



## VERMONT STATE GEAR UP IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE FAMILY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES CRAFTING A PLAN

### Education and Planning Curriculum: Tell Your Story to your Kids!

You've got a story to tell! Go ahead and share it with your kids, friends, other parents. In past, present, and future, let people know about you. Who you are, where you came from, your interests, dreams, and odd tidbits. Tell your story and let everyone know the wonder of you!

#### What are the benefits of this process:

"In our study of family stories at the Emory University Family Narratives Project funded by the Sloan Foundation, we found that family stories seem to be transferred by mothers and grandmothers more often than not and that the information was typically passed during family dinners, family vacations, family holidays, and the like. Other data indicated that these very same regular family dinners, yearly vacations, and holiday celebrations occur more frequently in families that have high levels of cohesiveness and that they contribute to the development of a strong sense of what we have called the intergenerational self. **It is this intergenerational self and the personal strength and moral guidance that seem to derive from it that are associated with increased resilience, better adjustment, and improved chances of good clinical and educational outcomes.**" -- [Duke, M.P., Lazarus, A., & Fivush, R. (2008). *Knowledge of family history as a clinically useful index of psychological well-being and prognosis: A brief report. Psychotherapy Theory, Research, Practice, Training, 45, 268-272.*]

This was proven true in a recent survey from a Vermont high school. Students who knew their family story (parents history, family stories, educational and career paths, and connectedness) showed:

- less school absences
- higher academic achievement
- higher graduation rate
- higher college attendance rate

And remember, it is not only the information that is known that makes the difference – it is the process by which this information is shared that will make the biggest impact.

**Develop a timeline and opportunities for kids and parents to discuss the questions. Family/school/community dinner programs – cook together, eat together, share life stories. Below you'll find the ongoing discussion questions that, over time, should be discussed at family meals, travel, afterschool times, etc.**

The 20 items of the Do You Know scale are provided below. However, please remember that these are only a representative sample of the kinds of questions that kids should be able to answer. You can make up others. The main criterion, as mentioned above, is that the questions are about things that the children could not have learned on their own or experienced directly. Each family will have different stories and different key moments and memories that are shared. It is not only the *content* of what is known that is the critical factor, but the *process* by which these things came to be known. In order to hear family stories, people need to sit down with one another and not be distracted. Some people have to talk and some have to listen. The stories need to be told over and over and the times of sitting together need to be multiple and occur over many years. The most convenient times traditionally have been family dinners, family trips in the car, vacations, birthday gatherings, etc. However, given the complexities of modern family life families can also sit and talk over a snack after school or before everyone goes off to work, or at any other time that they can focus on each other. These gatherings -- short or long -- are at the heart of the process by which the intergenerational stories can be told and learned and through which children can grow stronger and healthier. No quick fix. No simply learning the answers to the questions. Just coming from a family in which the opportunities to learn family history and

to create a family narrative are regular, multiple, predictable and *inviolable*. As Bruce Feiler implores in his book, *"The Secrets of Happy Families"*: Talk. A lot.

### The Do You Know Scale

Please answer the following questions by circling "Y" for "yes" or "N" for "no." Even if you know the information we are asking about, you don't need to write it down. We just wish to know if you know the information.

1. Do you know how your parents met? Y N
2. Do you know where your mother grew up? Y N
3. Do you know where your father grew up? Y N
4. Do you know where some of your grandparents grew up? Y N
5. Do you know where some of your grandparents met? Y N
6. Do you know where your parents were married? Y N
7. Do you know what went on when you were being born? Y N
8. Do you know the source of your name? Y N
9. Do you know some things about what happened when your brothers or sisters were being born? Y N
10. Do you know which person in your family you look most like? Y N
11. Do you know which person in the family you act most like? Y N
12. Do you know some of the illnesses and injuries that your parents experienced when they were younger? Y N
13. Do you know some of the lessons that your parents learned from good or bad experiences? Y N
14. Do you know some things that happened to your mom or dad when they were in school? Y N
15. Do you know the national background of your family (such as Japanese, Irish, Canadian, African, etc)? Y N
16. Do you know some of the jobs that your parents had when they were young? Y N
17. Do you know some awards that your parents received when they were young? Y N
18. Do you know the names of the schools that your mom went to? Y N
19. Do you know the names of the schools that your dad went to? Y N
20. Do you know about a relative whose face "froze" in a grumpy position because he or she did not smile enough? Y N

Score: Total number answered Y.

### **Before the culminating event:**

**Secure the materials needed:** magazine cut-outs, stickers, tri-fold boards (or big sheet of rolled out paper on wall), glue sticks, markers, ribbon, lace, beads, colorful papers. Confirm event date, site, materials, and schedule with school. Personally invite families to attend (first by postcard, then follow up by phone call). This should be easy because you've been working together on storytelling!

### **Activity:**

We're going to get a little creative. Let's think about where we've come from – what were our dreams then, what are our dreams now. How do we move through this world? How does the world see us? Who do we let them see, and what would we like our children to know about us? Take some time to think about how you might visually represent yourself with the materials here. Look around to see what you might use – and then get creative! Each panel is a different part of you – your past, present, and future. Put together a display that you can relate to and share (if you want to) with your family.

Alternate to the three panel approach – put up a big piece of rolled paper. Have families "sign in" on the paper and then use some materials to put together a visual description of themselves, ie. interests, skills, wishes, past, present, and future dreams, etc.

**Here are the topics that can be creatively expressed on their boards or on the tri-fold --**

What is something you would really like your family to know about you?

What is your most memorable high school moment?

How did your parents respond when you wanted to try something new?

In middle school what was the skill you had that you were most proud of?

What was your best day?

What was your favorite thing to do with a family member?

Do you wish you had done anything different in high school?

What did you accomplish that you always wanted to?

What would you still like to accomplish?

What is the coolest thing about your childhood?

What was the best/most memorable story a family member told you about your family?

What do you miss about being a school aged child?

What can we take from this discussion/project that could be helpful as we parent teenagers?

Participants are welcome to bring home their work.

**End of program:**

- Did any topics come up that you can follow up on with more programs or information?
- Did any topic develop into a community dialogue program that some participants want to pursue?
- Do the parents or students want to do something more with this?
- What does it mean to "have a story"?
- What have you learned from this?
- How can you nurture your own story and the story of your child(ren)?
- How can you share this and encourage others to do something like this?
- Should you consider doing this every year?
- Who will plan, organize, and maintain it?