

Keep Connected

Program Overview

Keep Connected is an interactive workshop series that strengthens youth-parent relationships during the middle school years. It offers a shared family experience in which youth and parenting adults reflect on, practice, and commit to shared relationship-building actions that bring—and keep—families connected as they learn and grow.

Designed for:

- Schools and school districts
- Family-serving organizations
- Youth-serving organizations
- Community education programs
- Faith communities
- Others that seek to support and empower families

Focus on:

- Families with 10 to 15-year-olds (middle-school age youth)

Research-informed

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.

Keep Connected is based on Search Institute's Developmental Relationships Framework 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 (Pekel et al., 2018; Pekel et al., 2015; Roehlkepartain et al. 2017.) Also guiding Keep Connected was extensive Search Institute research on family strengths and family engagement focused on families with children ages 10 to 15 (Roehlkepartain, 2013; Roehlkepartain & Syvertsen, 2014).

Impact

Youth and parenting adults who participate report:

- Improved parent-youth communication and decision making;
- Increased student motivation sense of responsibility;
- Stronger connections to other families and the sponsoring organization; and
- More confidence for approaching the teen years.

Schools and organizations that offer Keep Connected report stronger connections, deeper trust, and greater engagement from participating parents and youth.

Features

- **Developmental relationships:** Youth, parents, and families deepen their relationships with each other, with other families, and with facilitators, based on Search Institute's Developmental Relationships Framework.
- **Two generations:** Bringing both generations together reflects best practices in the family engagement field. It helps families practice and become comfortable focusing on their relationships.
- **Strengths as well as challenges:** Keep Connected recognizes that all families face challenges, and some of those challenges are severe. However, resilience comes through discovering and nurturing strengths, even in the midst of those challenges.
- **Culturally responsive:** Keep Connected draws from families' own experiences, cultures, and traditions to explore relationships.
 - Parent materials are in English and Spanish.
- **Learning through reflection and practice:** Participants learn from each other and support each other. They share their own experiences, expertise, and stories, guided by a trained facilitator.

Keep Connected Workshops

Keep Connected offers two delivery options, in-person and virtual, to allow for flexibility to meet families and youth where they are. In-person sessions are 2-hours while virtual sessions are 1-hour.

In-Person, 7-Session Series Overview

Session 1. Thriving Through the Teenage Years	
Participants explore relationships that have made a difference, and they explore their families' experiences with the five keys.	• Kids do best when they have strong relationships with parenting adults* through the teenage years. • Those relationships change through the teen years. • Five key actions help to keep relationships strong.
Session 2. You Already Care—How Do You Show It?	
As young people grow up, they shift in the kinds of care they appreciate. This session lets families explore what's working and what to adjust.	• 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 listening to each other.
Session 3. Sharing Power—Even When It's Challenging	
Most parents can talk about some power struggles they have experienced—particularly as they enter the teen years. Teens and parents try sharing power in ways that reflect their values.	• Sharing power focuses on treating each other with respect and giving each other a say. • Sharing power can be 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.
Session 4. In the Zone: Challenge and Support Growth	
Family relationships are stronger when family members challenge each other to learn and grow. In this session, family	• We challenge each other to grow so we can each be our best selves.

members explore ways they inspire and stretch each other to keep working toward goals.	• When we encourage each other to grow, it's also important to provide support in different ways. • Challenge growth is best when it focuses on our own goals or priorities, not on things other people wish we would do. • We improve the most in the "Growth Zone," where we are stretched to learn new things, but are also guided so we can succeed.
Session 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 to new places, and meeting people.	• As we grow up, we discover new things about ourselves and each other when we explore new ideas and get to know people who are different from us. • A great way to expand possibilities is to explore things you're curious about. • Having a specific plan to try new things is a fun way to expand possibilities.
Session 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 graduation.	• "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.
Session 7. Celebrating Your Family's Journey Together: The Graduation	
The series concludes with a family graduation celebration in which youth express their hopes for their family relationships when they finish high school, families complete a feedback survey, and families share their pledge to keep connected.	

Virtual, 4-Session Series Overview

Keep Connected Virtual, is a four-session workshop series designed to be offered remotely by schools and organizations to the families they serve. These four 60-minute sessions parallel the content of the longer, in-person Keep Connected workshop series. However, they have been substantially adapted to be effective and engaging in a virtual environment. Between sessions, families enjoy shared activities, included as part of the implementation toolkit provided to Keep Connected Institute Facilitators.

Session 1. Thriving Through the Teenage Years: The Power of Family Relationships	
Key Ideas in the Session	• Young people do best when they have strong relationships with parenting adults through the teen years. • Those relationships change through the teenage years. We need to adapt relationships to keep them strong. • Five key actions help to keep relationships strong.
Session 2. The Power of Caring and Caring About Power	
Key Ideas in the Session	• All of us care about each other in our families. At the same time, every family has power dynamics, such as decision making and responsibilities. Each family is different. • As kids grow up, expressing care can become more awkward, and power issues can turn into power struggles or conflicts. • We can learn practical ways to express care and share power that make them enriching and enjoyable parts of family life.
Session 3. In the Zone: Challenge and Support Growth	
Key Ideas in the Session	• In positive relationships, we challenge growth in each other. • Challenge growth is best when it focuses on our own goals, not on things other people wish we would do. • It's important to provide support in different ways. • Providing support focuses on how we give practical help to each other in solving problems and achieving goals. • We improve the most in the “Growth Zone,” where we are stretched to learn and try new things, and are guided and supported.

Session 4. New Possibilities for Our Family and the Future

Key Ideas in the Session

- Expanding possibilities keeps our minds fresh and growing.
- By connecting young people with new people, places, and experiences, parents open doors for their children to:
 - Discover more about themselves and what matters. • Find new opportunities.
 - Play meaningful, responsible roles in society.
 - Connect with people who look out for them.
- Teen relationships with their parents usually improve when teens also form relationships with other trustworthy adults.
- When kids are exposed to other ideas, they learn and grow—particularly when they talk about those ideas at home.

The Implementation Toolkit

Keep Connected Institute trained facilitators will have access to the following materials and resources:

The Backstory of Keep Connected

- Key ideas and approach
- Research base
- How it was developed
- How it fits with other approaches

Planning and Organizing Keep Connected Workshops

- Features
- Timeline and scheduling
- Budgeting
- Building organizational commitment

Inviting Families—and Keeping Them Coming

- Developing trust
- Welcoming diverse families
- Promotional tools
- Incentives: Pros and Cons
- Follow-up

Materials for Leading Keep Connected Workshops

Seven-Session In-Person Series

- Facilitator's guides for all sessions
- Handouts (English and Spanish)
- Optional videos

Four-Session Virtual Series

- Facilitator guides
- PowerPoint slides
- Family workbook
- Family Pledge and Plan

Facilitation Guidelines and Strategies

- Facilitation requirements
- Preparing for sessions
- Adapting sessions
- Facilitation tips for working with youth, parents, and intergenerational groups
- Videos with tips and strategies
- Facilitation challenges

Feedback and Evaluation Resources

- Surveys to get feedback from youth and parents
- Facilitator feedback surveys (for after every session; gift card for completing)

Extend Keep Connected Beyond the Workshops

- Social events
- Online resources
- Educational opportunities
- Service and leadership

Material from Keep Connected Institutes

- Workbooks, decks, and other materials from completed Keep Connected Institutes
- Loaded within one week after the completion of an institute.

Additional Tools and Resources

- Other Search Institute resources for family partnerships
- Social media resources
- Promotional tools