participating). They provided detailed process steps, sample language for mini-presentations, discussion questions, and other suggestions. Effective facilitation requires internalizing the process and content outlined in these guides, not using them as scripts to read through while facilitating sessions.

**Worksheets and Handouts**

Ready-to-reproduce handouts and worksheets are provided, including the at-home activities for each session. These may be reproduced in color or black & white. NOTE: We recommend accessing the electronic version of handouts through the *Keep Connected Implementation Toolkit* in order to print higher-quality copies (in color or black & white). Spanish versions of family handouts are available online. (Other languages may be added based on expressed needs by users.)

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**6. Preparing to Facilitate Sessions**

Keep Connected is not a plug-and-play program. The facilitation guide provides the structure and information needed to guide effective facilitation. However, effective facilitation requires skill and preparation. Here are some recommendations, based on experiences in the pilot sites:

- **Know the families you serve.** Adjust the material to fit with their needs, priorities, culture, current challenges, and expertise. As you prepare, think about how specific parenting adults and youth might respond to the materials, the questions, and the interactions with others. For example, a parent in the cohort may have older children and can speak to the issues that arise as kids grow up, and he or she could be a resource for the sessions.

- **Identify other resources for families.** Some sessions may bring up issues that require deeper conversation or work with particular families. (That kind of counseling or social work support is not the purpose of these sessions.) Group settings are often not the right place to work through certain issues.
• **Take time to learn and understand** the material in advance of the sessions. One facilitator in the pilot project said: “Getting the feel for it - you have to read through it quite a few times.” Another emphasized being prepared for the sessions—you can’t “wing it.”

• **Don’t try to be the expert.** You won’t always have all of the answers, and that’s okay. (You may be able to help find the answers.) In fact, participants often said that a strength of *Keep Connected* was when facilitators shared their own experiences, challenges, and vulnerabilities. This mutual sharing helps to deepen trust in the group.

• **Give it time.** In pilot testing *Keep Connected*, facilitators gained confidence in using the materials as they practiced it, and the sessions continued to improve as facilitators led them several times with different cohorts of families.

7. **Adapting Sessions to Fit You, Your Organization, and the Families You Engage**

*Keep Connected* is guided by a research framework, principles of effective facilitation and practice, and shaped by the experiences of participants through the interactive activities. Facilitators often wonder how important it is to follow the activities in the sessions vs. adapting them. Here are some guidelines:

• **Assume that they work**—The facilitator’s guide offers a diverse set of learning and sharing experiences that are designed to engage families for about 90 minutes. Even if they may be outside your most comfortable style of leading groups, try them and see how they go. Then, consider how you might improve them the next time. (This could include just improving your own facilitation as you experience the activities. Or you may find that you need to adapt them, based on the families you engage.)

• **Respond to cultural or other group dynamics**—You may find activities that you know are problematic for use with particular groups of parents or particular cultural groups. These would be appropriate to adapt. *Please give this feedback to Search Institute so we can ensure that future materials address the concern.*

• **Don’t adjust just because it will be easier**—Sometimes it’s more work to break into small groups rather than having a large-group discussion. Or it’s easier to stay sitting down rather than getting up and moving around.
However, the methods selected are designed to offer variety for participants and to work with different learning styles and personality types. Push yourself to maintain a variety of activities and discussion formats that are designed to enhance growth and learning.

- **A better idea (not just an easier one)**—You may think of an alternative way of facilitating a portion of a session that will be more powerful than what is written while also meeting the goals of the session and the purpose of the written activity. These may tap specific resources in your community. Or it may simply be a creative idea that goes beyond what we imagined as we were creating these sessions.

- **Focus on key activities**—If cuts in activities are needed due to unforeseen circumstances, focus time on the key activities in each session. These are highlighted in the “at a glance” chart for each session.

### 8. Evaluation, Feedback, and Continuous Improvement

*Keep Connected* builds on a research-based framework and was developed and tested in partnership with organizations across the United States. Through our research we know that strong family relationships not only help young people through the transition period from childhood into adolescence, strong parent-youth relationships also boost motivation and commitments that are foundational to learning, achievement, and well-being. Through relationships, young people build strong social and emotional strengths that they will use throughout their lives.

In addition, formative evaluation with the prototype and pilot projects focused on improving the quality of the model so that maximizes the experience for families. Focus groups with youth and parents following participation in *Keep Connected* offer initial evidence that the program enhances:

- Parent-youth relationships;
- Family communication;
- Youth responsibility;
- Student motivation to learn; and
- Supportive community of families for families.

However, Search Institute has not yet conducted the kinds of outcome or impact studies that would generate the level of evidence needed to describe *Keep Connected* as an evidence-based program, according to standards established by national databases such as the *What Works Clearinghouse*. (These studies are
most effective when conducted after a model has been refined through implementation or formative evaluations.) We continue to seek funding to undertake these rigorous studies.

Search Institute has several tools available through the online Keep Connected Implementation Toolkit (www.parentfurther.com/keepconnected) to support your own evaluation efforts:

- **End-of-session surveys**, in which youth and parenting adults give feedback on their experience in the sessions

- **Parent and youth surveys** of developmental relationships, which can be used as part of baseline data collection. (They have not yet been tested as pre-post measures. We would be interested in such testing with local partners.)

- **Site observation and focus groups**: Members of Search Institute’s research team may be contracted (pending availability) to conduct, analyze, and report findings from systematically collecting qualitative data on the implementation of Keep Connected (using tools developed during pilot testing). Contact us for more information by phone 800-888-7828 or email clientservices@search-institute.org.

### 9. Facilitating Youth, Parent, and Family Sessions

*Keep Connected* requires facilitators who are adept at working with three different groups: Youth, parenting adults, and intergenerational groups of youth and parents. Typically, organizations have one facilitator lead the parent sessions and, depending on number of youth, one or two who lead the youth sessions.

**Continuity in facilitation**—The most successful facilitators work to build a strong relationship with workshop participants, building a rapport and trust over time. Therefore, it is important to maintain consistency in facilitators through the *Keep Connected* workshop series.

**Joint facilitation of family portions**—Facilitators from both the parenting adult groups and the youth groups should co-lead family sessions. Co-facilitation makes the family time more comfortable for everyone (both youth and parenting adults), since they are already building a strong relationship with at least one of the facilitators. In addition, the facilitator who works with youth will
likely have additional ideas for how to draw young people more fully into the conversation.

In Each Session

Each session outline includes step-by-step instructions for how to lead each activity. In addition to guiding each activity, youth and parents can participate more fully when they are clear about process, expectations, and goals.

- **Facilities**—Be sure family members know where they can find restrooms and any other needed facilities. If childcare is provided, be sure they know about it and where it is.

- **Schedule**—Reinforce the schedule for the sessions each time you meet, particularly highlighting the next scheduled session. In addition, be clear about the plan for the graduation celebration. (You have the choice of making it a separate seventh session or including it in an extended sixth session. See the section in this guide on the graduation celebration.)

- **Session structure**—Remind families that youth and parents meet separately for about half of the session. Then, they come together for the second half. (If you are not including youth, the extended parent session continues without interruption, though you may choose to take a break.)

- **Key messages**—Early in each session is an opportunity to introduce the key messages. This is an important chance to reinforce the core ideas in ways that help the families focus on the purpose of the session.

- **At-home activities**—Each session includes several options for at-home activities that extend the learning to the family. More importantly, these activities encourage families to establish new positive habits and routines that, we hope, continue beyond the workshop series. Therefore, these experiences are not “add-ons,” but are integral to the *Keep Connected* design. Be sure to give families time to pick the one thing they’ll do that really fits them and their interests.

**LANGUAGE CHOICE**

We strongly encourage you to avoid describing at-home activities as “homework.”

Homework has negative implications for most families. The *Keep Connected* at-home activities are designed to enrich family life and to establish positive habits at home.
10. Dealing with Common Facilitation Challenges

The facilitation guides for each session support an interactive experience that is responsive to the experiences, interests, and needs of participants while also facilitating structured learning to achieve the session objectives.

Balancing the flexibility and structure can be challenging for some facilitators and some groups. Some groups may not have experience with this style of interactive learning, so they may either be reluctant to participate while others may dominate the discussion. They can pull the session off onto topics that may be of little or no interest to other participants, or they can interact in ways that are disrespectful or awkward. If left unchecked, these individuals can make others less interested in participating.

Many facilitators use the following tools and techniques as gentle but firm reminders that it’s important to keep the sessions moving and not get stuck on one topic, issue, or conversation for too long.

- **Set shared ground rules or expectations** about how group members interact with each other. (Session 1 includes youth proposing and parenting adults adopting a set of ground rules for discussions.) During the pilot project, one facilitator said about ground rules:
  
  “We set goals the first meeting, saying that what we hear here stays here. We don’t share the information we hear, you know, be respectful. If you don’t agree with what the parent is saying, we just respect that idea and no confrontation. We’re not trying to change someone’s mind. It’s just everyone sharing their experiences.”

- **Be welcoming, warm, and non-judgmental**: Recognize that many times when parents are dealing with professionals in schools and other organizations, it’s because their kids are in trouble. Parents may be reluctant and mistrustful to open up because of a history of these experiences.

- **If some participants tend to talk over each other**, try these strategies:
  
  o **Use a “talking piece”** to help participants take turns talking. Often a talking piece is an object of significance for the group (or the facilitator). It is placed in the center of a circle, then people hold it when they want
to speak. Whoever is holding it is invited to speak while others listen (and cannot interrupt).

- **Post a “parking lot”** where you (or participants) can jot down issues that come up that are important but are not on topic for the evening. They are placed in the “parking lot” as a reminder to come back to them—either later in the session, after the session, in a future session, or in a different setting. Be clear when the topics will be addressed, otherwise participants may be reluctant to “let go” of an issue.

- **If participants are slow to open up, try these strategies:**
  
  - **Bring in everyone’s voice very early in each session.** One reason to have introductions in every session (even if people know each other) is that everyone speaks early on. If people don’t speak early in a session (even with just their name and a few words), they’re less likely to speak up later.

  - **Share first (briefly) as a facilitator.** Opening up about your own challenges makes it safer for others to open up. Share your own experiences and stories that you believe participants will relate to. That said, avoid coming across as the expert or as having the final answer—which will only shut down other perspectives and voices.

  - **Push back on advice giving.** If people share something in the group, there’s often a rush to give advice—when people just want a listening ear and to be validated in their experience. Cut off people giving advice and affirm the person’s experience. Thank them for sharing. Depending on the situation, you might ask them a follow-up question that will help them open up more. Or you might invite others to share their experiences that might be similar (without shifting to giving advice).

  - **Invite participants first to reflect (and even jot notes) before they share.** Some people need time to collect their thoughts first.

  - **Don’t rely on whole-group discussions.** Breaking into pairs and small groups and structuring space for everyone to talk more privately can prepare them to share their perspective with the larger group.

  - **Thank participants for sharing.** One facilitator said:

    “I always thanked them for sharing, cause it’s not easy to do. Some people don’t want to open up regardless of the high or the low or the
discussion topic. I always said, “Thank you for sharing,” something like that, so I think they felt valued, that they were able to open up and not be criticized on anything that they said or judged. It just allowed for sharing. It was great.”

- **Play quiet music during quiet times** to reinforce the reflective goals of the time and to reduce the sense of awkwardness that some people feel during silence (which prompts them to talk).

### 11. Extending *Keep Connected* Through ParentFurther.com

ParentFurther.com is a free online resource from Search Institute that complements the experience in *Keep Connected* workshops.

**What ParentFurther.com Offers**

This website offers the following to *Keep Connected* families:

- **Self-quizzes** for parenting adults to reflect on each key to family relationships. Families can store results from the quizzes they complete.

- **Discussion-starter questions** for families and for groups of parents that match with the workshop series.

- **More interactive activities** for families to try at home to explore relationships. Families can keep track of the ones they do with the online profile tool.

- **More background information** on the themes of each workshop.

- **Additional topics** to explore at home or with other families.

**Helping Parents Get Started with ParentFurther.com**

Offering ParentFurther.com as a resource extends the learning families experience through your school or organization. However, many parents are not used to going online to find resources to strengthen family life. Here are some strategies to introduce ParentFurther.com to families and encourage them to use it:

ParentFurther.com is mobile friendly for easy access through smartphones and tablets.
• **Check in and share experiences**—Each session includes opportunities to check in about use of the site and also reminders at the end to try the site. If parents start talking about their own experiences with the site, others are more likely to visit.

• **Show and tell**—Have a computer and a tablet or smartphone at each session with the web site pulled up. Show it to families, and give them a chance to look around. This could include having it available during the shared meal, if it does not distract from families spending time together.

• **Orientation**—if you have access to a computer lab, invite the parents to come early or stay late to try out the site. You can support them in registering for the site.

• **Scavenger hunt**—Get families to go to ParentFurther.com by setting up a site scavenger hunt. Have them look for specific elements or ideas on the site, and provide a reward (such as a gift card) for those who do it.

• **At-home activities**—Each session’s “post it” take-home summary encourages families to go to ParentFurther.com to follow up on the session. Highlight this opportunity when discussing the at-home activities.

12. The Shared Family Meal

A shared family meal is a critical part of the *Keep Connected* experience for families. Not only does it meet a practical need for many families, but it also sets a tone of conversation and mutual care for the sessions. It gives them time to pause from their daily rush to transition from whatever went on during their day to the workshops.

**The Food**

Each organization has different available resources for a shared meal. During the prototype project, groups did the following:

• Invited families to prepare the meal together.

• Served families in the school cafeteria, which catered the meal.

• Asked families what kind of carryout they wanted, then picked it up for the next session.
In planning the meals, be aware of any food sensitivities or restrictions due to dietary concerns, cultural or religious practices, and health. Part of making the series welcoming for all is for them to be able to enjoy the meal together.

**Other Ways to Enhance the Family Meal**

A good meal may not need to be enhanced for it to be enjoyable and meaningful for families. However, consider the following:

- Provide **comfortable seating** for the families so they can enjoy talking with each other.
- Provide **quiet music** that helps create a relaxing atmosphere.
- Put **discussion-starter questions** on the tables. You can use commercially available discussion starters. You might use the questions that are provided in the at-home packet for each session of *Keep Connected*. Or, you can find additional discussion starters in the “talk about it” sections on ParentFurther.com.

**13. The Family Pledge to Keep Connected**

A key to sustaining strong relationships is for families to integrate shared activities or routines into their everyday lives. This “Family Pledge to Keep Connected” guides parents and youth in working together to identify their priorities and then set up everyday routines that help sustain their focus.

**Goals**

This activity is designed to help families . . .

- Enjoy co-creating a memory of the shared workshop experience.
- Focus on commitments they make for sustaining positive relationships through the teenage years.
- Remember to follow through by having a visual reminder of their commitments.
- Create continuity between sessions, with the potential of increased incentive to keep coming.
How It Works

This activity builds across the six Keep Connected workshops, culminating in a display during the final graduation celebration. In each workshop, youth and their families add to the pledge project based on the workshop’s topic:

During each workshop, youth decorate the selected craft to highlight how the session’s theme applies to their family. Then families work together to talk about priorities and complete the activity. Topics are as follows:

- Workshop 1  Top  A picture of their family
- Workshop 2  Side 1  Express Care
- Workshop 3  Side 2  Share Power
- Workshop 4  Side 3  Challenge Growth
- Workshop 5  Side 4  Provide Support/Expand Possibility
- Workshop 6  Finalize for the graduation celebration
- Graduation  Families publicly share their commitment

The pages that follow describe three options for implementing the Family Pledge to Keep Connected:

1. **Family Pledge Box**—Each family decorates a cardboard box and keeps artifacts from the series (that reflect family commitments) inside the box.

2. **Family Pledge Collage**—Each family creates a collage that represents their family and their shared commitments.

3. **Family Pledge Crest**—Youth draw or color representations of their family’s commitments on a family crest.

Decide which of these approaches you will use for your workshop series (or adapt your own). Then select that option in the facilitator’s guide.

Each session’s facilitator’s guide outlines each session’s activity, including needed supplies.

**Option #1: Family Pledge Box**

During each workshop, youth decorate the outside of the box to highlight their family and its commitments.
Give each family a white cardboard box (about 10” X 10”\(^5\)) to collect objects, note cards, and pictures that serve as reminders of commitments families make together. Youth decorate the box as part of the first session, and then the box is used throughout the workshop series to gather the symbols and notes they make or gather to represent their commitment to keep connected.

In workshops 2 – 5, families add small objects, note cards, or pictures to help remember ways they can be intentional in enhancing the five keys in their relationships. These are stored in the box. In addition, if the family takes pictures of their home activities each week, printouts of these pictures can also be included in the box.

During the final session, they will revisit the collection and identify specific “pledges” they will make to keep connected in the coming years. They will identify routines or rituals that will help these pledges become a part of their everyday life together.

The box will be used in the final “graduation” celebration, and then taken home as a visible reminder of their pledge to keep connected.

**Option #2: Family Pledge Collage**

Each family receives a poster board or a large sheet of paper to create a collage across the six workshops in the series. The images would serve as reminders of commitments families make together through the *Keep Connected* workshops.

Youth start the collage with a family picture during the first workshop. Then, the family works together on the collage in subsequent workshops.

During the final session, families revisit the collage and identify specific “pledges” they will make to keep connected in the coming years. The collage is used in the final “graduation” celebration, and then taken home as a visible reminder of their pledge.

If possible, provide each family with a frame for the collage as part of the graduation celebration (or laminate them). Families then can keep the collage visible in their homes as reminders of their shared commitment.

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\(^5\) Plain white boxes are available in office, storage, and gift stores. An example is the Container Store: www.containerstore.com/s/gift-packaging/gift-boxes/white-1-piece-cube-gift-boxes/12d?productId=11001010&green=33605C0E-ASA2-56D4-9C5A-868851D1C857

Supplies

- A plain white box for each family
- Craft supplies for each session
- Other objects families want to add

Supplies

- A poster board or large paper for each family
- Old magazines, etc., to clip pictures
- Glue sticks
- Scissors for youth
- Markers
Option #3: Family Pledge Crest

Creating a family crest (or shield) is a way for families to use symbols and art to show what’s important to their family.

Use this idea to create a “Family Relationships Crest,” which would highlight the pledges the family makes to each other in the relationship keys that are explored in workshops 2-5.

Families each need a poster board for their crest. During the youth session in Workshop 1, youth create their crest, drawing its shape on the poster board, adding the names of all family members, and decorating around the board. (You can provide a stencil of the crest made from poster board shape that they can use to trace the outlines.)

In workshops 2-5, the commitments for each area of relationships would be added, with words, collage pictures, photographs or other objects that are mounted onto the poster board. The crest is integrated into the graduation celebration in workshop 6.

Supplies

- A poster board or large paper for each family
- Stencil of a crest
- Markers
14. The Graduation Celebration

The *Keep Connected* workshop series culminates in a graduation celebration. The graduation celebration has at least four strategic purposes:

1. It provides positive affirmation to the participating families, recognizing their commitment to each other and to strengthening relationships.

2. It provides an opportunity for families to state publicly their commitments, which increases the likelihood that they will follow through and that they will seek and receive support from other families in the sessions.

3. It provides an opportunity for families to reinforce their time together and to be more intentional in building connections to continue past the workshop series.

4. It highlights the positive experience with *Keep Connected* to others in the community, including other families that may participate in the future.

Getting Creative with the Graduation Celebration

The facilitator’s guide provides a basic outline for hosting the graduation celebration, including talking points for opening remarks and a template for a graduation program. However, you may augment it with these or other ideas:

- **Family pictures**—I. J. Holton Intermediate School brought in a photographer to take portraits of each family. The youth painted picture frames about their family, then, gave the frames (with the family portraits) to their parents at the graduation celebration.

- **Family pot luck**—Some families combined the graduation with a family potluck in which families shared foods that reflected their own cultural traditions. In some cases, the youth were the advocates for this approach, since they wanted to show off a parent’s cooking!